

# **Crossover Literature and Age in Crisis at the Turn of the 21st Century:**

## ***Harry Potter's Kidults and the Twilight Moms***

**Maria Verena Peters**

Reihe Medienwissenschaften Band 15

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UNIVERSITÄTSVERLAG SIEGEN

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Phd Project in Literary and Cultural Studies

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2018

### **Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

Dissertation, 2015 angenommen von der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Siegen

### **Impressum**

Rechte: bei der Autorin  
Umschlag: *universi* – Markus Bauer M.A.  
Druck und Bindung: UniPrint, Siegen

Siegen 2018: *universi* – Universitätsverlag Siegen  
*www.uni-siegen.de/universi*

Gedruckt auf alterungsbeständigem holz- und säurefreiem Papier.

**ISBN 978-3-96182-013-9**

I thought about adults. I wondered if that was true: if they were all really children wrapped in adult bodies, like children's books hidden in the middle of dull, long books. The kind with no pictures or conversations.

Neil Gaiman



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## 1. Introduction

What does it mean to be an adult? According to scholars from various disciplines such as sociologist James Côté, communication theorist Neil Postman or political theorist Benjamin R. Barber, answering this question has become immensely difficult. The borderline between childhood and adulthood, they suggest, started to erode after the Second World War, resulting in a prolonged state of adolescence. This development has been described as the end of childhood and/or adulthood, the infantilisation of adults or kidulthood. The particular origins of the kidult<sup>1</sup> are usually traced back to the logic of consumer capitalism as a part of which consumers are encouraged to buy goods that they do not actually need. Barber, for instance, defines the kidult as the product of an “infantilization that is closely tied to the demands of consumer capitalism” (3). The kidult, a consumer with the capital of an adult but the desire for play of a child, is depicted as the perfect breed of consumer – from Playstations to action figures there is nothing that the kidult would not buy.

Around the turn of the twentyfirst century, the kidult's literary tastes have come under particular public scrutiny. In reviews in both American and British newspapers, literary critics have scorned infantilised adults who enjoy J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books more than their children do. Adult women reading Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* novels, originally intended for a young adult [YA] audience, have been demonized across the media landscape as bad mothers who try to revive their youth at the expense of their progeny. In all of these texts, children's and YA literature read by adults has been considered escapist. This discourse has fed back into the academia. Political scientist Jacopo Bernadini, for instance, sees the popularity of the *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* novels with adult readers as direct evidence for an increasing infantilization.

In contrast to this, the study at hand will suggest that the cultural work of such novel series as *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*, when read by adults, is not necessarily to prolong a state of childhood – to the contrary, their reading could actually function to reaffirm clear-cut conceptualizations of adulthood and maturation and to address contemporary cultural concerns about these categories and processes. After all, these books are not about staying young, but about coming of age. Rachel Falconer even suggests that “[c]ontemporary children’s fiction is of particular consequence to adult readers because in many cases, it is discovering ways to give consecution, consequence and depth to the unreality of a suspended adolescence which troubles adults, no less than children, at the beginning of the twenty-first century” (*The Crossover Novel* 41). In order to elucidate this, the first part of this work, “Reading *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*”, will be an analysis of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* as coming of age novels.

A literary analysis of the novels will make clear that these series offer structures and social rituals for the development from child to adult to their readers that

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<sup>1</sup> In other sources sometimes also spelled “kiddult”.

compensate for the rising feeling of a disappearance of these clear structures and social rituals in the real world. At the same time, they directly address the felt crisis of childhood, adulthood and coming of age. To depict children's and YA literature as texts that are essentially escapist reading is, as the analysis will show, a strategic reduction of the multifaceted, potential cultural work of these text, for they can just as well be considered to confront the reader with current anxieties and paradoxes concerning the identity category age.

After an insight into how childhood and adulthood are constructed as opposites in the fictional worlds of these books and yet also depicted as troubled identity categories, the analysis will turn to the discussion of these novels and their adult fans in the media in "Part 2: Readers of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*". An exploration of the history of children's and YA literature will show that the impression of a crisis of adulthood constructed in literary reviews of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* needs to be viewed against the fact that ever since the division of these two separate markets in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, books have been crossing over in one or the other direction (Beckett 1-3; Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Kinderliteratur, Kanonbildung und literarische Wertung* xv; Falconer, "Young Adult Fiction and the Crossover Phenomenon" 87, Grenby, *The Child Reader* 36ff.). While it may astonish the literary scholar that this fact is silenced in the literary reviews at hand, it is even more disquieting that the categories child and adult are treated as if they were natural/essential. Ideologically, the construction of a crisis of adulthood indicated by a rise in crossover fiction functions to reaffirm a belief that the categories child and adult used to be clearly delineated from each other in the first place. A discourse of crisis has to be seen, as Acland points out, not as a disturbance of the social order, but as a means through which the social order is reaffirmed, for the discourse of crisis implies "a common set of standards, values and ethical questions" (41). The kidult can be read as a mild kind of folk devil<sup>2</sup> through which a moral panic is evoked that ultimately serves the legitimization and cementation of a conservative ideology concerning power structures based on age, gender and social class.

The representation of the child/adult binary as natural cannot only be found in reviews of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*, but it can also be detected in a part of the academic output on crossover literature, which blatantly ignores academic works on the invention of childhood and in fictional representations of kidults in the mass media. Thus, the second part of the PhD project will be a discourse analysis that will focus on how the identity categories child and adult are depicted as natural and the kidult as a transgressor, not only in the literary reviews of these two current phenomena of crossover literature, but also in their general scholarly discussion in

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<sup>2</sup> The usage of the term "folk devil" here, as well as the term "moral panic", are based on Stanley Cohen's analysis of the mass media representation of mods and rockers in Great Britain in the 1960s. Through the depiction of a group of people as folk devils, a moral panic is produced which eventually serves to reinforce social control. The terms therefore align with Acland's understanding of the discourse of crisis as a means through which social order is reaffirmed (*Folk Devils and Moral Panics*).

literary studies and in popular culture. The objective will be to show how these different sources all participate in the construction of the kidult as a site of crisis which not only reinforces a conservative approach to age, but also to practices of consumption that define class affiliation and to the identity category gender, all of which are intricately linked.

Before launching part one and two of the analysis, however, a brief overview over the status quo of research into children's and YA literature in general, and *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* in particular, will be offered to elucidate some of the problems in working with crossover literature and to pinpoint the need to discuss crossover literature and the kidult discourse together. Subsequently, two further introductory chapters will establish the basic construction and ideological function of the child and of the kidult in contemporary culture to clarify the premises of the analysis at hand.

A final remark might be due on the selection of examples for this PhD thesis: The choice of the primary objects for this study originally resulted from the mere frequency with which *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* have been used in these sources as shorthand for the felt increase in crossover fiction and the rise of the kidult. This is, for instance, the case in academic publications preoccupied with children's literature such as the *Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature* (9), but also in works that participate in said discourse of crisis: Barber, for example, mentions the *Harry Potter* books and their film adaptations fully six times in the first couple of pages of his book on the infantilisation of contemporary culture (1-25). Undeniably, both novel series have had an overwhelming impact on popular culture. Popular culture is considered, within the framework of this analysis in particular and cultural studies in general, as "an arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured" (Hall quoted in Storey 2). The attention these crossover novels and their franchises have received internationally, not only by their readers, but also by those refusing to read them<sup>3</sup>, makes the discourse about these two cultural phenomena a particularly relevant part of this arena in contemporary western culture. Those were the books of the last years that everybody had to have an opinion about, which bespeaks their ideological relevance in the construction of our identities.

This however, is by no means an attempt to gloss over the differences between these two works. While the first books of Rowling's novel series were first marketed as children's books, Meyer's *Twilight* saga started out as YA novel right away. Both books can roughly be grouped into the genre of the fantastic but belong into different subgenres therein. Also, while Rowling is a British author, Meyer is American. These differences will be addressed within the analysis where necessary. Often, these contrasts rather helped the analysis for their complementary nature rather than hindering the PhD project – for instance, *Harry Potter* focusses on a male protagonist, *Twilight* on a female one, which promises insights into the significance of gender difference in the representation of childhood, coming of age and adulthood in

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<sup>3</sup> Sheffield and Merlo, for instance, point out that positioning oneself as "anti-fan" is just as significant an identity construction as declaring oneself as a fan (of *Twilight*, in their particular analysis).

contemporary culture. Most of the time, however, a surprisingly huge overlap of the ideological premises of both works and in the reactions to them surfaced throughout the analysis, which might imply that the analysed cultural constructions are part of a wider ideological consensus in western culture. Thus, while this analysis certainly does not aim to repudiate the necessity to be culturally and historically specific within cultural studies, it sets out to uncover a framework of identity and age not specific to Britain or America, but looks for a shared consensus on the significance of age in western culture under late capitalism in general.

## 2. Research Survey

Children's and YA literature as a field of research is a relatively young discipline. Only in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has it been mapped out as a field of academic interest (Kümmerling Meibauer, *Kinderliteratur, Kanonbildung und literarische Wertung* 5; Mickenberg and Vallone 7). While foundational works were already published in the 1970s, it was only in the 80s and 90s that the study of children's literature was no longer largely regarded unworthy of academic analysis because of its alleged lack in complexity. Recently, the felt rapid increase in the popularity of children's literature with adults within the last ten years that Rachel Falconer describes (*The Crossover Novel* 1; 11) seems to have prompted all the prestigious British publishing houses of academic writing to publish handbooks and companions to children's literature (*The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature* (2010); *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature* (2010); *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature* (2011)). Even though it has come to be largely recognized as a legitimate object of study in academia, this does not mean that it will not occasionally still be treated with dismissiveness or put in isolation from the rest of literary studies (Ewers 8; Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Kinderliteratur, Kanonbildung und literarische Wertung* 249). Sometimes, even works dedicated to this very subject can be found to implicitly operate under the premise that children's literature is less complex and less relevant than adult fiction as the analyses in the ensuing chapters will show.

In this chapter, books on the subject of crossover literature in general as well as analyses specifically focussing on *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* will be surveyed. A first result of a precursory look at the publications on the subject of crosswriting in general shows that the field is mainly dominated by British and German scholars. Matthew Grenby's *The Child Reader*, for a start, offers a study of the cross-reading of children's literature in the 18th century. Using the scribblings on the margins of 5,282 books from various historical collections, which he contextualized with census data, autobiographies, letters, fictional, and pictorial scenes of reading, Grenby delivers ample evidence for the traffic of books across the borders of age, class, gender and religion in the 18th century (detailed in the second chapter of his monograph). The work of German scholar Hans-Heino Ewers, attempts to categorize different kinds of children's literature in terms of how it addresses children and adults at the same time. In his monograph *Literatur für Kinder und Jugendliche* he delivers an overview over the history of children's and YA literature and works on extrapolating typical features of crossover literature. Ewers particularly focuses on the publishing history of crossover literature – looking both at books that were just published in one edition but with paratexts that invited several audiences and at books that were published in separate editions for children and adults with the literary text remaining unaltered – and on what is typical for the narrative perspective for crossover fiction that is, in his eyes, double-layered. While the latter feature certainly helps to explain how readers at different developmental stages can be drawn to the same text, it is merely significant

for a narratological analysis of crossover literature, but does not give any insights into the dynamics of constructing the child/adult dichotomy in and through children's literature.

The way books are edited and marketed is of much more relevance for this cultural studies research objective. As Andrea Immel suggests, the way children's books are presented and marketed is, of course, deeply intertwined with our constructions of childhood (19). With the selection of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* as case studies, two different scenarios out of those described by Ewers – one with separate editions for children and adults (*Harry Potter*<sup>4</sup>) and one with only one edition for both audiences (*Twilight*) – will be the subject of the analysis at hand in terms of editing and marketing.

An unresolved problem with regard to the definition of crossover literature that most secondary literature has to struggle with already surfaces through this first glance at the differences between *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*: This problem of definition stems from the fact that crossover fiction is more a phenomenon than a genre. A book cannot be identified as crossover fiction before it hits the book market because crossing over is a pattern of consumption and not a distinct mode of writing setting apart some children's books from others. In fact, almost all children's classics, according to Bettina Kümmerling-Miebauer, have to be classified as crossover literature (*Klassiker der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur* xv; see also Beckett 3). This may explain why there is no literature that systematically explores the phenomenon in general, working on its definition, taxonomy and on an apparatus for handling and analysing it, which, in turn, brings forth the lack of systematic method and consistent analysis that the presently existing work on crossover literature often ails from. With regard to this problem of definition and method, the analysis at hand takes cue from Rachel Falconer who suggests that “‘crossover fiction’ can really only be defined by what it does, rather than what it is” (31). This means that apart from crossing over from one book market to the other, crossover fiction does not have any typical features which a definition could detail. This, however, only refers to textual features. While there is no distinct mode of writing that can be assigned to crossover literature, there are distinct modes of marketing. Some of these will be explored in chapter eight both with regard to *Twilight* and *Harry Potter*.

While works that introduce the reader into the field, such as Ewers' *Literatur für Kinder und Jugendliche*, Zohar Shavit's *Poetics of Children's Literature* or Fiona McCulloch's *Children's Literature in Context* for instance, dedicate themselves first to explaining that childhood is a cultural construct as first suggested by Philip Ariès' influential study *Centuries of Childhood*, academic articles about contemporary phenomena in contrast do generally not only ignore this, they even tend to reiterate the essentialist narrative of child and adult as a natural binary. For instance, in an article published in Sandra Beckett's anthology on crossover literature entitled *Transcending Boundaries* Shavit –

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<sup>4</sup> This however, only concerns the dust jacket, not the text of the novel.

though originally well aware of childhood and children's literature as a social construct – reaffirms the idea of a natural and discrete boundary between children and adults by depicting adults as parasitic readers of doubly addressed literature and poses as a guardian of the inviolacy of children's literature from such parasitical reading:

Their [*Alice*, *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*, *The Giving Tree*] inherent double attribution enables adults briefly to re-experience aspects of a lost childhood, though this is no longer a “pure” childhood, but rather an image of childhood that adults wish to reconstruct. Texts that address both children and adults make it possible to reenter a fabricated childhood – one that never really existed, but nonetheless pretends to be the nostalgic childhood adults always love to remember. Texts that merely address children could not fulfill this need. [...] As much as adults enjoy this kind of literature, they should ask themselves whether children's literature is not reaching a point where the child-reader is being abused in favor of the child's parents. (95)

The distinction between literature with an inherent double attribution as texts that deliver an image of childhood as constructed by adults, on the one hand, and of texts that solely address children and deliver a representation of “pure” childhood on the other is, of course, already faulty in its premises. As both Jacqueline Rose and Peter Hollindale have stressed, children's literature is never “pure” in that sense, for it is written by adults and therefore always only contains a construction of childhood from an adult's perspective (3f.; 12). Leaving that objection aside Shavit's statement still remains problematic, for it participates in a construction of childhood as a time of powerlessness where one needs others to protect one's interests and as a “pure” event for children, that is, an event that is outside of ideology, direct and unmediated, which means, necessarily, that children are outside of ideology as only they experience childhood “authentically.” In contrast, the analysis at hand assumes that childhood is always a construct, whether for the children experiencing it or the adults remembering it. Peter Hollindale makes an argument along these lines in *Signs of Childness in Children's Books*, when he writes that

[a]ll children know for a period of years that they are indeed children, and hold culturally determined views of what childhood is, what its privileges and drawbacks are, and how long it lasts. [...] The sense of what is appropriate and what is permitted to children is socially acquired, from other children and from adults of varying attitudes and competence. [...] children also construct



childhood as they go along, and [...] they do so from fictions of various kinds, not merely from social experience. (14)

Adopting the constructivist view of childhood that Hollindale suggests as approach to the analysis of children's literature means that the subsequent analysis will remain wary of academic writings such as Shavit's above-quoted article that presuppose an essentialist understanding of the child/adult binary. Such academic writings turn into an object of study instead of a source for the agenda of this investigation of constructions of childhood and adulthood in literature.

Apart from these often problematic premises found in research on children's and YA literature, there seems to be a vague discomfort among many scholars towards the adult reader of children's literature who is not a parent: with the exception of Martin Christoph Just's "Harry Potter und die Nürnberger Prozesse. Mehrfach-Codierung in Rowlings Romanen" and "Relating to *Twilight*: Fans' Responses to Love and Romance in the Vampire Franchise" by Behm-Morawitz, Click and Stevens Aubrey no other paper seemed to be interested in the adult reader outside of the social context of the family within the first years of academic output on these novel series, even though the sheer number of academic articles written on *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* was overwhelming. Instead, child and parent, sometimes also grandparent, were compared as readers of the same book in order to elucidate different receptions according to age, as in Caroline Stubenvoll's study of three readers from different generations within one family, or in order to praise the pedagogical benefits shared reading has for family life as in Cathy Leogrande's "My Mother, Myself: Mother-Daughter Bonding via the *Twilight* Saga," for instance. Kathleen F. Malu's "Ways of Reading *Harry Potter*. Multiple Stories for Multiple Reader Identities" also is ultimately only concerned with creating a guideline for parents and teachers to make their children read more. Even Andrea Immel, whose main objective in her article about "Children's Books and Constructions of Childhood" from 2009 is to highlight that "a keen objective of how constructs can direct our responses to children's books enhances our ability to interpret them intelligently, sensitively and knowledgably" (34), claims that the cross-generational bonding enabled through crossover literature was its "most valuable aspect" (25). The remainder of the early papers dealing with the readers of these books pay little to no attention to the different age groups among readers and fans and how that affects their perception in the public (e.g., *Twilight*: Click; Sheffield and Marlo; *Harry Potter*: Jenkins *Convergence Culture*).

Although there clearly and undeniably is a large number of adults without children who read children's and YA literature – some of which even publicly disclosed themselves as fans – and though their number is large enough for the book industry to deem it worthwhile to explicitly address them (see chapter eight), they initially did not seem significant enough for academia to analyse them. It seems that this group often stays invisible for scholars, or rather, is kept invisible, probably out of

a fear of what harm the kidult discourse could do to the serious academic study of children's and YA literature. Most often, academic anthologies and monographs only mention the immense crossover appeal of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* as evidence for the cultural significance of the respective novel series in a preface or introduction, but it then receives little to no attention in the ensuing analysis. Instead, most contributions focus on literary studies objectives, like the question of genre (e.g., *Harry Potter*: Hiebert Alton; Manners; O'Sullivan; Petzold; Steege), or structuralist concerns (*Harry Potter*: Kornfeld and Prothro; Pharr; Gallardo and Smith), or, if they take a cultural studies approach, are concerned with the well-established analysis of the identity categories race, class and consumption (e.g., *Harry Potter*: Mendlesohn; Teare; Waetjen and Gibson; Westman; Nel) and gender (e.g., *Twilight*: Averill; Donnelly; Housel; Jameson and Dane; Jarvis; Mann; McGeogh; Miller; Platt; Shachar; Silver; Taylor; *Harry Potter*: Doughty; Dresang; Gallardo and Smith; Heilman and Donaldson; Pugh and Wallace). While many of these produce interesting insights, the narrowness of the focus often leads to unresolved contradictions that a wider focus could remedy as I seek to demonstrate in chapters five and six. A more wholesale approach is often taken by contributions focussing on family, which thus consequently also touch upon gender and different characters from different age groups as well as the topic of coming of age (*Harry Potter*: Decker; *Twilight*: Branch; Whitton; Stevens). Only few scholars seem to dare and choose the road less travelled by dedicating their analysis to age: Benning and Lövgren focus on age in *Twilight*, Hawes looks at coming of age in *Twilight* and Nikolajeva analyzes the representation of childhood in *Harry Potter*. When this approach is taken, it is, however, always exclusively focussing on the diegesis, not on the consumption of either of the two novel series.

Only after 2012 did more scholars begin to mention or focus on adult readers of *Twilight* outside of the context of family life and paedagogics – with *Harry Potter* that has not happened at all as of yet – almost like an academic afterthought. Anne Helen Petersen's "That Teenage Feeling", explores the attitudes of adult feminist readers to the *Twilight* novels. Within Matt Hills' study of *Twilight* fans and inter-fandom he briefly talks about age and fan identities within the *Twilight* fan community and refers to an address by Lisa Bode, in which she apparently talked about the demonization of adult *Twilight* fans by teenage fans who seek to demarcate their own identity (121). The demarcation line of age that runs right through the *Twilight* fan community is further explored in Leslie Paris' "Fifty Shades of Fandom: Intergenerational Permeability of *Twilight* Fan Culture." Before she focusses on her main objective, namely the exploration of the specific spaces and the fanfiction of adult fans (i.e so-called "mommy porn" like *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which started out as *Twilight* fanfiction 687), Paris gives an insightful description of the disapproval of *Twilight* moms that can be observed in the mainstream media. Within two paragraphs she quickly establishes that they are depicted as escapist readers who seek to avoid adulthood through regression, which is sometimes even reaffirmed by secondary literature, such as Dorsey-Elson's paper on *Twilight* moms which links this particular

instance of cross-reading to the female midlife crisis. They are more vulnerable to ridicule than younger *Twilight* fans because they are “lacking the excuse of youth”, they are stigmatized more than adult men who transgress age boundaries, and their object of the fandom falls into two genre categories that are already devalued: romance novels and YA fiction, again making them easy targets for ridicule (681). These findings, presented by Paris in the mode of the summary, deserve further attention and will be discussed in detail in chapter eight.

All of these publications focus exclusively on the female adult readership of *Twilight*, thus both mirroring and constructing the perception of *Twilight* as strongly gender-exclusive reading, a point that will also receive further scrutiny in chapter eight. As one can already see from this survey, *Twilight* as crossover novel has received more attention from scholars of fan studies than from literary studies scholars, which reaffirms the impression that literary studies is at unease with the traffic of children’s and YA fiction to the adult market and that the adult consumption of children’s and YA literature has an illicit, obsessive, in short “fannish”, connotation to it.

Among the existing literature on contemporary crossover literature from the children’s to the adult book market in general only one analysis actually discusses it in great detail in context with the kidult discourse. This noteworthy exception is Rachel Falconer’s *The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children’s Literature and Its Adult Readership*. In the introduction of her monograph, she points out that the current “hostility expressed towards cross-reading” in literary reviews in the press is suggestive of “a broader anxiety about the blurring of boundaries between child or youth culture and adult culture in the millennial years” (3). Falconer’s introduction is an insightful analysis of the kidult discourse and its cultural significance. The thesis at hand takes cue from her twofold approach of discussing different facets of the kidult discourse in general to then look into particular works of crossover fiction that have been placed in this discourse, such as *Harry Potter*. While Falconer connects the roots of the kidult discourse on a national level to Labour’s “Cool Britannia” campaign in the 90s, she also discusses broad cultural trends that the kidult discourse may root back to. However, what is quite problematic about her approach is that she takes a rise in crossover fiction travelling from the children’s to the adult’s book market within the first decade of the twenty-first century as premise for her interest in crossover fiction and the kidult without making any attempt to substantiate this claim apart from appealing to a general, public perception. While there do exist concrete surveys on the popularity of the *Harry Potter* books among different age groups (see Gupta 8-13), Falconer makes no reference to these. Also, these surveys only show that *Harry Potter* is popular among adults – they give, however, no hint whatsoever at whether they are any more popular among adults than any preceding crossover novel. The latter is certainly a claim not only difficult, but impossible to prove for lack of data. The premise of the analysis at hand therefore has to distance itself from Falconer’s. Instead of claiming an increase of the number of adults reading children’s and YA literature within the last decade, I want to suggest – more carefully – that there is the

perception of an increase which has been caused by a higher visibility within the mass media. This higher visibility is instrumental in the construction of the kidult discourse as discourse of crisis.

In her subsequent analysis of the *Harry Potter* series Falconer focusses more on the aesthetic literary standards these novels are measured against by those charging it as light or escapist entertainment than on diving deeper into the cultural significance of the books that she introduced at the beginning. While she analyzes Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* cycle as *Bildungsroman* in another chapter and cross-references it with several other children's novels that depict aging and growing up critically, she does not mention that this is indeed also true for *Harry Potter* and that it can explain the novels' popularity and cultural impact. Her findings on Pullman's *His Dark Materials* have, however, a broader relevance than she seems to realize. As this analysis will argue, the fact that children's and YA literature has important things to say about growing up does not just explain the popularity of Pullman's books with adults, but of most, maybe all, popular crossover fiction in the present.

Similarly to Falconer, Dieter Petzold introduces his analysis of *Harry Potter* with a brief survey of the history of childhood, thus elucidating the constructedness of the category "child", yet he does not make the constructivist approach towards this identity category productive in the subsequent analysis of the novel series as crossover literature. Instead he is also preoccupied with the aesthetic categories the quality of the novel series is measured against.

The preoccupation with aesthetic standards in both Petzold and Falconer is, on the one hand, due to the fact that the study of children's literature is still generally battling the claim that it is not really literature at all, and on the other, due to the particular circumstance that *Harry Potter* was runner-up for the Whitbread Prize in early 2000 as the overall winner of Book of the Year award for 1999, which added fuel to the flames of this ongoing discussion. The nomination had triggered a heated debate among literary critics about the literary qualities of the novel series, whether it could compete with "serious" adult literature and about whether Rowling's books deserved to be called children's classics (Lyon Clark 162f.; McGuire; Elgod; Hensher, "Harry Potter, Give Me a Break"). It would have been the first children's book to win the award after children's literature had been barred from the competition against adult books for the overall prize for years<sup>5</sup>. *Harry Potter* thus not only caused an assault on the seemingly discrete barrier between children's and adult literature, but also put the criteria for canonisation as a classic in general into question. What is more, the nomination gave the novel's popularity among adult readers the kind of public visibility which could serve as nurturing ground for a feeling of crisis.

For further information on the process of canonization of children's literature as classics, Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer's monograph *Kinderliteratur, Kanonbildung und literarische Wertung* from 2003 is highly recommendable, as she sheds light on the

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<sup>5</sup> Only two years later winning the overall prize was eventually achieved by Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass* (Reynolds n. pag.).

correlation of canonisation and crossover reception. Kümmerling-Meibauer, who already pointed out in her earlier encyclopaedia of children's classics that most of these are also crossover novels (xv), argues that more research into crossover literature and crosswriting is urgently needed. She comments on the scarcity of works published in this field of study:

Offenbar hat man noch gar nicht die Brisanz dieser Thematik erkannt, denn hier ergibt sich eine Chance, auf die enge Verzahnung von Kinder- und Erwachsenenliteratur hinzuweisen und folglich den Bereich der Kinderliteratur aus seiner vielfach beklagten „Ghettosituation“ herauszuholen. (*Kinderliteratur, Kanonbildung und literarische Wertung* 249)

By claiming that children's literature is "ghettoized" Kümmerling-Meibauer points to the fact that children's literature is often understood as a genre to itself and as such often ignored in anthologies of national literatures, for instance. Referencing Beverly Lyon Clark, Mickenberg and Vallone also draw attention to this in their introduction of the *Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature*: "If they do include works such as *Little Women* or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, these stories, [...] are no longer labelled 'children's literature,' for the term is still often viewed as a something of an oxymoron in the context of Great Books" (7). It needs to be pointed out though that in order to establish children's literature as just as sophisticated as other literature, Kümmerling-Meibauer particularly focuses on crosswriters, that is, authors who have written for children as well as for adults and not on crossover literature in general. This is a strategic move to highlight that children's literature has been written by "proper" authors such as Nobel Prize winners William Golding and Rudyard Kipling emulating the strategy pursued by Knoepfelmacher and Myers in their 1997 foreword to an edition of *Children's Literature* dedicated to crosswriting. However, this attempt to legitimize the reading of children's literature by adults through arguing for the recognition of its literary quality does not address the question of what cultural work children's literature that crosses over into the adult market does.

Interesting as the process of canonization in itself may be, its criteria are only of interest for the analysis at hand with regard to their role in constructing and reaffirming the identity categories child and adult. In contrast to Falconer's and Petzold's analyses, I will suggest that the insight that childhood is a cultural construct and thus subject to historical change must be the guiding notion in analysing crossover fiction, orientating myself toward Myers and Knoepfelmacher's cultural studies informed approach to crossover literature, which contends that "cross-writing may [...] help us revise, once and for all, the notions of a 'Romantic' natural childhood, which still tends to dominate most readings of children's literature and the child" (xvi). Crossover fiction and its marketing must indeed primarily be viewed as one of the sites where childhood and adulthood are discursively constructed thus informing both

children and adults about their place in all social hierarchies. In completion to Knoepfmacher and Myers' remark, the premise of this analysis is that both the notions of 'natural' childhood and 'natural' adulthood need to be deconstructed for a cultural studies informed literary analysis of crossover literature.



### 3. The Child

The premise of the analysis at hand is an understanding of childhood as a cultural construct. Rooting back to Philippe Ariès' *Centuries of Childhood* childhood is analysed as socially and historically determined in contemporary sociology and literary and cultural studies (e.g., Gittins 37ff.; McCulloch 3; Hollindale 13; Müller, "Introduction" 3; Jenkins, "Introduction" 15). However, in contrast to Ariès approach, the study of the history of childhood is no longer concerned with detecting the moment in time when the idea of childhood in our modern understanding first emerged. As Müller and others have pointed out, Ariès thesis about the historical "invention of childhood", as he calls it, can be criticized for normalizing the modern notion of childhood by disregarding earlier, differing concepts of childhood. In contemporary childhood studies, there is a growing awareness of the diversity of childhood concepts and the need for a more localized perspective (Müller *Framing Childhood* 3). Said awareness of the diversity of childhood concepts leads to an understanding of laments about a "disappearance of childhood", such as Neil Postman's thus-titled monograph from the early 1980s, as mere symptoms of "the transition from one contingent childhood concept to another" (Müller *Framing Childhood in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals and Prints 1689-1789* 2).

Yet, the identity marker age is still less frequently considered by cultural studies analyses than class, race or gender – in 1998 Henry Jenkins, for instance, found that "until recently, cultural studies has said little about the politics of the child" ("Introduction" 2) and for certain representations of children this is still true today. Only as late as 2012, for instance, was the first collection of essays published that tried to systematically approach the analysis of the representation of evil children (Renner). Hence, there may be a necessity for a brief introduction to the general premises of analysing the identity category child from a constructivist perspective.

Generally speaking, the analysis of the child/adult binary offers similar pitfalls to the analysis of race or gender as it is even more often mistaken for a natural instead of a cultural distinction. Seemingly, differences between children and adults are grounded in their different bodies or different biological stages of development and not in ideology. The ideological distinctions between different genders, races and age groups are produced by the inscription of power structures onto biological bodies. The "prior materiality" of our bodies is not accessible "without the means of discourse", argues Judith Butler (qtd. in Costera Meijer and Prins 278) and hence, identity grounded in what seems to be merely the biological body – and its changes – must always be an ideological construct. Therefore, the child's body in itself does not mean anything. It is inscribed by culture with meanings such as purity and/or lack. For instance, children's bodies are mostly regarded in western culture as being androgynous, because we have inscribed our belief that children need to be protected from the secret of sexuality onto them.



What further complicates the constructivist analysis of the category child is that children are imagined to “exist in a space beyond, above, outside the political” (Jenkins, “Introduction” 2). In addition, there seems to be the widespread assumption that because everyone has once been a child, we believe to already know what that entails and therefore, no theoretical exploration is necessary (Lyon Clark 10). Lyon Clark elucidates why this is a misled assumption:

Social critics would not assume that someone who has left the working class still has an uncomplicated appreciation of what it means to be of the working class; similarly with a transsexual’s appreciation of what it means to be female, or male; or the appreciation of someone who passes for white of what it means to be black. (ibid.)

She concludes that, as the very definition of adult is to not be a child, we cannot talk about childhood as natural, transparent or obvious. Lyon Clark mainly supports her overall argumentation in favour of an in-depth exploration of childhood as an ideological construct with feminist theory and thus compares age to gender, citing Margaret Higonnet who explored “the ways in which both women and children have been treated as Other” (5). Ultimately, Lyon Clark is interested in the position of children’s literature in literary studies in the US throughout its rather short history and sees many parallels to women’s writing, which, of course, necessitates first thinking about childhood as a construct. One important difference between age and gender that needs to be highlighted, however, is that there is no major moment of resistance in which children have contested their representation in literature by seizing the means of representation. “The women’s movement writes its own books, and children do not” asserts Hollindale (11). In so far, the term “children’s literature” is also misleading, for there only is literature about children, not by children, which is why Jacqueline Rose contends that the term children’s fiction comprises an impossible relation (1-4).

While Lyon Clark mainly draws parallels to gender, comparing age to further identity categories, such as class and race, can also be very productive. For instance, in western cultures, adult identity has the same position in the hierarchy based on age as masculinity in the gender binary and whiteness in the race binary: it is a normative identity. Like age, race and gender are represented as natural although they are products of cultural processes:

[C]ultural processes are intimately connected with social relations, especially with class relations and class formations, with sexual divisions, with the racial structuring of social relations and with age oppressions as a form of dependency. [...] [C]ulture involves power and helps to produce asymmetries in the abilities of individuals to define and realise their needs. (Johnson qtd. in Storey 3)

The production of asymmetries works through marking one part of the binary as normal and the other as deviant. Being a child is marked as a deviant form of identity<sup>6</sup>, thus comparable to femininity and blackness in terms of power and the production of asymmetries in a white patriarchal society and therefore also shares some of their features in terms of constitution. Yet, as Johnson points out here, the kind of dependency enforced through age oppressions is specific to this identity category in contemporary culture, although it could be compared to historical forms of dependency between men and women and whites and non-whites based on such asymmetries. In fact, the image of the innocent child was often projected onto women and non-whites to produce and legitimize said asymmetries:

[A]s Ashis Nandy has suggested, dominant ideologies of racism and colonialism have often mapped onto racial and cultural others the image of the child as “an inferior version of the adult – as a lovable, spontaneous, delicate being who is also simultaneously dependent, unreliable and wilful and thus, as a being who needs to be guided, protected and educated as a ward.” [...] Asian and African adults were often described with the childlikeness of good “obedient” children or the childishness of “bad” rebellious children. (Jenkins, “Introduction” 14)

Yet this does not mean that childhood is only constructed as a negative to adulthood's positive. Again, like femininity and blackness, childhood is a double construct of otherness, imagined not only as an inferior identity, but at the same time also as a glorified and fetishized other. The two sides of the cultural construct ‘child’ are apparent in the vocabulary that the English language offers for talking about what constitutes the child: While “[n]o word in current regular use denotes this ‘child quality, being a child’ in all its intricacy”, two adjectives regularly in use to describe features typically belonging to the state of being a child are “childish” and “childlike” (Hollindale 50). These two terms, of course, comprise very different meanings: “Childish” carries negative connotations. It refers to the idea that children are lacking in maturity (Hollindale 51) like women, who – in the patriarchal view – lack men's rationality and strength – and non-whites who are – in the racist perspective – lacking in evolutionary development. On the other hand, “childlike” carries positive connotations. It refers to the particular innocence ascribed to children. They are constructed as good-natured and pure, thus comparable to the seemingly positive concepts of the Angel in the House or the Noble Savage.

These different aspects of the discourse of the child are myths – they appear as natural and depoliticized, but a look into the history of childhood makes clear that they are culturally and historically constructed. The idea of children's inherent

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<sup>6</sup> The same is true for old age: Both childhood and old age are frequently contrasted to (male) adult identity. This relation seems to have already been in place in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as Anja Müller shows at the example of periodicals of the period (“Fashioning Age and Identity” 100).

goodness and purity, for instance, can be traced back to the Romantic era when children were idealized by poets like William Wordsworth as being closer to God and closer to nature. The notion of the child as lacking and therefore needing education was reinforced in several discourses. In contrast to the Catholic belief that children are cleansed from original sin through baptism, the Reformation brought about a spreading of the Protestant belief that children's sinfulness and potential evilness can only be corrected through education. While John Locke's claim that children are born to this world as *tabulae rasae* stood in contrast to the belief that children are born sinful, his further explication that they are formed by whatever influence they are then put under reaffirmed the notion that children needed education of some form. This notion gained further popularity during the Enlightenment, which also focused on children's need for education: Rousseau, for instance, suggested that – with the right education – the corruption of civilization could be kept away from man's naturally innocent ways and thus enable him to grow into a virtuous adult (Kehily 5; McCulloch 5-13).

What is subsumed under the label child in the dominant cultural discourse today is thus, in fact, a collage of notions from different historical eras rooted in specific philosophical and religious discourses, or, in the words of Henry Jenkins: "Our modern sense of the child is a palimpsest of ideas from different historical contexts – one part Romantic, one part Victorian, one part mediaeval, and one part modern" ("Introduction" 15). The child as a myth not only hides the constructedness of these discourses but also glosses over the inherent contradictions between these different elements of the collage.

It is around the contemporary myth of childhood, that the contemporary norm of adulthood has been constructed (Jenkins, "Introduction" 2) and through which a relation of dependence is enforced. The idea of children as mainly defined through a lack has become intricately linked to the idea of their innocence, though at first sight it seems to stand in contradiction to it. Because children are constructed as *tabulae rasae*, they are also potential threats to the status quo, which again reinforces the need for policing. Thus, the myth of childhood innocence serves, for instance, to justify the policing of media consumed by children. Examples of this policing would be different forms of censorship affecting only products intended for children and young adults, such as the Comics Code or the music industry's label "parental advisory".

In addition, fictions that depict children as "pre-social", "inadequate" and "irrational" (Jenkins, "Introduction" 2) also often work to normalize the need for protection and supervision by adults. Instances of this are, for example, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) or the media discourses about murder cases committed by children, such as the James Bulger case in the early 90s<sup>7</sup> as well as the

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<sup>7</sup> Toddler James Bulger was kidnapped, tortured and murdered by Jon Venables and Robert Thompson in 1993. The case received a lot of media attention; particularly after mug shots of the two perpetrators had been published, showing the murderers as two scared eleven-year old schoolboys.

British reality TV show *Boys and Girls Alone* (2009). The latter was a *Big Brother*-inspired TV experiment, where boys and girls between the ages of eight and eleven were left all on their own without any rules. The *Daily Mail* summarized some of the ensuing events thus:

Within two days, some of the children were sobbing inconsolably. Meanwhile, their parents watched on CCTV as their children exercised their newfound freedom, intervening only when events spiralled out of control. In the boys' house, it was not long before innocent horseplay turned to violence, with blows being exchanged. In one scene, not to be aired, one boy even points a dinner knife at the other. The girls, meanwhile, fared little better. They split off into actions, with some of the older girls bullying the younger ones. One girl is filmed sobbing: 'We got away from our parents to have fun, but it's not fun. It's a nightmare.' (Petty n. pag.)

As a consequence to the events on the programme, there were not only shocked viewer reactions, but ministers even ordered a review of child employment laws to render such television formats illegal (Frea n. pag.). Thus, the discourse around *Boys and Girls Alone* showcases how crisis is ideologically mobilized to reinforce cultural hegemony. While the brutality that the children on the programme were exposed to be capable of had the potential to deconstruct the myth of childhood innocence on the one hand, it at the same time reinforced the belief in children's need for protection by adults and led to a corresponding reaction by institutions. Thus, the double image of the child as both innocent and evil often works with one half of the image reaffirming the other instead of challenging it. Often, representations of the child free from all social and moral constraints, the child gone monstrous, use the trope of demonic possession, as, for instance, in *The Exorcist* (1973), in order to make it possible to depict children as evil and at the same time preserve the myth of childhood innocence. Along these lines argues Charles Acland who analyses the representation of teenagers as troubled and troubling at the same time. Acland lists five different typical depictions of deviant youth in film that locate the reason for their evilness in an outside source, thus upholding the myth of childhood innocence (120f.). Though he focusses on film and teenagers, his findings can be applied more generally: The narrative patterns he identifies also apply to literature and most of them also apply to smaller children. In addition to genetic causes and economic depravity he also lists social apathy and boredom, demonic possession, as already mentioned, and last, a depiction of a contentious youth as normal youth, implying that youth always means per cultural definition rebellion and transgression of norms. This last point may be specific to teenagers, while the four other ones also apply to depictions of smaller children as evil. Evidence for that may be found in Acland's own elaborations as he cites Rhoda in the movie *The Bad Seed* (1956) as an example of genetic causes. Rhoda, however, is only eight years old and therefore not a teen yet. With the help of some further examples, Acland convincingly shows how the evil child is an image that

speaks about more than itself: it may be deployed to criticize the erosion of the nuclear family, the decadence of the upper classes, or the depravity of the lower classes.

Another foray into the study of the deviant child is made by Karen J. Renner. Renner attempts to set up a typology of different kinds of evil children. In *The 'Evil Child' in Literature, Film and Popular Culture* she defines two types: The possessed child and the feral child. The possessed child narrative deals with a child possessed by or otherwise influenced by demonic forces. The ideological work of this type of story “has less to do with the child – who in many ways remains an innocent figure taken advantage of by a more powerful spirit – and more to do with his or her parents”, argues Renner (7). In line with Acland’s typology of different depictions of contentious youth, she argues that these stories are not constructing a crisis of childhood innocence, for the child’s deviant behaviour is ascribed to temporary outside influences, but a parental crisis: “Possession narratives act as cautionary tales that warn us, in symbolic terms, that children are vulnerable to dangerous influences, when traditional family structures are damaged and parents are negligent in their duties” (8).

In contrast, tales of feral children are about society as a whole instead of single families, according to Renner. Renner points out that up to the early twentieth century, the romantic notion of the Noble Savage is still reaffirmed in tales of feral children, as here, these children are not yet automatically evil. Cases in point, she suggests, are Mark Twain’s *Huck Finn*, Rudyard Kipling’s *Mowgli* and J.M. Barrie’s lost boys. Influenced by the disillusionment brought about by the two world wars, tales of feral children in the subsequent decades of the twentieth century seem to suggest that if man is freed from all civilising influences and constraints, he will return to being a savage, pitiless animal. The most prominent example of this is probably William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* again, in which a group of English schoolboys is stranded on a tropical island and rapidly descends into savagery, culminating in murder and a manhunt. The representation of feral children as evil thus potentially negates the romantic notion of the ‘Noble Savage’ and hence also the notion of childhood innocence.

Yet, this does not mean that these stories necessarily always have to be read as deconstructions of childhood innocence either, for in the end, these texts often again hint at outside influences that have corrupted these children. Such is, for instance, the case in *Lord of the Flies*, which takes place against the backdrop of an atomic war (Renner 14). Renner concludes that “the implication is that the children are not inherently evil”, but that they are instead merely imitating adult cruelty (14). Hence, the contemporary feral child narrative generally criticizes broad societal failings – “war, careless pollution, adult violence” (ibid.) instead of the status quo of the family in particular.

Both Acland and Renner point out how images of evil children function as deterrence that reaffirm the need for structures that both protect children and keep

them under surveillance. To ensure that children do not go astray but develop into citizens proper two institutions mainly are entrusted with the tasks of protection and surveillance: school and the family. Here, the child is protected and instructed. Already Ariès points out that the nuclear family and school are the spaces that work to separate the child from the adult world, i.e. they are the spaces where the child learns that it is other from adults, that certain behaviours are expected from it while others are undesired and where it is informed about what it should ultimately grow into. In short, these are two major sites where “childness” is constructed and kept alive.

The term “childness” is introduced by Hollindale, because the terms “childish” and “childlike” are so loaded (49). Childness, as Hollindale defines it, comprises all the features ascribed to children in the dominant cultural discourse. While this critical term has not become widely disseminated, the thesis at hand will nonetheless resort to it, for it indeed fills a gap in the vocabulary that is necessary to analyse the child as culturally constructed, similarly to the terms ethnicity and gender.

In spite of all the overlaps between the cultural construction of age and other identity categories such as race and gender, a significant distinction between the child/adult binary and other identity markers that needs to be taken into account is that the opposition is permanently accompanied by the regular transformation of children into adults which could be read as a destabilizing force concerning that very distinction. Claudia Nelson suggests in this context that age might be viewed as “inherently queer from the outset” because it constantly changes (11). Similar to people whose shifting or instable gender performance or ethnicity challenge the discreteness of boundaries, such as queer, transgender or mixed race identities, the identity of the teenager and the process of coming of age might also be considered a precarious ideological issue, which might explain why western cultures seem to be obsessed with narratives about them. This is evidence of an ongoing attempt to negotiate this threatening and yet necessary transgression, to tame and assimilate it.

If the distinction of child and adult is to be understood as a cultural construct, then we must look at the discursive construction of these identities in order to understand their meaning in contemporary culture. Hence, the PhD thesis at hand analyses both *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* and the comments by critics and scholars on them and their readers as discourses, that is, as texts in and through which identities are constructed. Both the fictional texts of crossover fiction and the output of academics and literary critics and other journalists on them and on their converted use as adult literature must be taken into consideration as they are all texts that contain and negotiate representations of children, adults and of coming of age. All of them are equally relevant to the analysis of the discursive construction of these identity categories and their accompanying processes in contemporary western culture as they all are active in limiting and reaffirming what we understand by these terms. In the interplay of the representations of childhood, adulthood and coming of age in the two novel series, the heads of their readers, the public musings of private and professional readers on these representations and the struggle of their conversion

from children's to crossover literature an arena unfolds for the struggle over meaning and thus, over power.

The ensuing analysis of the constructions of the adult/child binary in the two novel series will focus on the major pillars of the discourse of the child established in this chapter. That means, it will investigate images of ideal and deviant children, focus on the two spaces family and school and analyse how gender and age are intertwined in coming of age narratives. Also, it will seek to identify the narrative patterns that are deployed to contain the disruptive potential of coming of age as a kind of transgression of the binary and highlight the role of figures that challenge the notion of a natural process of maturation from child into adult.

#### 4. The Kidult

As soon as childhood began to be understood as a naturally separate sphere of life from adulthood, figures that blurred this binary opposition were bound to become stigmatized. While a transition from one state to the other is, on the one hand, depicted as necessary and healthy, the representation of this very transition is, on the other hand, one of trouble and turmoil. The teenager as figure of transition is more often demonized as a danger to society than not, and western culture's almost obsessive preoccupation with coming of age narratives can be understood as an attempt to gain control over the disruptive potential over the idea of transition that links one pole of age identities to the other and thus could deconstruct their essential difference.

Even more troubling than the image of the teenager is the idea of a stunted development which results in an eternal adolescent. The so-called kidult, a term introduced in the second half of the twentieth century (*Oxford Dictionaries*) is just one historical form of appearance of these stigmatized figures that problematized the imagined simple, linear and irreversible transition from child to adult. Already in the eighteenth century satirical prints poked fun at women who did not act their age, but tried to appear younger (Müller, "Envisioning Age Distinctions in Eighteenth-Century Prints" 238). Through humour as a social corrective, these prints as well as later manifestations of the phenomenon, serve to naturalize idea of "irreversible stages of life" (Müller, "Envisioning Age Distinctions in Eighteenth-Century Prints" 243). This, however, does not mean that age is the only identity category that is negotiated in such representations. Quite to the contrary, the cultural work of these depictions often involves the naturalization of other boundaries, such as class and gender, in an intricate connection to age. In the early twentieth century, for instance, C.G. Jung started to write about the "puer aeternus", an archetype that his student Marie Louise Franz elaborated on in the 1970's publication *The Problem of the Puer Aeternus [Der ewige Jüngling]*. While Jung mainly describes this archetype of the eternal or divine child not as something that has to be overcome, but only combined with senex for a healthy individuation, Franz mainly describes him as pathological. As the title of her book already tells, she considers him problematic, often even, according to Franz, resulting in an early death for the afflicted person. According to Franz, the puer aeternus is a man-child whose failed coming of age manifests itself either in homosexuality or in Don Juanism (Jung 99; von Franz 9). Due to a fixation on the mother, he is stuck in an eternal adolescence. The stigmatizing of the puer aeternus at the time hence also functions to reaffirm heteronormativity and monogamy over which adulthood was then defined and in addition, expresses a patriarchal fear of a strong influence of the mother as a threat to patriarchal norms and values. Clearly, the stigmatization of the puer aeternus in the 1970s is then a conservative reaction against the political and social upheavals of the sixties and seventies, which put all of these norms into question.



While the puer aeternus originally also had positive aspects in the eyes of Jung, for he perceives him as a source of creativity within the adult, the discourse of the kidult offers no such positive perspective on a prolonged childhood. Also, the kidult is less obviously about gender, but ostensibly only about consumption. In the *Macmillan Dictionary* the term is explained as “an adult who enjoys entertainment such as films or computer games that are intended mainly for children.” Similarly, the *Oxford Dictionary* defines the kidult as “[a]n adult with childish tastes”, but here the word “childish” already contains the negative stigma of the term (see Hollindale’s elaboration on “childish” and “childlike” in the previous chapter). These connotations become more evident in the sample sentences offered for the term:

No, the awful truth is that we have become a nation of kidults: adults who think, and behave, like children.

Yes, kidults, because while I don't doubt that these books have their appropriately aged readers, the fact is that what's made them such a publishing sensation are their garnering of much older fans as well.

But this movie collapses the distinction, suggesting that all thirtysomething women pine to be tweenie kidults. (*Oxford Dictionaries*)

The premise for this discourse is the assumption of a natural and clear boundary between products for adults and children that kidults then violate. Whenever the term “kidult” is used, this crossing of the boundary is described as a recent phenomenon, in spite of the fact that the term has been around since the 1960s and in spite of the fact that books have been crossing over into one or the other direction ever since the division between adults’ and children’s’ literature was created in the first place. Fiona McCulloch’s description of the recent history of childhood and adulthood is a case in point concerning this pretence:

All of this has led to a sense that childhood is disappearing, while adults are becoming increasingly child-like in their nostalgic desire to preserve their own youth. Examples include the rise in crossover fiction, such as *Harry Potter* or *His Dark Materials* or the growing adult interest in Playstation or Wii or Nintendo. This group has even been given its own label, known as ‘kidults’ and are regarded as the most nostalgic generation ever, with constant revivals of music and fashion from the 1980s. (25)

While McCulloch first carefully phrases that there is “a sense” that childhood is disappearing and adulthood is dissolving into a lived nostalgia for childhood, she then presents the rise in crossover fiction as simple fact that serves to substantiate this

claim. Likewise, Rachel Falconer also depicts the rise in crossover fiction within the last decade as simple fact (1-11), as already mentioned in the research survey. It needs to be pointed out though that while there are statistics on the world-wide sale of *Harry Potter*, *Twilight* and the like, none of these apportion these numbers to age groups (which would be fairly impossible anyways, for while the age of the buyer could be elicited by a survey, this person does not have to be the one the book is ultimately bought for). Thus, there is no way of telling whether *Harry Potter* has really been read by more adults than children's and YA novels of previous decades. The only thing that is for sure is that there exists a felt increase in the popularity of children's books with adults, which is then utilized in the mass media to evoke a feeling of crisis concerning the child/adult dichotomy. This is not to diminish the significance of this discourse of crisis, for its ideological impact is not bound to whether there really has been a statistical increase in the number of adult crossover readers or whether it is just a felt crisis.

Ideologically much more significant than the question of whether the claim of a rise of adult crossreaders holds true is the question of the cultural work of the kidult discourse. How does it normalize the very identity categories that it depicts as under threat? How are the child and the adult constructed in this discourse, and what other identity categories are mobilized in their construction? These questions will be addressed in the second part of the thesis at hand, which focusses on the marketing of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* to adults and on the depiction of their adult readers as kidults in the press. While this analysis will then mainly be concerned with readers, it should not be forgotten that all constituents of the nonfictional literary communication process of children's and YA literature, that is, authors, the texts themselves and their readers, are stigmatized through the reduction of childness into childishness, which denotes lack or immaturity.

In the recent Hollywood movie *Young Adult* (2011), for instance, both the writer of YA novels and the books themselves are depicted as superficial and immature. Protagonist Mavis is a divorced woman in her late thirties clad in hello kitty shirts and pink track pants, who spends her days playing Wii and her nights partying and cannot even muster enough responsibility to take care of a tiny dog. The plot mainly revolves around Mavis trying to win back the heart of her high school sweetheart, not because she is truly in love with him, but because he has just had a baby with his wife. Mavis seems to be modelled not only on the kidult, but also on Jung's puella – the female counterpart of the puer aeternus – who sets out to destroy marriages motivated by her unreflected vanity (103). Mavis' occupation as author of YA novels and her own stunted development are set in direct relation to each other by the plot device of combining a voice-over of her reading out her fictional stories, which feature an equally vain female teen protagonist, with the visual portrayal of her own narcissistic attempts to sabotage the relationship. The movie thus reaffirms “the belief that those who write for children [or in this case, young adults] in whatever fashion are, themselves, childish” (R.D.S. Jack qtd. in Hollindale 50).

Both Stephenie Meyer and J.K. Rowling have, of course, attempted to resist this discourse by constructing their author personas along established lines of what counts as literary quality and expertise. In these constructions, their respective national identities have played a significant role: Rowling, the Brit, has stressed the relatedness of her work to other classics of English children's literature and has depicted her process of writing as mainly consisting of world-building and archiving. In documentaries and interviews she readily has given insight into her archive of character portraits and pieces of background story that were never to become part of the major plot. Rowling has thus depicted her work as very systematic and as rooted in tradition. Meyer, on the other hand, has stylized herself into the New World version of the creative genius. Claiming to have never read any vampire fiction and keeping silent on her B.A. in literature, she depicts herself as having no previous literary education. The story came to her as a dream of the key scene of what was to become the first novel of the *Twilight* saga, claims Meyer. Meyer's narrative of divine inspiration and of being uncoupled from literary traditions and previous conventions mirrors notions of America as the New World and of the myth of manifest destiny.

Nonetheless, Rowling's nomination for the Whitbread Award triggered considerable controversy on the very basis of a dispute over the literary quality of her work. While Rowling's work, by now, may have become relatively accepted as a children's classic by both literary criticism and academia, Meyer's books still are widely considered as trivial, if not trashy, which may have to do with the double stigma of not just being YA literature, but YA literature for girls. In addition, the label "children's classic" seems to be almost exclusive to works with a British origin with few American books having made their way into this canon.

Scholars of children's literature have spent considerable time and energy on repudiating the claim of the lack of quality of children's literature and analysing the ideological backgrounds of this claim (see, for instance, Falconer's discussion of *Harry Potter* as "light" reading (43-73); Hollindale 23-44; Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Kinderliteratur, Kanonbildung und literarische Wertung* 157-161). In this context, Hollindale found that the "practice of devaluing childhood and children's literature when we really are protecting our concept of adulthood (and exposing our unease about it) is extremely common in derogatory estimates of children's books" (36). This finding will be the starting point of the analysis of the kidult discourse in this thesis. Taking the worthiness of children's and YA literature as an object of study as a given, the following chapters will dig deeper into the unease with adulthood and childhood at a broad cultural scale based on *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* and their consumption by adults as case studies.

Part I: Reading *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*



## 5. “In the wizarding world, we come of age at seventeen.”

### Childhood, Adulthood and Coming of Age in *Harry Potter*

Throughout the seven novels of Rowling’s series, Harry Potter ages from eleven to eighteen. In other words, the reader can observe his development from child into teenager and finally into an adult. The following analysis of the representations of childhood, adulthood and the transition from one to the other in *Harry Potter* will proceed chronologically both with regard to the publication of the novels and Harry’s aging process. The ideal of childhood embodied by the protagonist in the first books will become clearer through an exploration of the genres that the story’s setting mostly draws on. Subsequently, figures of deviance that Harry as ideal child is contrasted with will be under focus, as these can tell most about the way in which normative childhood and coming of age are constructed. In this context the way contemporary parenting is depicted will also be of interest, as this reveals which norms and values are depicted as desirable in terms of what parents pass on to their children. As a last step, the analysis will shed light on how Harry proceeds from child to teenager on to adult with a particular focus on the link between age and other identity categories.

#### 5.1 School and Coming of Age: The Nostalgic Nightmare of the School Story

In “Playing the Genre Game. Generic Fusions of the Harry Potter Series” Anne Hiebert Alton argues that *Harry Potter*’s appeal lies in Rowling’s combination of various genres. She suggests that the novel series incorporates features of pulp fiction, mystery, Gothic and horror stories, detective fiction, the school story, the sports story, fantasy, adventure and quest romance (199f). While “playing the genre game” certainly has its appeal (for both readers and literary scholars), the following chapter is less interested in listing the number of genres that *Harry Potter* borrows from, but rather in the question of how the combination of particular generic features functions to construct childhood. The ultimate aim of the analysis at hand is not an exhaustive generic categorization of *Harry Potter*, but an insight into the cultural work of the text in which the utilization of a combination of genres is merely a tool and not the product itself. For this purpose, the analysis will first turn to the genre of the school story. School, or more particularly Hogwarts, is the centre of Harry Potter’s life and adventures. The representation of school and schooling in *Harry Potter* is essential to the analysis of the construction of childhood. In *Centuries of Childhood* Ariès points out that school and family are the two spheres of childhood (passim). Hence, the following two chapters will first shed light on *Harry Potter*’s place within the genre of the school story in order to then focus on the features which differentiate Rowling’s novel series from the conventional genre pattern. In a subsequent step, the analysis of how the school story is fused with Gothic fiction will shed light on how *Harry Potter*

contributes to the construction and reaffirmation of childhood as eternal, essential, universal and unchanging, that is, to childhood as a myth. Last, but not least, an analysis of the combination of school story, Gothic story and adventure quest will highlight the ways in which growing up as a linear progression from ideal childhood to ideal adulthood is constructed in *Harry Potter* and in which ways this is intertwined with gender.

### 5.1.1 *Harry Potter* and the Literary Tradition of the School Story

The school story has a long literary tradition in Britain. It is the genre in which modern English children's literature is rooted, "with Sarah Fielding's story of the nine pupils of Mrs Teachum's 'little female academy', *The Governess* (1749), frequently identified as the first continuous narrative for children in English" (Reimer 209). Only after the 1930s did the genre's significance decrease, due to changes in the British educational system: While real schools were moving toward more modern structures, the setting of the traditional school story connoted privilege and elitism, notions that sounded increasingly old-fashioned (O'Sullivan 31; Manners Smith 72).

Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days*, which was published in 1857, has been labelled as the prototype of the genre (O'Sullivan 31, Petzold, "Die Harry Potter Bücher" 35), though such a generalization would mean bracketing out the preceding works by Sarah Fielding, Mary Wollstonecraft (*Original Stories from Real Life* (1788)), Lady Eleanor Fenn (*School Dialogues for Boys* (1783)) and Mary Ann and Charles Lamb (*Mrs. Leicester's School* (1809)) to name just a few of the approximately ninety school stories published between Fielding's and Hughes' (Steege 141; see also Manners Smith 70). To be historically more exact *Tom Brown's School Days* should rather be labelled as a novel that "was an important source for character types, plot incidents and motifs for school stories for at least a century following its publication and, arguably, left an indelible mark on the generic form itself" (Reimer 215). As the title already indicates, it is a boy's school story<sup>8</sup>, and it is mostly autobiographical, based on Hughes' own school days at Rugby (Reimer 212). David K. Steege offers an exhaustive comparison of this influential work and *Harry Potter* and so does Karen Manners Smith, but here it shall suffice to briefly look at key elements and the basic plot formula to elucidate that, while *Harry Potter* clearly is a boys' school story, it deviates in important ways from the conventions in *Tom Brown's School Days* and subsequent works, which may help to explain why it is so popular with a contemporary international readership.

In the tradition of boys' school stories, the protagonist typically is a newcomer to the school the story is set in, just like Tom Brown and Harry Potter. Stock elements of the traditional school story are the shopping list that the new student has to work

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<sup>8</sup> Early school stories were almost exclusively girls' school stories. For the ways in which these follow a different pattern and offer a different constellation of school and the world outside of it see Reimer 216ff.

through in order to be properly equipped for his first year at school, the journey to the new school, the house system and the key importance of sports tournaments at school (mostly rugby or cricket), in which the protagonist excels far more than in the academic field, and the role of the headmaster as the new student's personal mentor. All of the aforementioned elements can be found in *Harry Potter*, though often defamiliarized through fantastical elements (O'Sullivan 32; Hiebert 210-214). The traditional British sport rugby, for instance, turns into Quidditch. These defamiliarizations render Rowling's novels less explicitly culturally specific, which helps explain why the books are so vastly popular even beyond Britain's borders, argues Steege (154).

At the level of plot, *Harry Potter* deviates in a significant manner from the literary convention. The typical plot formula of the school story as summarized by Edward C. Mack in 1941 sheds light on the psychological development that the protagonist of the traditional boys' school story would ideally go through:

[A] boy enters school in some fear and trepidation, but usually with ambitions and schemes; suffers mildly or severely at first from loneliness, the exactions of fag-masters, the discipline of masters, and the regimentation of games; then makes a few friends and leads for a year or so a joyful, irresponsible and sometimes rebellious life; eventually learns duty, self-reliance, responsibility, and loyalty as a prefect, qualities usually used to put down bullying or overemphasis on athletic prowess; and finally leaves school, with regret, for the wider world, stamped with the seal of the institution which he has left and devoted to its welfare. (qtd. in Steege 155f.)

Steege here concludes that Rowling's novel series offers a softened version of the traditional school story, as the negative aspects of this formula are left out: Harry does not experience homesickness, as the home and family he knows are much worse than Hogwarts, his first year is not problematic and he already makes friends on the train-ride to school (ibid.; Hiebert Alton 210f.; Manners Smith 81). The school subjects in Hogwarts sound fun<sup>9</sup> instead of tedious, younger students are not victimized by older ones, so called fag-masters (Manners Smith 80), and at least under Dumbledore, there is no physical punishment of rule-breaking.

This eradication of negative elements renders the novel series a representation of "school days as they should be' complete with practical jokes, sports, mischief, studying, 'and Dickensian Christmas hols' (Richards 12)" (Hiebert Alton 211). Thus, one could even go a step further than Steege and not only call *Harry Potter* a softened version of the traditional school story, but even a strongly softened school story. After all, school stories were already criticized in the 1940s as very idealized accounts of boarding school life. George Orwell, for instance, remarked about the school stories

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<sup>9</sup> Again this is achieved through fantastic elements, e.g. students do not learn Latin but Latin-sounding magic spells.



published as boys' weeklies at the time that "these stories are fantastically unlike life at a real public school", because they were in fact directed at an audience that could never have afforded a reputable public school (179). Therefore, if one already has to consider the traditional school story as softened, then *Harry Potter* has to be labelled an extremely softened and idealized school story.

A preliminary conclusion of the comparison between *Harry Potter* and the traditional boys' school story then would so far yield the results that Rowling's novel series features most of the stock elements of the genre, albeit often in a fantastical form that also renders the story appealing for readers beyond the English book market and that negative elements of the typical plot formula are left out or softened resulting in a strongly softened account of boarding school life and thus, more generally speaking, a strongly idealized image of childhood. In addition to that, *Harry Potter* can also be described as an updated version of the traditional school story as it takes into account the changes that have occurred in the British school system since the heyday of the genre: Hogwarts is a co-educational school with both male and female staff and students and at least the latter ones are also multicultural (Steege 153; Manners Smith 83). However, on a deeper, ideological level, a comparison between *Harry Potter* and its literary forerunners results in findings that partly contradict these first impressions in that they expose the updating of the school story as merely superficial. In fact, the predominant feeling evoked through the story is nostalgia for the privilege and elitism that public schools stood for in the past, argues Mendlesohn.

Looking at the psychological development of the main characters and the values and norms they are introduced to at Hogwarts, *Harry Potter* seems congruent with the norms of the ruling English elite as idealized in the school stories of the nineteenth century. While the story emphatically foregrounds Harry, Ron and Hermione learning about the merits of friendship and camaraderie, there are many issues addressed in the background that are ideologically problematic from a contemporary perspective. For instance, studiousness and academic zeal often carry ambivalent, sometimes even clearly negative connotations. Compare, for instance, the relative ease with which Harry finds social acceptance in contrast to Hermione. Even Harry and Ron hesitate and rather reluctantly befriend Hermione because she is devoted to learning and full of ambition. Protagonist Harry, in contrast, can be described as a gentleman scholar: "[H]e works hard enough that his natural talent will take him through, but he is never shown at the top of the class, as this, a position occupied by Hermione, is despised as too showy for a gentleman" (Mendlesohn 169). Typical of the gentleman scholar and the traditional school story, Harry's achievements in the school's traditional sport Quidditch are valued much higher than any academic achievements (Steege 148) and as Quidditch is clearly "a rich man's sport" (Mendlesohn 172) – winning actually depends at least as much on having the most expensive equipment, i.e. the newest broom on the market, as it does on skill and practice – this is a sign of the class privilege glorified in the traditional school story.

Furthermore, while Hermione is ridiculed for her achievements, Harry is cherished for his heritage, i.e. for his parents' achievements, more than for his own at the beginning of the story. Heritage and bloodlines seem to be a highly ambivalent and problematic issue in Rowling's magical world indeed: Mendlesohn points out that while open contempt is expressed by Dumbledore and the Weasleys toward the Malfoys, Voldemort and their emphasis on pure blood, both are quick to point out that the Weasleys and the Potters are from some of the oldest magical families of England (167f.).

On the basis of these first findings, Mendlesohn develops the thesis that the novel series basically offers its readers the choice between two kinds of aristocrats through the various magical families, the nice ones – Dumbledore, the Potters and Weasleys – and the mean ones – the Malfoys and, of course, Voldemort and his other followers – and thus backgrounds any critical questions about the hierarchical and hereditary structures of aristocracy itself (169). Once one analyses Hogwarts beyond the superficial updating of the school story by integrating students and teachers of mixed genders and cultures, the norms and values of Hogwarts rather befit the England of the nineteenth than of the twenty-first century. Note, for instance, how Hermione's fight for the rights of the enslaved house elves is not only brushed off by her friends and Dumbledore, but even ridiculed and undermined by a higher instance, namely the tone of the narration itself (Mendlesohn 180). Slavery is presented as just if the slave owners are good people like Dumbledore, which roots the representation back to the imperialist discourse of the benign slave holder.

Another example of how the novel thus naturalizes social hierarchies based on class and race is the case of Hagrid. Mendlesohn points out that while Hagrid certainly must have gone through the same education as all other alumni of Hogwarts, some of which have become teachers at the school, he is only employed as the groundkeeper on the basis of his race.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Mendlesohn concludes, the liberalism embodied by Dumbledore and the like is not about equality but about the belief in an obligation to treat those well who are inferior. The Muggle Protection Act, for instance, is just another example of that very logic. Thus, ideologically, the good and the bad magicians are actually not so far away from each other as they may seem at first sight: both groups agree that people are divided into superior and inferior groups, that this division is natural and should not be meddled with. The only point where their opinions diverge is on how to treat those people. Thus, the story naturalizes differences that are actually socially constructed. From all of this Mendlesohn extracts the thesis that *Harry Potter* is building up nostalgia for an imaginary Old England, the inequalities, injustices and conservatism of which become acceptable because they are displaced onto a fantastical setting (180).

What is more, the way students are taught at Hogwarts is outdated, conservative and rigid in its structures. School in a boys' school story has to be regarded as

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<sup>10</sup> Hagrid is a giant, a race that is notorious for being dangerous and evil in Rowling's fictional universe.

microcosm to the macrocosm of the world at large, as a “little world” in which the students can learn safely about their role and place in the world (Reimer 212). Taken as such, Hogwarts is the model of a world in which there is little autonomy and self-determination, if any at all. While the protagonists do go on adventures on their own, they are, in the early novels, always saved by the overpowering mentor Dumbledore<sup>11</sup> in the end, who also serves the lesson to be learned, thus imposing a limitation on both actions and thoughts (Mendlesohn 176) and reaffirming the existence of a clear-cut boundary between adults and children. As already mentioned above, students like Hermione, who dare to critically question the status quo, are silenced by ridicule and thus soon indoctrinated. Furthermore, while there are normally no physical punishments under Dumbledore, students are actually punished thus when Dolores Umbridge, who follows Voldemort’s ideological lead, comes into power at Hogwarts. While this return to the cruelty of the traditional school story is only temporary, it is interesting to note that the solution to the ideological problem of such cruel punishments is achieved simply by removing Umbridge from the position again. At no point in the story are the power structures of Hogwarts, i.e. that students are completely at the mercy of their teachers, ever put into question. As in the case of the enslavement of the house elves, rigid social structures are represented as natural, and the welfare of those who are disadvantaged by these structures, in this case children, is fully dependent upon benign rulers, that is, adults. Whether children or elves, none of these groups is ever encouraged to actually think independently, act autonomously and challenge the status quo.

There are certainly some weak points in Mendlesohn’s argumentation on the grounds of which it can be challenged. For instance, while the prevalence of heritage over achievement is certainly true for the outset of the story, Harry’s reputation is increasingly connected to his own achievements throughout the course of the seven books. Moreover, while Harry is treated as royalty at school on the basis of his heritage, his mother was just a muggle, which would actually mark him as racially and hence also socially inferior if the novels were ideologically as consistent as Mendlesohn argues. Karin E. Westman particularly sees Hogwarts’ multicultural student body and the racial tensions between muggles, mudbloods and wizards as counterarguments to a reading of Hogwarts as a nostalgic image of “Old England” and rather sees the world of the novels as a commentary on post-Thatcher England<sup>12</sup> (305). However, a closer look at the design of Hogwarts as a setting, both with regard to atmosphere and power structures reveals that Mendlesohn’s thesis can still be held up in spite of these counterarguments and that, in fact, the choice between these two theses is not an either-or question. Yet, Mendlesohn’s reading of Hogwarts as

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<sup>11</sup> In fact, his influence on the protagonists is so overpowering that it is quite clear from the start that Harry Potter only can come of age if his mentor dies.

<sup>12</sup> Westman concludes from this that Rowling’s novels cannot be read as an “ahistorical, ultimately conservative rendering of British childhood experience” (305). I will argue to the contrary in the following chapter within the framework of a fusion of the theses of Mendlesohn and Westman.

invocation of an imaginary England of the past needs some modification to negotiate the aforementioned contradictions.

### 5.1.2 *Harry Potter* and the Haunted Castle

In order to modify Mendlesohn's thesis in a way that incorporates the above-mentioned counter-arguments, it is necessary to have a closer look at the story's setting and structure. That Hogwarts is grounded on ideological principles of a romanticized, fantastically displaced past, as Mendelsohn argues, is also detectable in the aesthetic design of the setting. The school building is a huge castle that appears to be a mouldering ruin to muggles. To wizards, it is full of hidden chambers and pathways, with monsters and ghosts hiding in those chambers and the sewerage, waiting to be discovered by Harry and his friends (Hiebert Alton 203). It is decorated with living paintings in which the ghosts of the persons depicted move about. In sum, this means that Hogwarts is a typical Gothic setting<sup>13</sup> as described by Jerold E. Hogle as "an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space" in which some secrets from the past are hidden that haunt the main characters in the shape of ghosts or monsters (2). These secrets from the past in Hogwarts of course all have to do with Voldemort, or rather with former student Tom Riddle who turned into the evil undead wizard Lord Voldemort.

The central conflict between Lord Voldemort and Harry Potter can also be described with the Gothic plot formula: In a psychoanalytical reading the Gothic "[i]n some way [...] is usually about some 'son' wanting to kill and striving to be the 'father' (4)<sup>14</sup>. On a cultural level, the son is usually an embodiment of the forces of change in a present seeking to break with the past, the father (ibid.), whilst he is still attracted to parts of this past:

Gothic fictions since Walpole have most often been about aspiring but middling, or sometimes upper middle-class, white people caught between the attractions or terrors of a past once controlled by overweening aristocrats or priests [...] and forces of change that would reject such a past yet still remain held by aspects of it. (Hogle 3)

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<sup>13</sup> Emer O'Sullivan also sees traces of the Gothic novel in *Harry Potter*, albeit without elaborating which (30).

<sup>14</sup> This, of course, also describes the conflict between Dumbledore and his pupil Tom Riddle/Lord Voldemort. If one wanted to describe the constellation of all three characters, Dumbledore, Harry and Voldemort, together, they could be likened to God, Satan and Adam and Eve in Milton's *Paradise Lost*: Dumbledore is the god of his little world Hogwarts. Voldemort, like Satan, rebels against God and his introduction of novelties (the humans/muggles) into the world, because he, instead, would like to return things to the preceding system (God and the Angels/only wizards of pure blood). Harry Potter, the half-muggle, stands for God's new favourites, whom Satan, out of envy tries to ensnare to take revenge on God. While the Romanticists read Milton's Satan as a Byronic hero, Rowling does not allow her Satan-figure that kind of complex ambivalence, but charts him as villain through and through and thus interprets this figure very conservatively.

Using this reading of Gothic fiction, some of the contradictions resulting from Mendlesohn's reading of Hogwarts as an invocation of Old England can be resolved. Dumbledore, Harry and his friends, the positive characters of the book, are the aforementioned middle-class, white people that are caught between the terrors and attractions of the past and the forces of change. That the behaviour of the story's positive characters is not as ideologically consistent as Mendlesohn presents it is due to the fact that besides being a school story, *Harry Potter* is also a Gothic story. As pointed out in the summary of Mendlesohn's reading, the protagonists are ideologically much closer to Voldemort and the Malfoys – embodiments of the dark underside of the past, i.e. those aspects of Old England that are hard to feel nostalgic about – than they admit to themselves (and the reader). While Harry and his friends are enchanted by everything about Hogwarts that smacks of Old England, they also battle the very past that these things belong to and are open-minded (to a certain extent) to muggles, to mudbloods and to change. This uneasy mix of past and present lies at the heart of *Harry Potter* – its nostalgia for nineteenth-century England and its attempt to exorcise the demons that belong to it. The negative aspects of that romanticized past are embodied through Voldemort, who haunts Hogwarts, seeking to install the ideological structure that actually belongs to this past. The disjointed ideological nature of Hogwarts as a school is also indicated by its treatment of young Voldemort, Tom Riddle. As Holly Blackford points out, "Tom is a monstrous creation of school culture that, in the paradigm of Frankenstein's monster, Dumbledore does not wish to acknowledge" (89). The points that Dumbledore criticizes about Tom, his elitism, materialism, his tendency to seek allies and servants instead of friends and focus on hoarding objects is exactly the kind of behaviour that Hogwarts fosters in its students through its tournaments, its distribution of points to houses merely based on teachers' goodwill, the necessity to gain privileged access to additional sources to pass tests in class and its high esteem for students whose families have visited Hogwarts for generations (ibid.).

By importing the imagined, romanticized England of the past as depicted in the traditional boarding school, *Harry Potter* also imports an equally outdated representation of childhood. Though it may seem familiar to contemporary readers, it is in fact a collage of different historical periods and celebrates ideals that have either been rendered invalid or at least been seriously put into question in our contemporary conceptualization of childhood: From the early boarding school story it imports the Enlightenment idea of the improvable child: children need to learn from adults and not vice versa. Following Puritan hierarchies, adults set out the rules for children, who are placed under their absolute authority, even in the face of the shortcomings of that system in the world of *Harry Potter*. As Maria Nikolajeva points out, "even though it is understood that Harry is the only one to match the evil force of Voldemort, until the ultimate battle Harry has to comply with the rules imposed by adults" (231).

At the same time, the novels also present a childhood of friendship and camaraderie, of adventures that always end well, a childhood full of magical,

“Dickensian” Christmases (Richards qtd. in Hiebert Alton 211), festive meals and exciting gifts to be bestowed upon them by adults. In the world of *Harry Potter*, there are no divorced parents that children might have complex and conflicting feelings about, but only the unambiguously evil step-parents (the Dursleys) typical of the fairy tale. And in the world of *Harry Potter*, parents, primarily the *Übervater* Dumbledore and Harry’s dead parents, are infallible, omniscient guardian angels that are selflessly helping children to learn the next lesson that they have laid out for them and even come in to save them from the realm of the dead. Last but not least, in *Harry Potter*, there is a lesson to be learned out of every experience and with each lesson the child makes another step towards becoming adult and never a step back, thus suggesting that coming of age is a clearly cut out linear progression, an idea imported from the Victorian era. This linear progression is suggested by the structure of each and every one of the books of the heptalogy, as in the end of each novel Dumbledore explains to Harry Potter (and to the reader) what the lesson to be learned from preceding events is, thus ensuring that his coming of age is successful. This only seemingly timeless representation of childhood in *Harry Potter* is as far away from the complexities of real contemporary childhood as Hogwarts is from an actual contemporary public school.

In conclusion of this chapter then, *Harry Potter* can be read as a representation of childhood that consists of a set of historically specific conceptualizations of childhood, but this historic specificity is veiled by placing this representation of childhood into a setting that is partly defamiliarized through the fantastic and thus seems less culturally or historically specific than it actually is, and by patchily updating this setting to approximate it to the world of the contemporary reader. It is thus hidden that the single features of this representation of childhood are specific to a place and a time, and it is hidden that this time and place are those of a past long gone, and that indeed, a childhood as represented here is non-existent under contemporary social and cultural conditions.

The effect on contemporary readers, however, is not that they find this a bizarre representation of childhood that they cannot relate to. Instead it seems to be a natural, universal representation of childhood that both adult and child readers can relate to. It is no longer childhood, but the myth of childhood. The ideological work of this myth is that it reaffirms the belief that the meaning of the identity category “child” is stable, that it remains untouched by historical change. Part of the cultural work of *Harry Potter* then is the naturalization of childhood. This is a cultural work that it fulfils with regard to both adult and child readers. Hence, the novels’ appeal to audiences may in part be grounded on their reaffirmation of the existence of the child/adult binary.

When Jerold E. Hogle discusses whether the Gothic genre is conservative or revolutionary, he comes to the conclusion that mostly it is both at the same time:

Most often, though, Gothic works hesitate between the revolutionary and conservative [...]. No other form of writing [...] is as insistent as Gothic on

juxtaposing potential revolutions and possible reactions [...] and leaving both extremes sharply before us and far less resolved than the conventional endings in most of these works claim them to be. (13)

In an attempt to answer the question whether this hesitation between the conservative and the revolutionary is also typical for *Harry Potter's* Gothic representation of childhood, the following chapters will investigate whether the myth of childhood as constructed in *Harry Potter* is at the same time challenged within the novel series. For this purpose, Voldemort's boundary transgressions as Gothic villain will be of further interest. Another possible conclusion to this chapter, however, could be that the very fact that childhood is placed into a blatantly fantastic setting, Hogwarts, already points at the impossibility of childhood, at the very fact that childhood is also a fantasy, albeit one entertained by the entire western culture in order to make a coherent identity possible.

### 5.2 Lord Voldemort: Monstrous Infant and Kidult

In the preceding chapter I have suggested a reading of Harry and Lord Voldemort along the conventions of the Gothic as a father-son-conflict. Of course, this is just one possible interpretation of the *Harry Potter* novels as Gothic. Hiebert Alton, for instance, also describes the central conflict between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort as typically Gothic, but focuses more on the gender conventions of the genre: "While the Gothic convention of the beautiful heroine suffering at the hands of the cruel villain appears in *Chamber of Secrets* with Ginny's possession by Tom Riddle's diary persona, overall Rowling has shifted this convention onto Harry, as he is repeatedly attacked by Voldemort in various guises" (203). This interesting thesis is offered by Hiebert Alton merely as a side-note and is not further explored. If, however, as suggested here, Harry is to be read as a maiden in distress, then the question arises what particular threat Voldemort stands for. In the Gothic tradition, the villain is a threat to the maiden's sexual purity, and thus, either literally or metaphorically attempts to rape her. In Harry Potter's case purity might also be at stake, though there is, in contrast to the conventional Gothic, no hint at a sexual subtext. Instead, the purity at stake here could be understood as the purity of childhood, the myth of childhood innocence. Nikolajeva, for example, suggests that it is Harry's "innocence and intrinsic benevolence" that "make him superior to the evil – adult – forces" (226). Voldemort is then a counter-figure to the purity represented by Harry in multiple ways that might subvert the myth of childhood innocence.

First of all, before he transforms into the Gothic villain Lord Voldemort, he is Tom Riddle, a student at Hogwarts, who is in many ways not unlike Harry Potter. In

*The Half-Blood Prince*<sup>15</sup> Dumbledore tries to rationalize the reasons for the boy to turn evil. Various explanations typical of the depiction of deviant children are suggested by Dumbledore in an attempt to deflect responsibility for the transformation of Riddle into the dark lord (Blackford 88). Firstly, genetic causes are suggested, i.e. an evil ancestor whose bad seed has been passed down to the child, in this case Salazar Slytherin, an ancestor of Tom's mother. Another typical explanation is that of economic depravity, usually associated with some failure of the nuclear family (Acland 120f.): Dumbledore finds Tom Riddle in an orphanage after his father abandoned the family and his impoverished mother died in childbed. Explanations like genetic causes, economic depravity and a failure of the nuclear family are frequently employed in the depiction of evil children and teenagers both in fiction and in non-fiction to still uphold the myth of childhood innocence (ibid.) while presenting a disturbing image of childhood. They allow for the continued belief in childhood innocence, as they posit the reasons for the child's deviance outside the child. The idea of an external corruption of childhood innocence can then be employed to strengthen further the need for a protection of children from any such influences and thus has a normalizing function.

The story's focalization through Harry directs the reader's particular attention towards the role of the mother in the preservation of childhood innocence. After Dumbledore has explained that Merope was suffering poverty<sup>16</sup>, thus had to give birth to Tom in an orphanage and then died in childbed, Harry reacts as follows:

'She wouldn't even stay alive for her son?'

Dumbledore raised his eyebrows.

'Could you possibly be feeling sorry for Lord Voldemort?'

'No', said Harry quickly, 'but she had a choice, didn't she, not like my mother –'

'Your mother had a choice, too,' said Dumbledore gently. 'Yes, Merope Riddle chose death in spite of a son who needed her, but do not judge her too harshly, Harry. She was greatly weakened by long suffering and she never had your mother's courage. (*The Half-Blood Prince* 246)

Through the focalization through Harry, a problematic value system is imposed on the events that differentiates the two spectral mothers into a binary opposition: Harry's own self-sacrificial mother as the good mother who gives her life to protect her son (Flotmann 248) and Tom's selfish mother as the bad mother who egoistically dies "in spite of a son who needed her", so that Tom is seen as a victim to sympathize with instead of Merope. Merope's death is depicted as a choice, a choice that she selfishly

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<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, all titles of the series will be shortened by leaving out "Harry Potter and" for this part of the title is always the same. Thus, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* is here, for instance, simply referred to as *The Half-Blood Prince*.

<sup>16</sup> Dumbledore speculates that she probably lost her magical skills through a depression over her husband abandoning her and therefore could fall into poverty.



makes instead of living up to the role of the good mother.<sup>17</sup> Not only does her choice seem even more condemnable because she is the only parent left for Tom, but she is his mother, thus bound to a role that, since the Victorian period, has been traditionally depicted as the main bearer of the responsibility of protecting childhood innocence. Though the novel series seems to be ostensibly about friendship and school day adventures, with families only playing a role in the background of the story, the central character constellation of protagonist and antagonist is thus founded, in this reading, on a problematic, pre-feminist value system of family politics (see also Heilman and Donaldson 153). The story's depiction of the two orphaned boys growing up might then imply that, because Harry's mother was a good mother, his childhood innocence is untaintable: Even though he is subsequently placed in a family constellation where he is mistreated on a daily basis (i.e., with the Dursleys), this does not corrupt his "innocence and intrinsic benevolence" (Nikolajeva 226) and he is to grow up into an upright citizen<sup>18</sup>. This reading becomes all the more likely in the light of how often it is stressed throughout the novel series that it is Harry's mother's selfless sacrifice that makes him almost untouchable for the Dark Lord. In the last pages of the last book of the series, Dumbledore points out once again that Harry's goodness is only a match to Voldemort's badness because of the gift of his mother's self-sacrifice (*The Deathly Hallows* 569) and that Voldemort is as bad as he is, because he never experienced any of the like himself. Through the repeated focus on the importance of the mark of love on Harry's forehead, Lily Potter's absence turns into a presence – she becomes a spectral mother who can be more pure and perfect than a living mother could be, reduced to that one feature of self-sacrificial love.

In contrast, Tom seems to have been corrupted from his mother's death onwards. The caretaker at the orphanage where he grew up explains that he was a

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<sup>17</sup> In *Magic Beyond Words: The J. K. Rowling Story* (2011), a movie that tells the story of how Rowling becomes an author and which basically renders this narrative a conventional rags-to-riches story, the role of Rowling as mother is depicted along similarly problematic lines. Rowling's major antagonists in the movie are adverse circumstances – she is a single, unemployed mother of a small baby – and the British welfare system, which gives her financial support as long as she stays at home to take care of the child, but does not furnish any support when it comes to finding a job to be able to finance herself. What first appears to be a criticism of the demonization of welfare moms through pointing out that the welfare system traps them in that precarious situation, is turned, again, into a story of choice following a neoliberal logic. It is by Rowling's choice to find a way to support herself and her daughter that the situation is resolved in spite of the obstacles that the welfare state puts in her way. Thus, the movie reiterates the same problematic story about the good mother that the books suggests, namely that being a good mother is a question of choice and determination and has nothing to do with any of the external circumstances.

<sup>18</sup> Flotmann claims that Harry and Lord Voldemort must be read as representations of the essentially good versus the essentially evil (child): "Emphasis is constantly laid on Harry's essentially good nature which shows itself ultimately unfazed by a loveless childhood with the Dursleys. [...] As much as Harry is fundamentally good, Voldemort's essentially evil nature is never truly questioned." (128) While I would not generally dispute Rowling's tendency towards essentialism, I argue here to the contrary that the plot does give an explanation for Harry's goodness and Voldemort's evilness. It, however, does so by founding this explanation on stereotypes, i.e. the stereotype of the good mother vs. the stereotype of the bad mother. Thus, I suggest a reading of the conflict between Harry and Voldemort as an exploration of family politics instead of the essential good against the essential evil.

“funny baby” that hardly ever cried – a familiar motif from horror movies, where the lack of crying is a sign that the baby has an uncanny sense of self and self-control beyond his young age – and soon turned out to be “odd”, meaning that he was cruel to animals and peers (*The Half-Blood Prince* 250). Dumbledore’s description of Tom adds to the sense that he lost his childhood innocence at an early stage and already was a miniature adult in the disguise of a child when Dumbledore first met him: “[H]e was his handsome father in miniature, tall for eleven years old” (252).

Because Tom never is a “proper”, that is, innocent child, he will not grow up, but grow strange: Instead of becoming a handsome man like his father, he turns into a monster, a snake/human-hybrid. This marking of the monstrous Gothic villain as other by having him transgress several boundary lines is a conventional feature, but in addition to the typical boundaries like human/animal and dead/alive, Lord Voldemort also transgresses the child/adult binary. The parts of the story that involve his adult self are shot through with images of birth and a baby Lord Voldemort. In Harry’s first encounter with the Dark Lord, the latter is inside of Quirrell in a type of grotesque male pregnancy (*The Philosopher’s Stone*). Later he will regain his original body in a birthing procedure involving a monstrous baby and a cauldron:

It was as though Wormtail had flipped over a stone, and revealed something ugly, slimy and blind – but worse, a hundred times worse. The thing Wormtail had been carrying had the shape of a crouched human child, except that Harry had never seen anything less like a child. It was hairless and scaly-looking, a dark, raw, reddish black. Its arms and legs were thin and feeble, and its face – no child alive ever had a face like that – was flat and snake-like, with gleaming red eyes. The thing seemed almost helpless; ... (*The Goblet of Fire* 555f.)

In both scenes Voldemort’s weakness and dependence, features typically linked to the idea of an infant, are stressed and yet it is explicitly mentioned that he calls upon his servants with a commanding tone. In the last book of the series, the image of Voldemort as monstrous infant is again referred to in a scene in which Harry Potter sees the part of Voldemort that had been cast inside him when Voldemort first tried to kill him:

It had the form of a small, naked child, curled on the ground, its skin raw and rough, flayed looking, and it lay shuddering under a seat where it had been left, unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for breath. He was afraid of it. Small and fragile and wounded though it was, he did not want to approach it. [...] He ought to comfort it, but it repulsed him. (*The Deathly Hallows* 566)

The monstrous infant is a figure that frequently occurs in Gothic and horror fiction, but has only scarcely been explored. While the gynaecological Gothic, which features the depiction of birth as monstrous, has received great scholarly interest, existing

literature mainly looks at the female birthing body as abject body (most famously, of course, Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993)) and not at that which is born by it. Steffen Hantke's and Andrew Scahill's papers on the monstrous infant in the horror film form a noteworthy exception. On the background of the findings of Hantke and Scahill, it can be said that the depiction of Voldemort as a monstrous infant borrows heavily from horror film conventions. For instance, both Hantke and Scahill point out that part of the conventions of the depiction of the monstrous infant in film is the retardation of its actual visual revelation (33; 202). In all of the above-quoted scenes, Voldemort as monstrous infant is heard before he is visually presented. His presence is thus indicated but he is still withheld from the gaze. In *The Philosopher's Stone*, his voice is heard long before Quirrell takes off his turban to reveal Voldemort's face. In *The Goblet of Fire*, the infant is first wrapped in – and thus also entirely covered by – a piece of cloth before Harry can actually lay eyes on it. Finally, in *The Deathly Hallows*, the monstrous infant is hidden under a bench and again, Harry first only hears it and then finds it. Scahill suggests that the monstrous infant is “so abject and category-defying that their very conception and representability can warrant a complete narrative arc” (202). Though *Harry Potter* does not go to such extremes as *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) for instance, which withholds a glimpse of the monstrous infant up to the very end, it also plays with our fascinated desire to see the abject infant.

Apart from describing the visual conventions of the monstrous infant in the horror film, Hantke also seeks to create a general reading of this figure based on Freud:

Dominant contemporary conceptions of the infant's body privilege it as a site upon which external forces impinge, a passive, docile, inert object, incapable of action, yet constantly acted upon. Horror films reverse this conception – in fact, monstrous infants in horror films command alarming degrees of agency. In the reversal, they liberate the repressed archaic notions of the infant as a seething cauldron of aggression, selfishness, and sin – a notion which, like everything we pride ourselves on having “overcome” and cast off, returns in frightening, demonic guise. (29)

In the case of Voldemort, this could result in the following reading: the combination of his clear and utter dependence upon his servants in his shape of a demonic embryo (when Quirrell carries him in his head) and demonic infant (that Wormtail dips into the cauldron), which contradicts his commanding tone towards the two, is thus an embodiment of the clash of the dominant conception of the infant/embryo as dependent and passive and the repressed notion of the infant as selfish and aggressive. Thus, the image challenges the romanticized notion of the infant as “paragon [...] of innocence” (ibid.). This impression is further consolidated by the description of Harry's reaction to the monstrous infant: He feels he “ought to comfort it” (*The Deathly Hallows* 566), which is the “natural” reaction to the innocent,

helpless infant in the dominant discourse of childhood innocence, and yet he cannot bring himself to do so. Instead he feels afraid of and “repulsed” by it (*ibid.*), because the thing before him embodies something at odds with the dominant discourse. Lord Voldemort as monstrous infant can thus be seen as a representation that potentially deconstructs the myth of childhood innocence.

This reading, however, only covers part of the possible meanings of the monstrous infant Voldemort. It leaves many signifiers belonging to this figure unregarded. If we focus in particular on the body of the monstrous infant, then a starting point could be the repeated description of its body as inchoate: “its skin raw and rough, flayed looking” (*The Deathly Hallows* 566); “It was hairless and scaly-looking, a dark, raw, reddish black. Its arms and legs were thin and feeble” (*The Goblet of Fire* 556). This description points in two directions: On the one hand, it throws us back, in a typically Gothic fashion, on the materiality of the human body as “raw meat” and therefore on the repressed notions of its animalistic aspects and its mortality. On the other hand, its seemingly unfinished nature indicates a departure from the body of the mother that was too soon. The description of the embryo-like creature in *The Deathly Hallows* also carries connotations of an aborted foetus or a baby dumped in a hidden place by its mother to die: “[I]t lay shuddering under a seat where it had been left, unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for breath” (566). The infant is not ready yet to be a subject – it is only a thing, more particularly an unwelcome, unwanted thing, rejected by its parents and the world.

Scahill points out that representations of monstrous or deformed infants can also function as revenge-on-the-mother tales (199-201). In these stories or images the monstrous infant is depicted as a punishment that the mother receives for her transgressions. Although Merope dies shortly after Tom’s birth and although he is not a monstrous infant then, his return as monstrous infant can also be read as a revenge on the mother. Merope’s refusal to be a mother to Tom (here, I am for a moment adopting the story’s framing of her death as a choice) leads to a later counter-reaction in which he tries to achieve birth without a mother. The latter is, of course, a frequent motif of the Gothic. Both Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* can be read as fantasies of motherless reproduction grounded in a fear of the maternal and its power. Thus, while *Harry Potter* stresses the importance of the mother as guardian of childhood innocence and identifies her as the decisive factor for whether a child grows up to achieve normative adulthood or not, it at the same time expresses the fear that goes hand in hand with that power and therefore engages in a fantasy that undoes motherhood.

The most unsettling part of Lord Voldemort as monstrous infant, however, is that he is marked as an eternal child. Growing up as a linear, gradual, non-reversible process is negated by Voldemort’s instant transformation from monstrous infant in *The Goblet of Fire*, and even more so by his depiction in *The Deathly Hallows*, where he is shown as an adult man, but at the same time the part of him that is inside of Harry is still represented as a monstrous infant. Dumbledore’s remark that this creature cannot

be helped could imply that part of Voldemort will forever stay this monstrous infant. Thus, Lord Voldemort is depicted as being adult and yet an eternal, monstrous child at the same time.

Typically for the Gothic monster then, Harry's antagonist transgresses a boundary that is of significant importance to the identity of the protagonist: In both his present shape as Lord Voldemort and in his past shape as Tom Riddle, he blurs the boundary between child and adult. As Tom Riddle, he appears to be child and miniature adult at the same time and later, as Lord Voldemort he appears as a monstrous infant that instantly turns into a grown man/thing and yet always partly remains a monstrous infant, as the final scene in *The Deathly Hallows* implies. The latter implication renders him an example of the eternal child, a figure that used to be depicted ambiguously, as, for instance, in its most famous realization, Peter Pan, but is here represented as unambiguously evil. Thus, Tom/Voldemort is in every possible way the antithesis to Harry, both as the embodiment of the prototypical Romantic innocent child and as an example of the Victorian ideal of a linear process of growing up (with no going back). Lord Voldemort as monstrous depiction of the eternal child in the fictional world of the novels and the depiction of the kidult in the non-fictional discourse about the novels' readers could be read as mirror-images of each other that bespeak anxieties concerning the identity category age. Sarah E. Gibbons moves towards such a reading of Lord Voldemort, when she writes:

In a cycle of motivation and consumption, citizens within commodity culture attempt to perpetually delay death, or at least old age, by surrounding themselves with purchasable representations of an ideal. Compared from such a perspective, Voldemort's wish to emerge from his own destruction renewed and powerful again is not abnormal. It links him [...] to [a] society [...], which pulls its totems of youth from fiction. (Gibbons qtd. in Flotmann 128)

What likens Lord Voldemort in particular to the discursive construction of the kidult reader is that these adults have been depicted as parasitical readers who try to relive their own youth through consuming books intended for children. Voldemort is depicted as the parasite par excellence of the Gothic, the vampire, in multiple ways, as Bergenthal points out. He returns from the dead, drinks blood (from a unicorn), he is intelligent, eloquent and quasi-aristocratic (312f.). Most importantly, however, Voldemort tries to defy aging and death by parasitically living through others. When he turns Harry into a Horcrux, this means that part of him lives in and through the child as a parasite. The parasitical ways of vampires have often been read as a critique of consumption in capitalism (e.g., Latham) based on Marx's use of the vampire as metaphor (Gelder 20). The adult readers of children's books are similarly depicted as intruding illegitimately into what is not theirs to live through their children in critiques of so-called kidult consumption: For instance, Charles, who sees the popularity of the *Harry Potter* books among adults as evidence for what he calls "cultural infantilism,"

claims that adult readers are “horning in on our kids' favorite books”, implying through the choice of words that this is a parasitical kind of consumption (n. pag.). Zohar Shavit, who argues that children's books should solely address children, also sees the adult reader as a kind of parasite who tries to live through his/her child:

Like a doting father who buys himself an electric train in order to fulfill his own childhood dream that never came true, more and more recent books for children seem intent on satisfying adult wishes and, in this sense, often appeal to adults at the expense of the child-reader. For adults seem to find it difficult to accept that once their own childhood is over, it is over for good. (95f)

Parents are turned from selfless caretakers into selfish parasites in this description. This discourse of adult cross-readers as parasitic kidults has become the dominant discourse on cross-reading, which will be further explored in chapter eight. The existence and repeated reaffirmation of this discourse in both scholarly and laymen contexts stands in a blatant contradiction to the results of research on the history of children's literature which has come to the substantiated result that all books categorized today as children's classic have crossed over in one or the other direction (Kümmerling-Meibauer xv; see also Beckett 3). Hence, the insistence on a clear-cut division between books for children and books for adults is based on an essentialism that ignores that this division never existed for any other reasons than marketing in the first place. It could be argued that the image of the parasitic kidult is invoked as a kind of deterrent to achieve a consensus that the identity categories child and adult exist in the first place. The very same purpose is fulfilled by Lord Voldemort as monstrous transgressor of age boundaries. In his seven theses on monsters, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests that the cultural work of monsters is to “police [...] the borders of the possible” (12). “The monster of prohibition”, explains Cohen, “exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture, to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot – *must* not – be crossed (“Monster Culture” 13). Both the kidult and Lord Voldemort are breaking the laws of age and thus embody what “cannot – *must* not” be, if the distinction “child” and “adult” is to make any sense. In conclusion then, one could understand Lord Voldemort as just another version of the image of the demonized, parasitic kidult, a monster created to scare off adults from consuming cultural products intended for children to fulfil an alleged desire to evade their own aging. The destruction of this monster functions in an essentialist view of identity to reaffirm and protect the binary child/adult (and thereby also the binary children's literature/adult literature) from its deconstruction through a historical perspective that would expose its construction and arbitrariness.

### 5.3 “His money’s worth”<sup>19</sup> – Capitalism, Consumption and Coming of Age

While the previous chapter suggested a reading of Lord Voldemort as a conservative critique of a very particular kind of consumption by a particular kind of consumer, the *Harry Potter* novels also criticize consumption more explicitly and more generally at different points in the story. Whenever Rowling focusses on the Dursley family, for instance, consumption becomes a central topic. Note, for instance, the description of Dudley Dursley’s birthday in the first book of the heptalogy:

The table was almost hidden beneath all Dudley’s birthday presents. It looked as though Dudley had got the new computer he wanted, not to mention the second television and the racing bike. Exactly why Dudley wanted a racing bike was a mystery to Harry, as Dudley was very fat and hated exercise [...]. (*The Philosopher’s Stone* 20)

Dudley does not desire the gifts he receives for their usefulness – as Harry points out here, Dudley certainly will never use the racing bike – but it is all about the quantity of presents and the status they represent. He shares this attitude with his parents, whose major purpose in life seems to be to impress the neighbours (*The Prisoner of Azkaban* 8). In fact, Dudley already has so many toys that he needs a second bedroom for them (*Philosopher’s Stone* 32). His insatiable greediness is further highlighted by Rowling by repeatedly stressing his obesity. Teare therefore suggests that this could be read as an intertextual link to *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*<sup>20</sup>: “He clearly descends from Dahl’s Augustus Gloop, whose gluttony Rowling can make even more contemptible by implicitly calling on current concern about obesity and inactivity among couch-potato kids” (338). Dudley has been described as a “hyperconsuming suburbanite” and the portrayal of the entire Dursley family has been read as an “acid broadside against crass materialism” (Waetjen & Gibson 9). Westman even suggests that judging only from the depiction of consumption in the Dursley sections of the novel series, one would “expect the focus of Rowling’s critique to be the dangers of consumerism and conspicuous consumption, a world Harry would leave behind when he begins his life as a wizard” (310).

However, once Harry enters the wizard world, he joyously engages in consumer capitalism as well, and this is in no way depicted negatively. His very first journey into the wizard world is a shopping spree where he has to pull himself together not to spend all his newly gained wealth all at once (Waetjen & Gibson 15; Westman 310). Like Dudley, Harry also receives expensive gifts, like the state-of-the-art broom, the Firebolt, he is given by Sirius Black. Last but not least, Harry and his friends spend their money on little knick-knacks like candy, collector’s cards, joke articles and fan articles (at the Quidditch World Cup) all the time. Not only is the consumerism of

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<sup>19</sup> *The Philosopher’s Stone* 21.

<sup>20</sup> Doughty also sees similarities to Dahl’s novel because the Dursleys are depicted so easy to hate (248).

Harry and his friends not depicted negatively, but it is instead even represented as a normal and healthy way of gaining friendship, status and popularity for a child in a capitalist society. For instance, Harry's and Ron's friendship begins with Harry buying his poorer peer some candy, while Dudley's consumption of candy is depicted as contemptible. Also, Harry's popularity and status at school increases significantly through his success at Quidditch, which is enabled by the expensive broom (Waetjen & Gibson 15).

Looking at the Dursleys, Rowling's portrayal of the family seems to suggest that trying to buy somebody's affection (in this case, the parents trying to buy their son's love) or somebody's admiration (in this case, that of the neighbours) is doomed to fail, because money cannot buy these things. However, looking at the portrayal of consumerism in the chapters set in the wizard world, the opposite seems to hold true. Thus, while in the muggle world consumerism is depicted as ultimately empty – that is, it does not make those who spend the money happy – in the wizard world it is depicted as emotionally fulfilling (Waetjen & Gibson 13-14). This central contradiction in the text is what the interpretations that focus on the representation of consumerism in the novel series struggle with (Westman 310; Waetjen & Gibson 4; Nel 242). Both Westman and Nel try to resolve the seeming paradox by interpreting it as a moral lesson that differentiates between different kinds of consumption:

Capitalism is amoral, but what people do with their capital does not have to be. Rowling's depiction of the Dursleys, the Malfoys, and Harry exemplifies precisely this point: all three have sufficient money to live comfortably, but the Dursleys and Malfoys like to lord their socioeconomic status over other people.[...]. In contrast, Harry uses his money to buy treats for his friends and gives his Triwizard Tournament winnings to Fred and George Weasley, making them promise that they will use some of the money to buy Ron new dress robes, and use the rest as an investment in their joke shop (*Chamber of Secrets* 48; *Goblet of Fire* 635–6). As Karin E. Westman observes [...] “An outsider to the Dursleys' materialism, Harry comes to embody all that his relations are not: he is unselfish, compassionate and good-hearted” (310). (Nel 242)

While this approach finds a way to make sense of the seemingly contradictory depictions of consumerism in the text, it leaves out some defining features of the scenes that deal with consumption. I want to suggest a different approach that reads the scenes in the Dursley household first and foremost as a critique of parenting. It still, of course, also remains a critique of consumer capitalism, but only with regard to its role within the framework of parenting as a social practice. This becomes clear if we look at how, for instance, the description of Dudley's birthday quoted earlier continues:

‘Thirty-six’, he said, looking up at his mother and father. ‘That’s two less than last year.’ ‘Darling, you haven’t counted Auntie Marge’s present, see, it’s here



under this big one from Mummy and Daddy.’ ‘All right, thirty-seven then,’ said Dudley, going red in the face. Harry, who could see a huge Dudley tantrum coming on, began wolfing down his bacon as fast as possible in case Dudley turned the table over. Aunt Petunia obviously scented danger too, because she said quickly, ‘And we’ll buy you another two presents while we’re out today. How’s that popkin? *Two* more presents. Is that all right?’ Dudley thought for a moment. It looked like hard work. Finally he said slowly, ‘So I’ll have thirty...thirty...’ ‘Thirty-nine, sweetums,’ said Aunt Petunia. ‘Oh.’ Dudley sat down heavily and grabbed the nearest parcel. ‘All right then.’ Uncle Vernon chuckled. ‘Little tyke wants his money’s worth, just like his father. Atta boy, Dudley!’ He ruffled Dudley’s hair. (*The Philosopher’s Stone* 21)

This passage is, like all passages on the Dursleys, to be understood as social satire exposing the foolishness of the parents and the evilness of the child. Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia are successfully instilling the values of consumer capitalism to Dudley, which could here be something along the lines of “more is more”, and Rowling is offering a conservative critique of parents like the Dursleys who have not recognized that by fulfilling their “little tyke’s” every wish they have reversed the normative power relations between child and adult. The entire household here is bowing to spoiled Dudley to avoid one of his tantrums.

At the heart of this problem is the constellation of the parents as gatekeepers of the money and not the money itself. Because Harry, in contrast to Dudley, manages his funds all by himself, he is aware of the fact that his money is limited and therefore is selective about his purchases:

Harry didn’t like to think how much gold the Firebolt would cost. He had never wanted anything so much in his whole life – but he had never lost a Quidditch match on his Nimbus Two Thousand, and what was the point in emptying his Gringotts vault for the Firebolt, when he had a very good broom already? (*The Prisoner of Azkaban* 43-44)

While Harry owns a huge amount of gold in his Gringott’s vault, he is aware that it can someday be empty if he is not careful and frugal about his wealth. Dudley does not manage any funds by himself – for him, money only exists in the form of a never-ending flow of gifts from his parents. Therefore, he does not learn how to limit himself, how to discipline himself and restrain his desires, which is also signified by his obese body. The narrative suggests that by thus pampering Dudley and blocking his way to lessons about discipline and restraint, his parents also are blocking his development from child to adult. This is signalled by the many terms of endearment Petunia uses for him: all of them are forms of diminution (e.g., “Diddykins”, “darling”, “popkin”, “sweetums”) that may be read as expressions of her unconscious desire to keep him little in order to keep herself relevant to him.

The narrative also signals in other ways that Dudley is not essentially evil, but a product of his upbringing. This is already implied when he is first introduced as a baby:

Mrs Dursley gossiped away happily as she wrestled a screaming Dudley into his high chair. [...] At half past eight, Mr Dursley picked up his briefcase, pecked Mrs Dursley on the cheek and tried to kiss Dudley goodbye but missed, because Dudley was having a tantrum and throwing cereals at the walls. 'Little tyke,' chortled Mr Dursley as he left the house. (8)

Dudley is shown to be a misbehaving child already at this early stage (again, he is having a tantrum). However, this does not make him an essentially evil child. His misbehaviour only seems to continue because it goes unsanctioned by his parents – worse, they even fail to recognize it as such while the narrator's choice of words in describing Dudley's behaviour leaves no doubt about its quality. A later scene even makes clearer that Dudley is not essentially evil, but instead able to change his behaviour and become a 'good' boy, if only confronted harshly enough with his own misbehaviour. In *The Deathly Hallows* the parting scene between the Dursleys and Harry shows that Dudley has in fact evolved beyond his own parents, because he was exposed to the Dementors. Thus, the fault for him being the nuisance he is during most of the novel series is pitted solely on his parents' upbringing.

Rowling, however, does not leave it at that, but makes sure the criticism becomes explicit towards the end of the novel series. When Dumbledore is paying the Dursleys a visit, he comments on how they raised the two boys, Dudley and Harry: "The best that can be said is that he [Harry] has at least escaped the appalling damage you have inflicted upon the unfortunate boy [Dudley] sitting between you" (*The Half-Blood Prince* 57). As readers have gotten to know Dumbledore as the authority with regard to pedagogy in the story world, his verdict of the Dursleys is very powerful for the readers. As he makes clear that the way the Dursleys have raised their child is rather a kind of abuse in his eyes, a binary opposition is constructed between child-raising by institutions like school, which is here depicted positively, and child-raising by modern families, which is here depicted negatively. This opposition is already introduced in *The Goblet of Fire*. After many contemptuous hints at Dudley's increasing body weight during the preceding novels (e.g., "Dudley, who was so large his bottom drooped over either side of the kitchen chair" (*The Chamber of Secrets* 7)), eventually consequences ensue for Dudley. However, these are not initiated by his parents:

The school nurse had seen what Aunt Petunia's eyes – so sharp when it came to spotting fingerprints on her gleaming walls, and in observing the comings and goings of the neighbours – simply refused to see: that, far from needing extra nourishment, Dudley had reached roughly the size and weight of a young killer whale. (*The Goblet of Fire* 30)

While readers cannot assess the reliability of the school nurse as easily as they can assess that of Dumbledore, they may still be inclined to again rather side with the representative of the institution than with Dudley's parents. This is achieved by the only seemingly neutral narrator who is using an exaggeration ("the size and weight of a young killer whale") to reaffirm that Dudley's bodyweight should really be a matter of concern just like the school nurse suggests. The repeated stress on how the Dursleys simply overlook or refuse to see what Dudley is like makes the accusation against them in this satire an allegation of neglect. The charge Rowling makes against modern parents is one against anti-authoritarianism, materialism and inattentiveness. The suggested remedy is to give institutions, particularly schools, more power over the upbringing of children to correct or undo the mistakes of the parents. After all, the setting of the boarding school means that children are placed far away from the influence of their parents. As the reader is shown by the example of Harry, who never experiences homesickness when at Hogwarts, children are much better off there, while the contemporary family is depicted as a space detrimental and corruptive to a child's development.

Repeatedly, I have now talked of Rowling's criticism as one directed at modern families. This demands further elaboration. If we focus on Harry and Dudley once more, then it turns out that Harry's life at Hogwarts consists of books and outdoor sports while Dudley's life consists of television and video games. Teare points out that "technology is for muggles" (338), which again stresses the vague feeling of past of the wizard world, which makes Harry's childhood a nostalgic representations of childhood. The description of Dudley's childhood, on the other hand, is marked so heavily as contemporary that Rowling even includes the release of the PlayStation in 1995, which Dudley owns in *The Goblet of Fire*, into his description. Thus, the *Harry Potter* novels not only idealize a childhood of the vague past and thus cultivate a nostalgia for childhood, but they juxtapose this with a devalued representation of contemporary childhood as ruined in its innocence by the influence of parents who are slaves to consumer capitalism and do not share the authoritarian ideals of a conservative approach to child raising. Next to this opposition between positively connoted past and negatively connoted present, there is also the opposition of family and school. The latter is depicted as the only healthy environment for children in the present as here, according to Rowling, adults are interested in what children need and not in what they want.

Rowling's critique of modern parenting does not stand isolated, but chimes in with a more widely disseminated discourse<sup>21</sup>: As Teare points out, Rowling is drawing

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<sup>21</sup> In the following paragraphs I do not want to suggest that Rowling drew inspiration from any of these TV shows. The mere chronology (both examples were only aired at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century while the first *Harry Potter* book was already published in the late 90s and thus clearly predates them) forbids any such implication. Instead, I want to point out that Rowling's critique of modern parenting does not stand isolated but draws on concerns that are deeply embedded into our culture. The anxieties she plays on prove to be powerful, as my two examples show, even over a decade later.

on “current concern about obesity and inactivity among couch-potato kids” (338) with her portrayal of Dudley as a spoilt kid. Moreover, children’s obesity has been interpreted as the consequence of parents’ (particularly mothers’) incapability to let go of their children and let them grow up. This is, for instance, repeatedly insinuated by the plot pattern of the reality show *I Used To Be Fat* (2010-), a makeover show, which is offering a kind of coming-of-age narrative that focusses on the body. The show’s description on MTV’s website reads: “[...] this summer is about more than just losing weight for these teens – it’s also about figuring out who they are and who they want to be. It’s time for them to stop leaning on mom and dad and to learn to stand on their own two feet.” It is especially the mothers on this show who offer resistance to the teen who is trying to change his/her way of eating, because they are incapable of letting go (which has a double meaning here because the teens are always trying to achieve their weight loss before they leave for their first year of college). Their similarity to Petunia Dudley who insists on giving her son diminutive pet names even when he has grown to the size of “a killer whale” is hard to overlook. Similarly, the British reality TV format *Young, Dumb and Living Off Mum* (2009-2011) also purports to help teenagers leave the nest. As in the case of Rowling’s Dursleys, the blame here is also pitted entirely on the parents who are depicted as having spoiled their children up to now (first and foremost financially), effectually rendering them to be incapable of persisting on their own.

This, however, does not mean that the criticism of parenting voiced in *Harry Potter* and in various reality TV programs is a new one. Already in the Enlightenment period Rousseau suggested that children should be taken away from their parents and placed under the guidance of a mentor. He believed that it was in particular the mother’s pampering that was potentially harmful for the child:

There is another by-way which may tempt our feet from the path of nature. The mother may lavish excessive care on her child instead of neglecting him; she may make an idol of him; she may develop and increase his weakness to prevent him feeling it; she wards off every painful experience in the hope of withdrawing him from the power of nature, and fails to realise that for every trifling ill from which she preserves him the future holds in store many accidents and dangers, and that it is a cruel kindness to prolong the child’s weakness when the grown man must bear fatigue. (book 1, chapter 3)

In the Victorian period, which, through its rigid relegation of women to the domestic sphere, on the one hand saw a strengthening of the role of the mother and on the other hand, produced an anxiety that boys’ identity could be negatively affected if placed under the effeminating influence of the mother. Hence, boys were sent off to public schools at the age of six or seven, where they were to learn what it meant to be an English gentleman and representative of the Great Empire while girls continued to be educated at home (McCulloch 17). In the 1930s American psychologists John B.

Watson claimed that modern parents were spoiling their children, that “the home [was] inadequate” because mothers in particular were coddling and kissing their children too much, which, in his eyes, would hinder their maturation and leave them ill-equipped for the modern workplace (“After the Family – What?” 469; “Against the Threat of Mother Love” 473-475). Watson also believed that “children [were] enormously better off” if raised by pedagogical professionals instead of their own parents (“After the Family – What?” 469). In the 1970s, Franz, on the basis of Jung, would argue that young men, who were too fixated on the mother, would get stuck in an eternal adolescence.

Rowling thus participates in a pre-existing discourse that constructs a crisis of adulthood that is built on a discursively constructed crisis of parenting<sup>22</sup>: Parents are shown to no longer be able to turn their children into economically and socially fully functional adults. They are raising them in a context of surplus (signalled indirectly through food and directly through other goods), mostly under the influence of an effeminizing mother and an oblivious father, which leaves them unprepared for the real world, hence runs the argument in these texts. Particularly the central features of a neoliberal, late capitalist society, which are self-discipline and the will to work seem to be lost on this young generation. As ideology works through crisis, one can see such representations of crisis as functioning merely as reminders to parents of what central values and skills they ought to teach their children to keep society running.

In challenge to this interpretation of the *Harry Potter* novels as a critique of contemporary families, one could argue that the novel series actually introduces two perfectly functional families: The Weasleys and Harry’s own future family with Ginny, which readers can only catch a short glimpse of at the end of the series. The Weasley family consists of the parents Arthur and Molly Weasley and their seven children, including Ron, Harry’s best friend. The family is presented as a closely-knit unit that both stands out and stands together as their shared red hair colour connotes. At multiple occasions the family’s poverty is highlighted through Ron’s second-hand clothes and school equipment, which earns him not only the ridicule from richer classmates like Draco Malfoy, but often even brings him into trouble. Although Rowling’s depiction of Ron can be read as a commentary on how hard it is for

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<sup>22</sup> Decker also argues that Rowling’s novels should be interpreted in the context of a discourse of a crisis of parenting and refers to the news and reality TV to show that this crisis is constructed all over the mass media (he, however, focusses only on Germany). He names *Die Super-Nanny* (2004-2012) as an example, a TV show that focusses exclusively on lower-class parents that are depicted as lacking both the knowledge and the social skills to raise their children properly. Furthermore, the show argues for giving children more rights and treating them with more dignity (while at the same time the format itself shows little ethical qualms over exposing these children and their families’ private lives to the public). Decker also explicitly cites that neglect is depicted as a problem of what is known in German as “soziale Brennpunkte” (= social trouble spots) (145). To the contrary, I argue here that the crisis of parenting as a representation is not limited to the lower classes and that a comparison to *Die Super-Nanny* is too general, hence leading to erroneous conclusions. This discourse of crisis is socially broader and has many facets. To find out which values are reaffirmed through this crisis, the comparison between *Harry Potter* and reality TV shows has to focus sharply on the particular behaviours of parents criticised in both forms.

children of economically disadvantaged families to do without “the commodities that trigger self-esteem in capitalist culture” (Teare 341), the family is, overall, not depicted as poverty-stricken, but as happy and wholesome. Their poverty rather endows them with the rustic charm of a romanticized peasantry and most of the time their life has the idyllic simplicity of the Hobbits in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (Mendlesohn 169; Gallardo C. & Smith 103<sup>23</sup>), which is another fantasy variant of Old England – and serves to make them appear endearing and morally virtuous (Mendlesohn 173). Thus, while they are as far away from the negative stereotype of lower-class families as being child-rich, but poorly educated, and negligent of their children, this does not mean that they are not a stereotypical lower-class family. The combination of child-richness, poverty, good-heartedness makes them a foil to the single-child families – the Dursleys and the Malfoys – that have been morally corrupted by money and greed.

That Harry immediately feels at home in the Weasley family is little astonishing as they stand in sharp contrast to the Dursley household. However, this representation of a functioning family life and good parenting does not alleviate Rowling’s critique of contemporary family life but rather sharpens it, because the Weasleys, like Hogwarts, stand for a misty-eyed, nostalgic vision of the past. Not only is a household busy with nine family members not particularly common in the twenty-first century, but the Weasleys’ attitude to everything that is part of the modern world also locates them in a period past: Mr Weasley is humorously depicted as obsessed “with newfangled Muggle inventions” (Mendlesohn 166) like electricity and his son Ron, for instance, fails to use a telephone.

The second example of a positive depiction of family life is to be found in Rowling’s epilogue to *The Deathly Hallows*, which is set nineteen years after the main action of the book. Harry and his wife Ginny bring their three children to platform nine and three-quarters where they meet Ron and Hermione and their children. While the children are mildly teasing each other, this only adds to a general impression of extreme intimacy and wholesomeness. This impression is topped off by the scene’s fairy tale ending formula: “All was well” (607). Kornfeld and Prothro evaluate this ending as the completion of Harry’s journey away from home to find home: “Harry has truly found home again [...], the safe, predictable, loving unit that he had been seeking ever since his parents died” (135). Decker, however, draws attention to the fact that the ending introduces an exaggerated vision of family, as it does not only include everyone who ever was of any emotional significance for the protagonist, but is also almost incestuously close-knit:

Am Ende des Romans ergibt sich eine extrem endogame Partnerwahl mit einer fast inzestuösen familiären Verflechtung der Figuren zu einer Großfamilie. Alle Jugendlieben und Jugendfreunde sind maximal möglich miteinander verwandt und verschwägert. Harrys und Ginnys ältester Sohn heißt dabei wie Harrys

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<sup>23</sup> Gallardo C. & Smith point out that particularly the Weasley home, called “The Burrow”, invokes “the cozy hobbit holes of Tolkien’s fantasy world” (ibid.).

Vater James, ihre Tochter wie Harrys Mutter Lily und der mittlere Sohn Albus Severus nach Albus Dumbledore und Severus Snape, den beiden getilgten Werte- und Wissensvermittlern. Am Ende wird also nicht nur ein heutzutage traditionelles und längst nicht mehr selbstverständliches Großfamilienmodell etabliert, sondern zeichenhaft leben in der Namensgebung der Kinder Harrys Eltern und auch noch seine Eltern-äquivalenten Beschützer fort. (138f.)

Like the Weasleys, this extended nuclear family model is – with the inclusion of its symbolical members – far too big to correspond to a typical contemporary family, but again reflects the values of the premodern period. In a way, these two big families as safe havens are mirror images of each other: On the one hand, they can be read as one and the same as all key characters have now been integrated into the idealized Weasley clan (Gallardo C. and Smith 104). On the other hand, the original Weasleys stand for the imaginary, nostalgic past of family life and adult Harry's future version of family for an imaginary, picture-perfect, idyllic future, a utopia. Thus, both exist in different temporal realms than the Dursleys and therefore do not alleviate Rowling's critique. On the contrary, as foils in both past and future, they make the deficiencies in contemporary family life lamented in the novel series stand out ever more sharply.

### 5.4 The Boy Who Saved the World: The Adventure Plot as Male Coming of Age

Both the dominant representation of parenting and childhood are strongly gendered, as the previous chapters have shown. Women's influence on their children is depicted as more fatal than men's if they do not parent correctly and good mothers have to be self-sacrificial while good fathers do not have to. Also, the representation of growing up is depicted as gender-specific as the chapter on school stories has briefly hinted at. The particulars of male coming of age in *Harry Potter* will be explored on the next pages. This chapter will start with a brief, general discussion of gender in *Harry Potter* to move on to an analysis of the story as a coming of age narrative with particular gender-specific patterns and motifs.

In the discussion of *Harry Potter's* representation of gender, the verdict on its depiction of femininity is ambiguous at best: While scholars have praised Rowling's depiction of Hermione Grange and Minerva McGonagall as strong women (Dresang 221-235) and Dolores Umbridge as one of literature's finest female villains (Gallardo C. and Smith 95), the negative aspects in the novel series' gender politics are numerous: mostly, women are cast in traditional, stereotypical roles as good mothers (Lily Potter and Molly Weasley), nurses and teachers, or vain and selfish bad mothers (Merope and Narcissa). When women are depicted as strong and clever, they are always placed in secondary roles, such as McGonagall to Dumbledore and Hermione to Harry (Heilman and Donaldson 146-149; Dresang 224; 240; Mendlesohn 174;

Gallardo-C. and Smith 192-194; Pugh and Wallace 270-271) and their strength is diminished by Rowling describing them as overly emotional, sometimes even hysterical through her usage of adjectives and verbs (Dresang 223; 237; Gallardo-C. and Smith 193; Heilman and Donaldson 149-151). While Heilman and Donaldson concede that the number of female characters increases as the series progresses and that Hermione and McGonagall and other female characters evolve and take up more powerful positions, this does not change much about the basic gender inequalities of the novel series as their depictions are still shot through with stereotypes and their rise to more powerful positions is either belittled by comic relief or marked as immoral as it is only achieved through deceptions (144f).

Masculinity, in contrast, is generally depicted as more interesting: “[T]he men in the series seem more fun, mostly because they are curious, if not downright adventurous” (Gallardo C. and Smith, “Cinderfella” 194). Particularly the contrast between the male Gryffindors Harry, Ron, James Potter, and Sirius Black, who are all ample examples of the house motto (“brave and daring”), and their female counterparts Hermione, McGonagall and Mrs Weasley who are instead responsible rule-enforcers leads Gallardo C. and Smith to this verdict. Furthermore, Heilman and Donaldson draw attention to the fact that boys and men who perform masculinity according to traditional stereotypes are depicted in a more positive light than those who do not. The “strong, adventurous, independent type of male” is cast as heroic character, such as, of course, Harry, Dumbledore, Sirius Black and Bill Weasley, whereas males who are not dominant are depicted in an undesirable way, such as Neville Longbottom, Peter Pettigrew, Argus Filch, Gilderoy Lockhart, Professor Flitwick, Professor Slughorn and Professor Quirrell (Heilman and Donaldson 155f). What is more, particularly the protagonist is, according to Doughty, “a boy’s boy”:

He is obsessed with sports (Quidditch); he flourishes in the somewhat homosocial<sup>24</sup> world of Hogwarts (although he does have a female friend, Hermione is usually fussing over her studies, and in the earlier books she often either does not accompany Harry and Ron on their most daring adventures, or frets in a shrill voice throughout the action); and he longs to be worthy of Gryffindor, brave and chivalrous, rather than patient (Hufflepuff), learned (Ravenclaw), or crafty (Slytherin). (243)

In addition, the quest pattern of the story likens Harry to other traditionally masculine heroes. He has been compared to King Arthur (in some versions of the myth), Superman and Luke Skywalker, to name just a few prominent examples of tales that follow the heroic monomyth, the archetypal pattern identified by Joseph Campbell

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<sup>24</sup> As pointed out earlier in the chapter on *Harry Potter* as school story, Hogwarts is not a school for boys only, so Doughty’s claim that Hogwarts is a homosocial environment might seem somewhat odd here. She specifies later: “[I]n the first four volumes Harry is more interested in his relationships with ‘brothers’ and father figures than he is in those with girls or women” (252).



(Pharr 55; Flotmann 15; Bergenthal 375-394). The monomyth and boys' initiation into the adult world are intricately linked. As Campbell points out, the basic pattern of the monomyth is that of an initiation rite: "The standard path of the mythological adventures of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation – initiation – return" (23). The hero must "venture forth from the world of common day" (ibid.) to begin his adventure, his journey. Based on Campbell's and other studies of mythology, Peter Freese identifies the initiation journey as a concrete geographic journey as the basic pattern of boys' initiation narratives (157). This definition of initiation narratives has proved to be problematic because its gender-specificity has often been overlooked. Instead it was treated as a universal pattern, which had the consequence that texts about girls did simply not qualify as initiation narratives as Ina Bergmann points out:

Since the female sphere in the 19<sup>th</sup> century could not be the outside world, such wanderings were not possible for young females, women remained in the "drawing room" as Virginia Woolf has put it (Woolf 1949, 110f.). And scholars relying on those theories failed to notice stories of female adolescents and their homely initiations. It seems that the neglect of the female adolescent is a question of method depending on the criteria that have been chosen to define the concept of initiation<sup>25</sup>. (n. pag.)

The narrative pattern of the *Harry Potter* series would be both the conventional hero's journey and the traditional pattern of boys' initiation. However, the notion that Harry's development is gendered in such a conventional and unambiguous pattern has been challenged, exactly because of his recurring home-fixedness that is rather typical of girls' tales.

While Harry does, without a doubt, "venture forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder" (Campbell 23) when he leaves the Dursley household to become part of the wizard world, the ensuing course of the narrative deviates from what is typical of the male hero's journey. Gallardo C. and Smith argue that because Harry Potter's story follows a cyclical pattern recurring to home, the story does not stand in a male tradition, such as the Arthur myth, but in the tradition of the cyclical, domestic "girls' tale". In contrast to other male heroes, Harry regularly returns home to the "drudgery and abuse" at the Dursleys'. They point out that while "[c]yclical "boy tales" do exist ("Jack and the Beanstalk", for example)", this is not the typical pattern of the "boy's tale". Rather, "this type of spatially recursive narrative centered in the home appears most often in tales about women", in particular when the home is a place of repeated suppression and renunciation. Therefore, they go on, Harry Potter could rather be compared to Spenser's Britomart than to Arthur (195f.). To strengthen their point, one could also add that Harry does not leave home to begin

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<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed discussion of female adolescence in literature and the literary-historical pitfalls see the analysis of *Twilight*.

a journey, but that in fact, the initial home – the Dursleys’ place – is only substituted for another home, Hogwarts, which Harry even describes as the only home he has ever known in the last book of the series. The school as “little world” is, after all, not entirely opposed to the domestic sphere – rather, it is an in-between space between home and the outside world. While the child characters are here first introduced to the conflicts of the outside world, including conflicts of race and class that they had so far been sheltered from, they are still in a protected, enclosed setting. Read thus, Harry’s journey would not really be a journey through the world, but only a shift from one domestic setting to another.

Gallardo C. and Smith also describe Harry Potter as a Cinderella-type character, because of the aforementioned features of the story. They proposed this reading of gender in Harry Potter in 2003 when the series was not yet complete and six years later revised it thus:

[T]he recursive Cinderella narrative structure of “home to school to home” we had identified [...] is dismantled when Harry leaves his abusive stepfamily for good, drops out of Hogwarts, and goes forth with his trusted friends on a typical hero quest to destroy Voldemort’s Horcruxes. (Gallardo C. and Smith, “Happily Ever After” 92)

I want to suggest that both of Gallardo C. and Smith’s readings of *Harry Potter*, the one from 2003 and the other from 2009, ail from the fact that they are interpreting the text with a focus on gender exclusively without taking into account the significant cross-sections of gender and age with regard to the representation of the main character. The same is true for other readings of gender in *Harry Potter*. Pugh and Wallace, for instance, analyse *Harry Potter* with regard to heteronormativity in the story world. They find the following development with regard to the protagonist:

Harry’s heteronormative heroism is linked to his maturation into an increasingly solitary hero. For example, in the two major challenges that he faces as a first-year student at [sic] Hogwarts, he works in partnership with Ron and Hermione. [...] However, as Harry matures, this pattern changes; as Andrew Blake notes, “in the subsequent books Harry’s heroism grows, while Ron’s and Hermione’s roles in the stories diminish in scope” (41). (274)

While I do not want to refute this finding, I want to argue that it actually does not fully capture the cultural work of the text, because Pugh and Wallace, like Gallardo C. and Smith, reduce Harry’s identity to merely one identity category. If one views Harry Potter, however, not only as a male, but also takes into account that he makes a meaningful transition in terms of another identity category, namely age, the findings concerning gender would have to be reformulated: Harry’s gender performance and performance of age are intricately linked. *Harry Potter* depicts the difference between

children and adults conservatively with the help of gender stereotypes: With regard to the male protagonist, heteronormative masculinity signals adulthood. Gender performances not in line with heteronormative masculinity signal childhood.

Children's identity is already not normative because of the very fact that they are children. Therefore, they are often allowed to also perform gender in a deviant way. There is, for instance, a frequent depiction of female children as tomboys in literature and other media that transforms, however, into normative femininity as soon as they hit puberty and go on to grow into adults. Thus, the shift from a deviant to a normative gender identity may signal the transition from child to adult.

When a male child is depicted with traditionally feminine features, there may be an additional ideological dimension to this: As already pointed out in chapter three, children's treatment as "other" has been compared to women's treatment as "other" and hence, it should not be surprising that children's disempowered social position is expressed through ascribing traditionally feminine features to them and casting them in situations conventionally reserved for female characters, no matter whether the respective child is actually male or female.

Seen in this light then, Harry's constant returns to the Dudley household, where he is suppressed like Cinderella by her evil stepmother, signal first and foremost that he is still a child and therefore does not have the power to lead a self-determined life. In contrast to what Gallardo C. and Smith claim, the next step in his development is not that he leaves the Dursley household for good, but there is another stage in between, which helps clarify that this is not just about gender, but about gender and age. In *The Goblet of Fire* Harry starts resisting the suppression by the Dursleys: He begins to talk back to Vernon Dursley and threatens the family with consequences if they continue maltreating him. This could be read as a signal of his development from child to teenager. He starts rebelling and attempts to stand up for himself. However, he can only do so on behalf of the adult, male caretakers (Sirius Black and Dumbledore who, he claims, would punish the Dursleys if they maltreat him), not on behalf of his very own authority. This means that there is still a decisive lack to be overcome in order to count as an adult.

When he eventually leaves the Dursleys never to return, this is still not a sign of his achieved adulthood/masculinity, because he is whisked away from their house by Dumbledore acting the part of fairy godmother in *The Half-Blood Prince*. Thus, he is still marked as a disempowered subject here as he still depends on the authority of strong adults to act on his behalf. Only with the death of his mentor<sup>26</sup> and the subsequent – literal – journey with Hermione and Ron does Harry embark on the last step from adolescence to adulthood. This journey culminates in the battle against

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<sup>26</sup> In a way, Dumbledore even dies twice. First, there is his literal death and then there is his symbolical death as mentor, as Harry subsequently to his passing finds out that Dumbledore has a dark past. Before, this character had been an *Übermutter*, a character too good, too wise and too patient to be true and thus his death was not enough to enable Harry to step out from his shadow. A second, symbolical death – a deconstruction of the ideal Dumbledore – was necessary to enable Harry's coming of age.

Voldemort, in which Harry figuratively dies as teenager and is reborn as adult who kills his antagonist, thus saving both muggles and wizards in the tradition of the conventional adventure hero. The actual geographic journey that Harry embarks on and his death and rebirth, during which his mentor returns to assist the transition, are both typical elements of boys' initiation stories as identified by Freese (155ff). Furthermore, the finale of the story works with the image of the *descensus ad inferos* to symbolize the initiation process. Freese lists this motif as one of the three essential symbols in initiation narratives. The descent into the underworld stands for an overcoming of moribundity, a topic quite excessively addressed in the story as Harry sets out on his way to Voldemort to sacrifice himself, thus facing certain death:

This was a journey they could not make together [...]. The castle was empty. He felt ghostly striding through it alone, as if he had already died. [...] [T]he whole place was eerily still as if all its remaining lifeblood were concentrated in the Great Hall, where the dead and the mourners were crammed. [...] Harry glanced down, and felt another dull blow to his stomach: Colin Creevey, though under-age, must have sneaked back just as Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle had done. He was tiny in death. (*The Deathly Hallows* 556)

As Harry walks out of the castle and through the forest, he walks together with the dead, as the Resurrection Stone has called upon his family and protectors to accompany him. When he arrives at Voldemort's camp, he makes his final sacrifice in order to save the lives of his friends and lets Voldemort kill him without defending himself. Subsequently, he finds himself in limbo, where he can choose between returning to the living or joining the dead. Here, Dumbledore, his mentor, assists him by giving him the information and insight about himself and his opponent that he needs to overcome Voldemort. The way Dumbledore addresses Harry and the way Rowling describes Dumbledore mark this moment of a transition or reversal: Harry has become a man and in comparison his previous *Übervater* Dumbledore is now little more than a child. Dumbledore greets Harry with the words "You wonderful boy. You brave man" (566). At the same time, the old magician is described as childlike now that the crimes of his past, which show Harry to be the bigger man, are revealed:

For the first time since Harry had met Dumbledore, he looked less than an old man, much less. He looked, fleetingly, like a small boy caught in wrongdoing. [...] "True, true", said Dumbledore and he was like a child seeking reassurance. (*The Deathly Hallows* 571)

Now that all other brave men in whose shadow Harry had been standing, like Dumbledore or Sirius Black, have been removed through death and maybe even additionally deconstructed (like Dumbledore through the revelation of past wrongdoings), Harry can emerge as the sole hero. Pugh and Wallace argue that the

removal of all other men who represent traditionally masculine traits is another point of evidence for the story's conservative gender politics: "Heteronormative heroism, as formulated in the narrative, demands an alpha male – the single and solitary male figure for the reader to respect above all others" (274). Harry now comes to be the embodiment of the core values of the text both with regard to gender and adulthood.

Freese points out that there can be three different dimensions to the process of initiation: a psychological ("finding oneself"), a sociological (introduction and assimilation to society's norms and values) and a transcendental one (a moment of divine revelation) (154). In Harry Potter's initiation the sociological dimension is foregrounded over the others both by words and actions. Not only does Harry act selflessly by sacrificing himself, but this is then also stressed in the conversation with Dumbledore where the latter points out that Harry only survived because he accepted his own death for the greater good. Dumbledore further strengthens this point by contrasting this with his own behaviour when he was Harry's age (*The Deathly Hallows* 567; 573). Selflessness and bravery seem to be the central values this society expects from its adult members. Self-sacrifice here can have two different purposes: it can be a sacrifice to save one's entire community or to save one's family<sup>27</sup>. Earlier in chapter four it has already been discussed that good adult women in Rowling's novel series are always shown ready to sacrifice themselves in order to protect their families, such as Lilly Potter who gives her life for her son or Molly Weasley, who fights like a lioness to protect her children from Bellatrix Lestrange in the final battle. Their sacrifice always is limited to a domestic purpose. Harry in contrast, saves his entire world by defeating Voldemort.

However, this seemingly simple gendered distinction of how adulthood is achieved and reaffirmed is complicated by the epilogue of the story. In their revised thesis of Harry Potter as a Cinderella-type character Gallardo C. and Smith point out that the epilogue of the story, which shows Harry with his wife and children as well as Ron and Hermione and their children, highlights that Harry's victory, first and foremost, was to achieve domestic bliss: The friends are all family now (as they have all become part of the Weasley clan) and have founded their own families by having children. Gallardo C. and Smith argue:

In the male narrative, domestic bliss, if achieved, is simply a fringe benefit of the overall drive for power and glory. So strong is the impulse to have the male hero avoid domesticity that the poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson saw it necessary to send the "idle" Odysseus back out to sea "to strive, to seek, to find, and not yield" in his famous poem "Ulysses." A male who *likes* home is, by traditional

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<sup>27</sup> Campbell makes a similar twofold distinction concerning the dimension of the hero's final accomplishment: "Typically, the hero of the fairy tale achieves a domestic, microcosmic triumph, and the hero of myth a world-historical, macrocosmic triumph" (30). While Campbell sees this as a genre-specific feature, it could be related to the hero's gender as well, as we may find female heroines more frequently in fairy tales than in myths. However, proving this thesis is beyond the scope of the study at hand.

logic, clearly no hero. Virtually all girls' tales, on the other hand, are based on domestic themes. Desiring and achieving a good marriage and a happy home are the signs of maturity in a young female protagonist [...]. ("Happily Ever After" 102)

They conclude on this basis that "Rowling's creation actively troubles the culturally defined binaries that divide us all" (92). While the epilogue certainly shifts the focus of the story's ending away from the macrocosmic dimension of Harry's victory to the microcosmic dimension of domestic bliss, there are two points that are overlooked in this interpretation, which I will elaborate briefly in the next paragraphs.

While the epilogue certainly depicts Harry's domestic bliss, the central topic, however, is not rooted statically in the domestic, but the action is dynamic, a movement away from home. The epilogue shows the children of the two couples as they set forth to travel to Hogwarts, just like their parents did when they were young, and thus, there is the implication of a departure onto new adventures, which are already waiting ahead. On this journey, the son, Albus Potter, takes the place of the father, Harry Potter (like Harry, he is both excited and anxious about what lies ahead). Thus, in contrast to Gallardo C. and Smith's argumentation, the epilogue in fact does not distance, but likens the text to Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses" and other typical tales of male heroes, where the hero does not dwell too long in the domestic sphere but sets out for new adventures.

Furthermore, in contrast to female characters like Lily Potter and Molly Weasley, Harry does not intend to save his family (he has none at that point in the story), but to save his community, when he confronts Voldemort. Only as a consequence does he thus create a world in which having a family is possible. In contrast to girls' tales he is primarily thus less a creator of domestic bliss than an enabler.

Thus, overall, the story could be read as the typical journey of a male hero and a typical boys' initiation story, in which the hero's entrance into adulthood is marked by his performance of heteronormative masculinity. The protagonist's placement in domestic situations of disempowerment in the earlier novels, which is rather typical of girls' tales, functions to express his position as child as a kind of lack that needs to be overcome. Thus, gender markers function as age markers.

Of course, this is only one possible reading of the text's construction of gendered and aged identities. Yet, even if one still chooses to read Harry as a deconstruction of gender binaries, the overall representation of gender in the epilogue is still conservative, because happiness here equates the life of the heteronormative family. The final pages of the novel series again focus on what has been at the heart of Rowling's tale from the start: In the fictional world of the novel series, good families simply create good people and are thus the cornerstone of a functioning society. Good families, this means in Rowling's terms white, heterosexual, extended nuclear, middle- to lower-class families, who embody traditional family values like the Potters or the Weasleys. Bad families are from the middle to upper class and are

materialistic, heartless and obsessed with their representation to the outside world like the Dursleys, snobs like the Malfoys or broken families like Tom Riddle's. This preference is stressed excessively through the implicit comparison between James, Lily and Harry Potter on the one hand and Vernon, Petunia and Dudley Dursley on the other. Good families produce children who will grow into heroes and thus be an asset for society; bad families produce children who will be selfish and ruthless like Dudley or Lord Voldemort and be a burden or even a danger to society. They might also end up lonely and tragic like Snape. See, for instance, how Rowling foreshadows that Snape is not the right choice of partner for Lily while James is: "Harry saw his father [...]: slight, black-haired like Snape, but with that indefinable air of having been well cared for, even adored, that Snape so conspicuously lacked" (*The Deathly Hallows* 538). While James comes from a wholesome family doting over their son, Snape comes from a broken home. As he tells Lily, his parents are constantly fighting, and when he comes to King's Cross station, he is only accompanied by his sour-looking mother, while all the other children are in the company of both of their parents. While families who spoil their children are harshly criticized (see the section about the Dursleys as social satire), the novel series nonetheless participates in a cult of childhood where the well-being of society is solely dependent on how well parents are taking care of their children.

### 5.5 The Representation of Age in *Harry Potter*

Early on in *The Half-Blood Prince*, Dumbledore visits the Dursleys and explains to them that Harry will soon formally count as adult:

'As you will no doubt be aware, Harry comes of age in a year's time.'  
'No, he doesn't. He's a month younger than Dudley, and Dudders doesn't turn eighteen until the year after next.'  
'Ah', said Dumbledore pleasantly, 'but in the wizarding world, we come of age at seventeen.' Uncle Vernon muttered 'preposterous' [...]. (*The Half-Blood Prince* 56-57)

Uncle Vernon's indignant reaction is symptomatic of how our conceptions of childhood and adulthood appear to be commonsensical, natural, even though they are as arbitrary as a randomly picked number. This text passage is one of the rare moments when the *Harry Potter* series explicitly directs the reader's attention toward the arbitrariness of the boundary line between children and adults at the example of Harry. Everywhere else Harry Potter is depicted as ideal child and his childhood as natural/essential. The boundary between children and adults is depicted as clear-cut and natural as indicated by the power structures at Hogwarts. The hierarchy between the two poles of this binary is repeatedly reaffirmed by showing children to be in need

of protection: The essential innocence of the child has to be protected by its parents, primarily its mother according to the ideals of family life forged in the Victorian era, who is expected to show her love through self-sacrifice: Because Harry has received the greatest sacrifice possible by his mother early on, nothing can taint his childhood innocence. He has been set on a path that will lead to a successful coming of age, which is subsequently ensured by his male mentor. Only if parents live up to these expectations can their children's innocence be retained which ensures that they will grow up into upright adult citizens. If parents, and again particularly mothers, neglect what is depicted as their duty, their children will face problems growing up, like Snape, or not grow up at all, like Voldemort. What further heightens the responsibility of parents is that children are depicted as almost completely determined by the upbringing they received from their parents. Though the importance of choice is stressed repeatedly in the dialogues of the novel series, the action and characterizations rather bespeak a deterministic view on children.

If one looks more closely at Harry's childhood experiences, however, it turns out that this seemingly timeless representation of childhood is in fact a nostalgic vision of childhood placed in an indistinct past that is fantastically defamiliarized. This nostalgic image is yet complicated by contrasting characters, which mars a reading of the novel series as merely escapist.

Harry's childhood and coming of age as ideal are juxtaposed with two images of deviant children and deviant coming-of-age: The representation of Dudley Dursley as spoilt and almost monstrously obese child functions to devalue contemporary childhood as this negative depiction is heavily marked as up to date. It suggests that children today are no longer innocent, but greedy and materialistic. Dudley can, in other words, be read as a representation of childhood in crisis that is contrasted with Harry as normative standard, because he stands for a fear of the disappearance of childhood innocence.

The second image of an evil child that Harry is contrasted with is Tom Riddle/Lord Voldemort. The central conflict between Harry and Voldemort functions to normalize or naturalize the linkage between aging and growing up, but at the same time draws attention to the fact that deviance from that is possible in the first place. The growing up of the ideal child Harry progresses step by step, with each novel comprising one important lesson to be learned on the path to adulthood. Thus the transformation from child to adult is depicted as a linear progress of enlightenment. Regressive tendencies, if they occur, are quenched by his mentor, and the narrative constantly reminds the reader that these are unhealthy:

Harry cannot go back to being a child, no matter how much he may desire to. [...] From the first book to the last, the message is always the same: just as Dumbledore advises a very young Harry after his third visit to the Mirror of Erised, where he sees himself surrounded by his family, that "it does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live", so "The Tale of the Three Brothers"



serves as a warning against unnatural desires to bring the dead back to life.”  
(Gallardo C. and Smith, “Happily Ever After” 104)

The central reminder that these tendencies are unhealthy, however, is Lord Voldemort as villain. Here, the full arsenal of horror, be it as monstrous infant or vampiric creature, is employed to depict deviance from normative aging as unhealthy, dangerous and threatening. In fact, the deviance of both of these evil children is first and foremost signified through a deviance of the body: Tom Riddle is depicted as a child that is already looking too adult for its age and Voldemort either looks like a human/animal hybrid or is depicted as monstrous infant. Likewise Dudley Dursley is also marked by physical deviance: His obese body, or bodily excess, is both causally and symbolically linked to the excessive care of his parents, which turns out to be another form of neglect, because Dudley’s parents do not invest themselves in setting any boundaries to their child’s behaviour and desires. In contrast to that, the bodies of those characters that are growing up in a normative manner are not only unmarked, but they are conspicuously absent from the text. Rowling mentions Hermione’s corrected teeth that turn her from an awkward child into an attractive teenage girl or Harry’s growth spurt over the holidays, but for most of the story, the bodies of the main characters are a moot point. The trials and tribulations of coming to terms with a changing body throughout puberty simply go by unaddressed in the text. Only the deviant children seem to have bodies in the first place. The trials and tribulations of coming to terms with a changing body throughout puberty simply go by unaddressed in the text. Only the deviant children seem to have bodies in the first place.

Another feature that Tom/Voldemort and Dudley share is that their deviance is linked to consumption. Both depictions draw heavily on pre-existing discourses that trouble the idea of aging as linear progression through an immersion in consumption: In the case of Dudley, the child is depicted as boundless consumer. This is linked to the idea of him being stuck in the egocentric and cranky ways of a toddler. He is a representative of the category of the spoilt child, which will not be able to grow up in terms becoming economically autonomous, which is addressed in reality TV programs like *Young, Dumb and Living Off Mum*. Lord Voldemort, on the other hand, belongs to the category of the adult who tries to relive his youth through children. He thus falls into the same category as the so-called kidult.

Images of deviant children like Tom Riddle and Dudley invoke a crisis of childhood, but because there is such a clear causal relation between their deviance and their parents’ influence on them, it would probably be more suitable in this case to talk of a crisis of parenting that is constructed in the text. After all, the myth of childhood innocence is not challenged by the story, but instead reaffirmed through the representation of Harry. Only through early external influences do children show behaviours that deviate from what this myth describes and these outside influences are always the parents. The text can be read as yet another example of how ideology works through crisis, because through pitting these products of failed parenting either

as villains or as objects of ridicule, a consensus is forged concerning which values parents need to pass on to their children in order for them not to turn into the likes of Tom and Dudley. These values would include, most prominently, the willingness for self-sacrifice and self-discipline, even in the face of seemingly endless resources. First and foremost, however, the novel series participates in a cult of childhood in that it suggests that parents need to devote themselves fully to the care of their children as their highest objective. It naturalises the parents' task to protect their children and thus also naturalises the very idea that children need protection in the first place. Even better than the care of parents, however, would be placing the children into a patriarchally structured institution like an old-fashioned boarding school, or so the story suggests, for here children learn discipline without being coddled too much.

Why are these qualities, self-discipline and self-sacrifice, important for becoming an adult subject in a late capitalist society? In her 1985 publication "Pricing the Priceless Child" Viviana Zelizer famously wrote that children have become "economically 'worthless' but emotionally 'priceless'" (3). This development is not entirely unproblematic for capitalism: On the one hand, the fact that children are "emotionally priceless" for their parents means that throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century parents have become more and more willing to invest a lot of money in, on and for their child. Children are nowadays often depicted as spoiled as Dudley with an insatiable hunger for more toys, games and status objects and their parents as willing to yield to their demands. While that insatiable hunger makes them perfect consumers, there is also a problematic side to children as members of a capitalist society. They are not productive or, as Zelizer puts it, because children are no longer allowed to work, they are "economically worthless" (ibid.). Their economic dependency is what programs like *Young, Dumb and Living Off Mum* use to draw a nightmare scenario in which young adults who have already formally come of age stay economically dependent upon their parents, or worse, the state. A satire like the depiction of Dudley Dursley and his parents reinforces the idea that parents are obliged to make sure that their children make the transition from mere consumers into consumers and workers. As the comparison to Harry's engagement with consumer capitalism has shown, capitalism is not generally criticized in the novel series. On the contrary, it is often depicted rather positively. Rather, the Dursleys are shown to teach their son a lopsided version of capitalism, which is then depicted as problematic, just like in the aforementioned TV show. A counter-strategy to avoid this problem is also suggested in the novels, namely teaching children to relate to capital as limited resource by letting them administer it themselves, like Harry and his Gringott's vault. In western countries, giving children pocket-money is a popular method to introduce them to capitalist thinking, with parents often giving higher amounts if the child behaved well or brought home good grades. In fact, by now there seems to be a considerable pressure on parents to equip their children with their own capital – a survey by Halifax has shown that the amount of pocket-money rose throughout 2013 in spite of an inflation in Britain (Hyde n. pag.).

Pocket money does, however, not teach self-sacrifice and discipline, which are, of course, key qualities of a good worker that will keep him/her productive and the capitalist system flowing smoothly. The motif of self-sacrifice is also a Christian one, which means that one could read Harry Potter as a Christ-like character because of his final sacrifice. Both capitalism's and Christianity's stability are ensured by the self-sacrificial subject and one has been used to stabilize the other as Karl Marx claims in his critique of religion as opium within the capitalist system. In *Harry Potter*, not only is the threat to the existing ideological order through Lord Voldemort extinguished through Harry's sacrifice, but the epilogue clearly makes a point of showing how everything can now run on the way it used to before the system was threatened.

Eventually, then, ideal childhood is under siege at two fronts in the story: on the one hand, through the haunting figure of Lord Voldemort which embodies all the ideological contradictions of the past that ideal childhood is grounded in and on the other hand through images of failed parenting in the present. Both of the deviant figures, Voldemort and Dudley, can be described as parasites that provide foils to Harry as the ideal child. Through this threat to the ideal image of childhood from all sides, the initially evoked nostalgia is tainted and instead replaced by a feeling of crisis for both the past and the future of childhood are depicted as threatening and repellent. In a typically Gothic fashion the *Harry Potter* series renders Voldemort as an embodiment of deviance a monster to be slain and in the fashion of satire it depicts Dudley as ridiculous because of his deviance to later be reformed. While thus the threats to normative identity have been destroyed, their haunting presence still lingers and boycotts a mere escapist reading of *Harry Potter* as nostalgic by confronting readers with current fears concerning the child, the adult and coming of age. Furthermore, the blatantly fantastic setting into which ideal childhood is embedded can be taken as a further cue to deconstruct the myth of childhood, for it suggests that ideal childhood itself is equally a mere fantasy.

6. “And how long have you been seventeen?”<sup>28</sup> – Childhood, Adulthood and Coming of Age in *Twilight*

Just as much as in the analysis of *Harry Potter*, a contextualization of *Twilight* with its genre's conventions is key to understanding the representation of coming of age, gender, class and consumption in this novel series. In the public reception of *Twilight*, much use teenage protagonist Bella Swan and her love interest Edward Cullen. The course of some of these discussions elucidates why contextualization is so important: For instance, in the documentation *Twilight-Fieber*, which focusses on the *Twilight* phenomenon and its fans, child psychiatrist Stéphane Clerget describes the novel series' protagonist as unconventionally active and brave for a female character in a vampire story. Certainly, Bella reacts less fearfully to her life and/or virginity being threatened both by mortal and immortal men than the traditional heroines of the Vampire Gothic such as Bram Stoker's Mina Harker and Lucy Westenra and their many movie incarnations, he contends. However, such a comparison ignores the evolution that the genre has gone through ever since *Dracula*. It is therefore necessary to take into account the generic shifts within the genre of vampire fiction since the publication of Bram Stoker's novel when analysing the *Twilight* saga in the context of vampire fiction.

The most frequently quoted thesis with regard to vampires is probably Nina Auerbach's statement that “every age creates the vampire it needs” (145). Auerbach insists that there is not “the vampire”, but only vampires in the plurality of cultural and historical specificity (5). *Twilight* and its characters hence must be viewed, on the one hand, in differentiation to older vampire fiction and, on the other, in comparison to other vampire fiction of the same cultural moment. Also, as age is the major focus of the analysis, *Twilight* certainly needs to be contextualized in particular with contemporary teenage vampire fiction (i.e. vampire fiction with teenage protagonists). Therefore, a brief overview of the genre's relevant milestones and important shifts in its recent history will be introduced prior to a closer analysis of *Twilight*.

Since the early 1970s there have been two paradigm shifts in the representation of vampires. First, vampire stories such as the blaxploitation film *Blackula* (1972), Anne Rice's novel *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991) or Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* (2005) appropriated the vampire as a demonization of otherness to speak to us from that position of otherness and thus transform him/her from a simple villain into a complex, sympathetic anti-hero/ine. Thus, they give insight into the marginalization of men and women on the grounds of race and sexuality. This appropriation of and empowerment through vampire identities that transform from monstrous to sympathetic others was reappropriated by white heteronormative mainstream culture in the new millennium with representations such as *Twilight* (2005), and the TV shows *True Blood* (2008-2014) and *The Vampire Diaries*

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<sup>28</sup> *Twilight* 161.

(2009-). Whilst they took over the depiction of the vampire as a sympathetic, complex character, they transform him/her into a representation of the white heteronormative hegemonic centre. As a result, the vampire recently started to stand much more for normative desires and hopes than for fears and transgressions. Or rather, instead of embodying a fear of otherness, the vampire came to embody the fear that what was (hetero)normative was about to disappear.

Furthermore, vampire fiction had become decidedly more focused on child and teen identities throughout the 1980s with movies such as *The Lost Boys* (1987), *Near Dark* (1987) or *Fright Night* (1985). This trend continued in the 90s with the TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and the novel series *Night World* (1998-1999) and *The Vampire Diaries* (1991-1992) by L.J. Smith, which paved the way for the *Twilight* saga and its film adaptations and the TV adaptation of *The Vampire Diaries* in the 2000s as well as a relaunch of both of Smith's novel series. The human teen heroines of these stories have significantly more agency than Stoker's female characters, and most of them also have more agency than *Twilight's* Bella.

Assuming that the representation of coming of age in *Twilight* can only be understood when contextualized – not, as Clerget does, with *Dracula* – but instead with the vampire fictions closely preceding it, the following analysis will suggest that *Twilight* presents the problems of growing up through the eyes of a passive, domestic heroine and seeks their solution in the domestic haven of the seemingly timeless fantasy of the perfect, heterosexual, white, upper-class, American family represented by a clan of vampires. As such, the depiction of the female coming of age in *Twilight* turns out to be a backlash from empowered teenage heroines such as Buffy or the various female protagonists in Smith's *Night World* and *The Vampire Diaries* series in the 90s.

As in the preceding analysis of *Harry Potter*, the following chapters will furthermore search for representations of ideal children, teenagers and ideal adults in the texts as well as for figures of deviance with regard to age. A first contrast to *Harry Potter* regarding the social context of childhood is that school plays no significant role in *Twilight*. Though the first encounter of the female protagonist and her love interest takes place there, all decisive ensuing actions are placed outside school either in secluded clearings in the forest or at home. In other words, while the topic of family life turns out to be an important theme in *Harry Potter* only at a second glance, its predominance in *Twilight* is apparent. In fact, both novel series have a happy ending that consists of a vision of maximum kinship where all main characters of the story have eventually become part of one extensive family. In *Twilight*, Bella and Edward have married so that she is part of the Cullen Clan now. Her friend Alice thus has become her sister-in-law. Bella's and Edward's daughter is named Renesmee, which means that she symbolically unites her two grandmothers Esme and Renee. Bella's best friend Jacob "imprints"<sup>29</sup> on Renesmee, which means that he will ultimately

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<sup>29</sup> "Imprinting" is an invention of Meyer's that is specific to the shapeshifters she has created. When they meet the mate they are destined to be with, they "imprint" on each other, which means that they

become part of the Cullen Clan as well. Hence, *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* could both be described as fantasies of a return to family that bespeak an underlying fear of the disappearance of family. Therefore, the following subchapter will first look at *Twilight*'s place within the genre of teen vampire fiction, in which the connection of family life and coming of age has traditionally been a central theme. Subsequently, the text will be examined for a journey pattern, and again, the representation of consumption and of deviant child characters will be put under scrutiny.

### 6.1. The Nuclear Family and Coming of Age

#### 6.1.1 *Twilight* and the Conventions of Teen Vampire Fiction

Teenage protagonists become more and more frequent in vampire fiction towards the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century. This, however, does not mean that they are absent from preceding representations. Early vampire fictions in the nineteenth century, namely John Polidori's "The Vampyre" and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, featured what would nowadays be labelled teen protagonists and the process of their coming of age. Both Polidori's protagonist Aubrey and Le Fanu's Laura are young and naïve, both have not been prepared for the dangers of the outside world by their adult caretakers/parents and both make the transition from childlike innocence to adult disillusionment through the dangerous friendship with a vampire. Thus, coming of age can be said to be one of the central topics of early vampire fiction.

This, however, changes with the entrance of Dracula. The vampire invented by Bram Stoker is to dominate vampire fiction from the novel's publication at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the beginning of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through such film adaptations as F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931) and the *Dracula*-films by the Hammer Studios (1958-1974). His dominance only starts to wane during the second half of the 1970s as the genre diversifies, leading to a return to teen vampire fiction only in the 1980s. The surge of teen vampire movies released throughout this decade includes *Fright Night* (1985), *Once Bitten* (1985), *Vamp* (1986), *The Lost Boys* (1987), *Near Dark* (1987), *My Best Friend is a Vampire* (1987), and *Fright Night II* (1989) (Bacon 5). In contrast to the genre of the school story with which *Harry Potter* was contextualized in chapter 5.1, there is no general overview of or formula for teen vampire stories offered in the secondary literature on the genre.

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recognize that they are meant to be together and no longer have the freedom to opt for another partner, even if they want to.

Therefore, a brief sketch of its development from the 1980s to the present with a focus on those parameters that are most important for an analysis of *Twilight* is first offered in this chapter. A major focus will lie on the movie *The Lost Boys*, for both its significant overlaps and contrasts with *Twilight* with regard to the topic of child-adult relations and coming of age.

Michael, the protagonist of *The Lost Boys*, is a teenage boy. Just like the protagonist of *Near Dark*, Michael is accompanied by a child in the form of a younger sibling. Michael and his little brother live in a single parent household. The single parent-household is a frequent trope in teen vampire fiction – Michael’s family situation is equivalent to those of the protagonists of *Near Dark* and *Fright Night* as well as *Carmilla*. As Michael’s freshly divorced mother has to find a job and is also starting to date again, she has little time to look after her two sons and therefore does not notice that Michael falls into the clutches of a youth vampire gang.

As in the early teen vampire stories by Le Fanu and Polidori, the youths in 1980s teen vampire fiction do not fall prey to vampires by their own fault, but it is repeatedly highlighted throughout the plotlines that their parents have not paid enough attention or missed out on preparing them properly for the dangers of the outside world and are therefore to be blamed for their children’s calamity. In *The Lost Boys*, for instance, there are several scenes in which Michael’s brother tries to tell his mother about the vampires, but she ignores him as well as the obvious changes happening to Michael in front of her eyes. Even in those movies where the teenagers come from an intact family, the parents show little interest in their children’s lives, as they are more interested in their own jobs and love-lives. Hence, these stories pertain, they invariably fail to take care of their children or prepare them for the world (Auerbach 168; Latham 63), thus exposing them to the dangers of the real world personified through the vampire without anything to fall back on. Simon Bacon concludes: “In all the varying twists and turns of plots in the 80’s teen-vamp films they are all about selfabsorbed adults” (5). The representation of failing parents has been interpreted as a conservative critique in two ways: On the one hand, it is a reaffirmation of the importance of traditional family values as championed by the New Right during the Reagan Era, and on the other hand, it is a critique of the ideals of self-exploration and self-realization brought forth by the hippie generation that the parent generation in these movies have internalized. In *The Lost Boys*, this is, for instance, already established in the exposition, when Michael’s naïve mother sings along to a song on the radio, namely “Groovin” (1976) by *The Rascals*, and points out that this is a song from her generation (Latham 64; Nnih Flinn qtd. in Bacon 6). Ideologically then, these movies participate in the conservative attempt to undo the social and cultural changes of the 60s and 70s and to return to the ideals of the 50s concerning family and the individual (Auerbach 171). Hence, these movies can be read as a conservative backlash.

For a deeper understanding of the structure of teen vampire fiction, it is also important to note that the relationship between vampires and human protagonists is a

very close one in this subgenre. When Nina Auerbach analyses *Carmilla* and “The Vampyre”, she points out that in these nineteenth century vampire fictions about youths, the relationship between the human protagonist and the vampire is one of close friendship or even of lovers (13). This, she points out, is no longer the case in *Dracula* and all subsequent works taking inspiration from the novel: “*Dracula* [...] is [the destroyer] of a tradition [...]. His indifference to the sort of intimacy *Carmilla* offered a lonely daughter is a curt denial of the chief vampire attribute up to his time” (64). 1980s teen fiction returns to the origins of the genre with regard to this closeness: In *The Lost Boys* and *Near Dark*, the human protagonists are “lost” children that fall in love with a vampires and thus these stories can be read as a return to the topic of the precariousness of intimacy for youths that dominated early vampire fiction.

Subsequently the teen protagonists of the 80s are drawn into the social structure of the vampire coven, which is structured like a gang of youth delinquents in *The Lost Boys* and like a criminal clan in *Near Dark*.<sup>30</sup> In both these latter movies, the vampire covens are depicted as perverted alternatives to the boys’ human families, and in both cases the happy ending is marked by a return to their biological families and a hint at a return to the structure of the traditional nuclear family (Nixon 120; 126). This is achieved in both cases by a final blissful union of the male teen protagonist and his heterosexual vampire love interest that has been “healed” from vampirism. In *The Lost Boys* they are even accompanied by a rescued vampire child to restore the picture of the perfect family. Whatever these lost teens had been looking for when they were led astray, it can only be found in the haven of their true families, these movies seem to suggest.

The changes happening to this basic formula in the 1990s can mainly be attributed to the influence of power feminism and girl power. The protagonists of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and L.J. Smith’s novel series *The Night World* and *The Vampire Diaries* all are strong, self-confident girls who bravely battle some vampires, while falling in love with others. Yet, whilst they are all empowered, they also embrace normative femininity. Their respective love interests are male vampires who admire their strength while they themselves are still clearly stronger (and often more knowledgeable, too).

The basic plot formula of the 80s, however, remains unaltered in 90s teen vampire fiction: the young protagonists have close relationships to vampires – they usually fall in love with one of them; their parents are either absent or oblivious of

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<sup>30</sup> That the vampire is no longer a loner in the 1980s, but lives within a social structure of vampires (which can be family or gang-like) who are not just his concubines as in *Dracula* with no further plot relevance is another important feature of the “new” vampire of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Zanger 18). This shift probably first appears in Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), the first novel in which three vampires live together as a kind of family and even encounter another coven of vampires. Rice introduces the vampire as a social being in her overall project of turning him into a more relatable, sympathetic character. Rice’s vampire family, however, is much more ambivalent than the one-dimensional perverted vampire families of 80s teen vampire fiction that serve as mere foils to the true traditional family unit.



what they are doing: the prime example for this is Buffy, whose single-parent, working and dating mother washes the blood out of her daughters clothes but never asks questions about it (Stevens 16). The vampires all live in social structures of families. Take, for instance, the constellation of the Master and anointed vampire child Collin during the first season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Stevens para. 12) or the relationship between said child and the lovers Spike and Drusilla, the vampire brothers Damon and Stefan in *The Vampire Diaries*, or the vampire Ash and his three sisters in *Night World – Daughters of Darkness*. In all of these stories vampires live in social structures that are family-like, and most of them still function as foils to the ideal family as in 1980s teen vampire fiction. For instance, Spike, Drusilla and the vampire child clearly form a perverted version of a family (after all, the two keep the child in a cage and eventually kill it) and the vampire brothers Damon and Stefan are mortal enemies.

However, the vampire bonds in *Night World* are often depicted very positively as strong bonds of caring and loving: Ash hunts after his three runaway vampire sisters only to protect them from the anger of their parents. With regard to the aspect of family *Night World* could thus be considered a forerunner to *Twilight*. In the cases where the perverted vampire family is a foil, it is, however, not a foil to the biological human family that has to be restored like in the 80s. 90s representations of human families are indeed often rather negative or remain in the background of the story – they can be said to stress the dysfunctionality or insignificance of the biological family (Stevens para. 15). Thus, negatively depicted vampire families are a foil to an absent ideal in the 90s. Instead these representations offer the peer group as a much more wholesome and important social unit. Such is the case, for instance, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, where Spike, Drusilla and the vampire child form a contrast to the group of friends around Buffy and also in L.J. Smith's two novel series, in which the human parents of the teen protagonists play no important role at all, but it is their friends or siblings who help them save the day<sup>31</sup>. This coincides with a more drastic depiction of the generational gap. Note, for instance, that in *Buffy* there is not only a lot of distance between parents and their children, but head figures of the institutions of the parent generation whose task it is to protect youth, such as the principal of the school or the mayor of the town, are often depicted as antagonists that secretly are allied to demon forces.

In the mid-90s, Shari L. Thurer finds that “we have passed the point in history when a stay-at-home-mother role is possible for most women, even if it is desired” and cites that “fewer than 7 percent of American families are composed of a breadwinner father and a homemaker mother” (291). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can be seen as a representation that takes this reality as a starting point and then develops a different representation of youth on this basis. In contrast to the conservative

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<sup>31</sup> This is a more general shift that can not only be observed in teen vampire fiction in the 90s. Taking a look at sitcoms during that decade, for instance, one will find that, while Jane Feuer claims that sitcoms are per definition about families (69), the peer group becomes the more dominant setting during the 90s in the most successful sitcoms of that decade such as *Friends*, *Seinfeld* and *Dharma and Greg*.

representations of families in 80s vampire fiction, it does not depict the consequences as tragic for its young protagonist and thus does not rake nostalgia for the traditional family model. Instead, teenagers in *Buffy*, because they are not protected by the safe haven of the family, learn to be self-sustaining and independent much earlier. By highlighting the generational gap, it is repeatedly stressed in the show that youngsters looking after themselves or each other is a much better model than their being protected by and dependent on adults, as they are shown to be much more competent and capable to deal with their own problems than the parent generation is (Wilcox 18-20; Bowers 2; Stevens 64). Thus, *Buffy* could be said to depict an emancipation of youth.

In summary, the typical pattern of teen vampire fiction concerning both 19<sup>th</sup>-century teen vampire fiction and contemporary fiction from the 80s up to *Twilight* could be described as follows: In the typical teen Vampire Gothic the protagonist is a teenager who comes from a family constellation that is not nuclear. The protagonist has been largely left to his/her own devices by the remaining parent and therefore soon encounters a single or a group of vampires who appear/s to be of the same age. These vampires are first indistinguishable from human peers. One of the vampires, a domesticated vampire, turns into the protagonist's love interest or intimate friend and thus – often unwillingly – draws the protagonist deeper into the dangerous vampire world and thus away from a “normal” life. The teen is eventually able to free him/herself and his/her love interest from the influence of the bad vampires or is rescued, either through human peers, the family, or both.

Most of the time, the antagonistic vampires in these stories are not only visually a part of teenage subculture, but their cultural meaning, the threat they stand for, is also particular to that age group. The evil vampires in these tales more often than not threaten to thwart the protagonists' successful entry into society as adults and stand for the “dangers” of teen subculture and of coming of age as perceived by the adult mainstream, e.g., drugs, delinquency, gangs, sex and sexually transmitted diseases (Auerbach 167; Latham 36; Nixon 126-127)<sup>32</sup>. Often, the teen characters of these stories are also accompanied by younger children as siblings who may also fall under the influence of the vampires and need to be rescued to restore family units. What is particular to this pattern in the twentieth century and onwards is that the vampires live in social structures that mirror or imitate human families – the vampire is depicted as a social being. What is more, as of the 1990s, the protagonists are most frequently female.

In the early 2000s, the *Twilight* Saga not only comes to dominate the genre of teen vampire fiction, but it also garners a wider audience that is probably only comparable to the popularity of *Buffy*, if to any of the preceding examples. *Twilight* fuses elements from teen vampire fiction of the two preceding decades. Like 90s teen

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<sup>32</sup> Important exceptions are the novels by L.J. Smith because here, the teen protagonists are not saved from the vampires by their families or peers, but fall in love and stay with the vampires. Their development rather consists of learning to accept and deal with the otherness of the vampire.

vampire fiction, it focuses on a female human teen who falls in love with a male vampire and who is thus drawn into his social circle, which is structured like a family. Unlike 90s teen vampire fiction, however, this female protagonist is not strong and self-confident. Instead, *Twilight* rather seems to indicate a postfeminist backlash against power feminism and girl power (Shachar 148). Bella is, in fact, described as a character that represents traditional co-dependent, relative, weak, passive and insecure femininity in the majority of articles that analyse her gender role (e.g., Mann; Housel; Platt; Shachar; Stevens).

Like 80s teen fiction, *Twilight* is predominantly about families and thus turns against the 90s focus on peer groups. In fact, close friendship only seems to be possible within the nuclear family unit in *Twilight*. Whilst Edward's vampire family is a foil to Bella's human family following the conventions of 80s vampire fiction, the significance of the two contrasted families is turned upside down (Branch 63f; Stevens para. 24). Here, the human protagonist in the end does not make the choice to return to his/her own family as in *The Lost Boys* or *Near Dark*, but chooses to become a full member of the vampire family instead. This choice is motivated by the fact that the vampire family of the Cullens represents the "most perfect of family role models" (Bacon 8), and it is thus worthwhile to take a closer look at these vampires within the framework of an analysis of representations of childhood and coming of age.

The family of the Cullens consists of the married couple Carlisle and Esme and the seemingly teenage vampires Edward, Alice, Emmett, Jasper and Rosalie, who pose as their children. Carlisle is the head of this family which renders their constellation patriarchal (Stevens para. 26). He has turned Esme, Edward, Emmett and Rosalie into vampires; the other "children" had already been turned into vampires by others when they joined the clan. This already marks Carlisle's more active role in comparison to his wife – while in other vampire stories, such as *Interview with a Vampire*, both vampire parents are involved the creation of children<sup>33</sup>, Esme has no role in creating the vampire children of the Cullen family (Whitton 132). What is more, she even shares the subordinate status of the "vampire children" because she was also created by Carlisle (ibid.). In their daily life, Esme also has a rather passive role: While Carlisle works as a doctor in Forks, Esme is a stay-at-home mom, supposedly responsible for taking care of their children and household. She "performs the traditionally feminine household duties of laundry and cooking that symbolize her role as maternal caregiver" (Hawes 172f), though these would seem to be unnecessary in a vampire household. In the face of the facts that these "children" are all actually at least a hundred years old and do neither eat nor sleep, it remains an unresolved mystery what Esme does all day long while her husband is at work and the vampire children at school. It is mentioned that she enjoys restoring old houses but this is clearly only an extension of her seemingly natural domestic role (Whitton 126). Furthermore, it is stressed repeatedly throughout the novels that what Esme excels in is taking care of

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<sup>33</sup> Both Lestat and Louis play a part in Claudia's transformation into a vampire.

others. The mother of the vampire clan is clearly positioned as the good mother (Hawes 174). So great is her love, patience and forgiveness that she not only welcomes Bella lovingly into the family, she even takes potential foes like the shape shifters into her maternal care. What is more, she is not only more of a parent for Bella than her biological mother Renée, but actually replaces Bella's biological mother in the end (Hawes 173).

On the whole, the Cullens represent the ideal of the traditional patriarchal, white, heterosexual family with the father as the sole breadwinner and the mother as a purely domestic being, but this is an ideal strikingly out of touch with the realities of contemporary family life. It conjures up the ghost of the 1950s American suburban family (although already then this kind of family life was a myth (see Coontz)). Tori Branch argues that "Meyer's novels themselves make abundantly clear the extent to which the family life that the Cullens represent is at odds with the "normal" world around them and its ideals" (64). The Cullens form a foil to Bella's own biological family, which is structured in a way that comes much closer to the realities of contemporary family life: Her parents Charlie and Renee were divorced when Bella was only a baby. When Bella is seventeen, her mother marries again and Bella then decides to move to her estranged father in order to enable her mother to spend more time with her new husband. Thus, all Bella has ever known are single-parent households, in which she, though still a child, already carried a considerable amount of responsibility. The fact that her mother is absent and that both of her parents are depicted as ineffectual connects this representation of family to the human families in preceding teen vampire fiction. In addition to that, the representation of Bella's biological family – in contrast to the representation of the Cullen family – is typical for the representation of family in contemporary YA family stories.

*Twilight's* representation of different families gives insight into a persisting idealization of nuclear families over other models. In the mid-1990s, Charles Acland writes on the success of the New Right politics, which included a 1950s ideal of the nuclear family, with the American public: "Even though we are [...] living in a situation in which only a minority of family arrangements would be described as nuclear, the ideological import of the idealized family feeds a certain nostalgia for a time of imagined stability and certainty" (13). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, *Twilight* can be seen as evidence for the enduring ideological power of that ideal and the persistence of that nostalgia for it. Bella's choice of joining the Cullen family and thus leaving her own family behind renders *Twilight* a representation of that nostalgia. Incessantly, Bella comments on the Cullen family life, expressing her adoration of it. *Twilight* can be read as a declaration of love for traditional family values: "[f]or all that has been made about Bella's love for Edward, the series itself makes abundantly clear that almost as much as she desires Edward, Bella desires to be part of the Cullen family" (Branch 63). It is in this aspect that *Twilight* is fundamentally different from 80s teen vampire fiction: In the 80s, the happy ending includes a symbolical return to the ideal of the nuclear family on the side of the human

characters, which also signals the protagonists 'normal' development into adults, who will soon build a new family on their own. In contrast, *Twilight* places the ideal of the nuclear family from the start in the realm of the fantastic by having a group of vampires represent it and thus, while evoking nostalgia for it, at the same time always draws attention to its impossibility in contemporary society:

[T]he saga reveals how the U.S. cultural ideal of family life [as represented by the Cullens] is outside the realm of possibility and experience. The novels reveal that it is in fact an ideal that is impossible for the vast majority of Americans to achieve, and that we, as an economy and a culture, have made it that way. The saga reveals and shrouds at the same moment, in quintessentially Gothic fashion, the strange and painful truth that, as members of late-capitalist, consumer culture in this century, a vast readership craves the sort of family life that it has made a thing of the past – a form of family life that we as a culture and as individuals abject quite literally, because it would deny us the sort of coherent selves we have come to imagine under late capitalism. (Branch 64)

In other words, while 80s vampire teen fiction represents a backlash against the development of the 60s and 70s, in particular with regard to feminism and suggests an undoing of these changes and a return to 1950s family values, vampire teen fiction at the beginning of the twenty-first century highlights how this return has become impossible by casting such a family into the realm of the fantastic through their being vampires<sup>34</sup>.

Note, for instance, how all features of typical family life enacted by the Cullens are mere facades behind which they hide their vampire ways: E.g., the family pretends to go hiking together, but really these are hunting trips during which they feed their blood thirst on wild animals. When they play baseball together, this is really just an excuse to allow free play to their supernatural abilities at an unobserved spot in the woods. All of the activities of the Cullens as typical American family ironically highlight how much they are not the typical American family, but only attempt to mimic it. This is pointedly highlighted by Edward, who mockingly comments on Bella's astonishment over them wanting to play baseball together: "It's the American pastime" (*Twilight* 303). When Bella visits the Cullens, they either overenthusiastically see this as a rare chance to engage in family rituals that are a little more than mere pretence, as when they cook a family meal for her sake or organize a birthday party for her. These enterprises, however, always fail tragically. Once they have given up on that, Bella finds herself sitting in their living-room surrounded by a family of living statues assembled like a dummy version of a family portrait around her. The patriarchal nuclear family, thus, turns out to be a sign in its last stage in accordance

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<sup>34</sup> Bella also can only become truly a part of this family by becoming a fantastical being, a vampire herself.

with Baudrillard's model of the four stages of the sign: the Cullens' performance of the social script for ideal family life pretends to be a faithful copy, but really it is a copy with no original. Among the humans in *Twilight* no such family exists. The Cullens therefore can be read as a simulacrum of family, not only masking "the absence of a basic reality", but being its own pure simulacrum (Baudrillard 1763). Notably, the centre of the myth of the patriarchal, nuclear family (which is ideologically inscribed as the only true, natural and therefore good form of family) the one thing that nuclear families are believed to be arranged around and for, the child, is absent from this family. At the heart of this simulacrum of family one only finds a gap.

The vampire is a representative of a nostalgically imagined past when the sign "family" still was in line with reality, when it was truth (1<sup>st</sup> stage of the sign) – and the stress here lies on "nostalgically imagined" because this past never really existed in the first place. If this constellation is to be read as Gothic, as Branch suggests, then of course, the representation of family must turn out to be haunted by its ideological underpinnings. The problematic repercussions of the undoing of feminist achievements by a return to a patriarchal family model are indeed addressed through the fates of the characters Esme Cullen and Rosalie Cullen and the role that the absent children play in the story. These repercussions ultimately force the myth of family to collapse in on itself.

First, both vampire women suffer from a loss of purpose by either having lost a biological child (in the case of Esme) or having been barred from ever having a biological child (Rosalie). As the role of women in the patriarchal family is defined around the child, the absence of "real" children is what the vampire women feel to be the greatest tragedy of their existence as undead creatures. In fact, it is the absence of real children and not their being vampires that turns the entire family into a fraud, because not only traditional femininity, but the entire notion of traditional family is organized around the child. As pointed out earlier when talking about Esme's questionable function at home, the very constellation of the Cullen family is organized around a gap and it is this gap that they need to hide from the outside world to pass. Because the innocent child in need of protection is ideologically in such a central position to this traditional concept of family, the story will later be haunted by an evil child of the past, which needs to be exorcised to uphold the status quo of the ideal family.

The central role of women as reproductive is another way in which *Twilight* fundamentally breaks with the traditions of vampire fiction: In *Dracula*, the vampire represents a way of reproducing without women, thus denying a direct representation of the boundary-blurring linked to the body of the woman which Kristeva outlines in the concept of the abject (Hogle 10) and instead displaces these onto several transgressions of the body of the monster (e.g., young/old; dead/alive; human/animal). *Twilight* expresses a desire for the return of the abjected maternal into the text, yet at the same time also continues to depict the woman's body in general and the birthing body in particular as horrifying in the series' last instalment *Breaking Dawn*.

Second, the absolute dependence of women on the benevolence of men in the gender dynamics of the patriarchal family model emerges as a true horror in the story with regard to the two characters mentioned above, Esme and Rosalie, and even with regard to Bella. Bella is almost raped by a group of men early on in the story, an event that is taken up again in a flashback in which the reader learns that Rosalie was raped by her fiancé and his friends, who then left her to die, and Esme was beaten up by her husband until she ran away from him when finding out she was pregnant. Esme then loses the child and eventually decides to commit suicide. All of these stories feature a dark double of the good patriarch to reveal the fear combined with the desire for the traditional patriarchal family, as the dangers lurking behind this model for women are made explicit.

The Cullens as a family of the impossible past in the present and Bella's turn towards them and away from her own family are intertwined with her coming of age, first, because coming of age is depicted as only possible in the traditional family constellation and second, because the Cullens are not only a fantasy of the ideal family, but also a fantasy of ideal adulthood. Hawes argues that Bella's coming of age, which takes the shape of her turning into a vampire, "represents a step into an idealized fantasy adulthood rather than her growth into a mature and confident adult" and that this "is indicated by the fact that the human adults in the novels are, quite often, ineffectual, weak, and even immature" (171). Much in the same vein, Benning argues that Bella's awareness of the hidden fantastic world of shape shifters and vampires is part of the role reversal between her and her parents: "The child now knows more about the world than do her parents, and she moves from the realm of student to teacher" (95).

On the basis of Benning's finding, Hawes's thesis has to be radicalized: In fact, not most, but all adults in the books are depicted as "ineffectual, weak, and even immature", except for the Cullens. Not only Bella's parents, but also all teachers, doctors and policemen in the story have no clue of what is really going on in the small town of Forks. Only the Cullens are not only knowing, but even capable of offering protection and care. If one takes knowledge and power as indicators of adulthood – as Benning suggests – then clearly the Cullens are the only adult characters in the story.

Catherine Hardwicke makes an explicit point of showcasing the adulthood of the Cullens by depicting all other characters as childish in her movie adaptation of the first novel of the series: Whenever Bella is trying to have a serious conversation with someone, one can see other characters horsing around or playing foolish pranks on each other in the background. The only exceptions for this can be found when she is with Edward Cullen or the entire Cullen clan. Here, a tone of earnestness and worry prevails instead.

It is, however, not only knowledge, seriousness and their propensity for offering protection that marks the Cullens as adults. As Benning points out, there are "several age paradigms within the text: physical age, emotional maturity, intellectual maturity and various in-betweens" (92). First and foremost, it is the representation of their

bodies that makes the Cullens a fantasy of ideal adulthood – they are, in the most literal sense, the only embodiment of adulthood in the story. Generally, vampire bodies are depicted as not being bound to biological aging in the way that human bodies are. Vampires live forever and do not age physically. In the twentieth century, this has often been depicted as a kind of curse for them, as for instance in Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931) and even more so in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, in contrast, the vampire lord is not only immortal, but can reverse aging. When the Harkers encounter him in London, he is much younger than he was at the beginning of the story. Yet, there are no hints at a tragic side to this special feature in this text. The depiction of the vampire's attitude towards his timeless existence then may have to do with how important age and ageing are seen with regard to identity formation in a given culture at a given time.

In the case of the Cullens, their being vampires is depicted as having reached a stage of perfection with regard to both their bodies and their character. Vampires in this text can have it all: biologically, their bodies “all fall on the spectrum of adolescence to middle-age” (Benning 93), thus they embody an ideal of adults that have preserved their physical youth (91-92). At the same time, they have the emotional and intellectual maturity that comes with age and experience.

Their static nature is often pointed out by Bella describing them as beautiful statues and by admiring the control they have over both their bodies and their minds. While children and teenagers are understood as being in a permanent process of becoming in western culture, adulthood is usually depicted as a static state of perfection, imagined as a plateau (Hollindale 37) where no physical or psychological changes occur until the adult suddenly enters old age, which is then depicted as a process of decay and as such is the countermovement to childhood. The Cullens can therefore be described as a bodily fantasy of ideal adulthood as a plateau, thus reaffirming the dominant discourse.

Again, the fact that only the undead manage to perform as adults may be read as an indication that adulthood is not possible under current cultural conditions, that it, in fact, like family, has entered the stage of the simulacrum. Its very constructedness, however, does not mean that it loses any of its power as cultural norm within and beyond the text.

It is also noteworthy that the novel series is almost exclusively populated with people of adult age, i.e. the Cullens, and people who are biologically qualifying as middle-aged, though not as ideal adults. In contrast, children and people of old age are, as Benning points out, almost absent from the story world (93). This, however, is not an issue specific to *Twilight* as a cultural text, but part and parcel of a symbolic annihilation on a larger cultural scale that is evidence of the marginalization of these groups, particularly in Northern American culture (notice, in contrast, how *Harry Potter* is populated with both a stark number of children as well as some people who are at least beyond middle age).



For the protagonist Bella to successfully come of age within this story world, she must first orient herself away from the childish adults around her and towards the Cullens, subsequently turning into a vampire herself. This is atypical for teen vampire fiction, where the threat of turning into a vampire used to stand for the idea of an inhibition of normal coming of age. This convention is inverted in the *Twilight* saga.

In Bella's transformation into a vampire as coming of age, the intersectionality of gender and age is of key importance since it is women's roles as mothers and women's particular bodies which are central topics in the depiction of female adulthood in *Twilight*. The next two subchapters will focus on these points in order to further elucidate the values and meanings attached to the child/adult-binary in the *Twilight* saga. Resulting from the insights so far, a particular focus will lie on why achieving adulthood is problematic under the cultural and social conditions of a late capitalist society.

### 6.1.2 *Twilight* and the Mother-Daughter Problem

The conflict between a nostalgic yearning for the traditional patriarchal nuclear family and the realities of late capitalist consumer culture are played out in *Twilight* as an underlying conflict between the protagonist Bella and her mother Renee. This character constellation is so central to the problems at the heart of the novel series that its key essence is already encapsulated on the first pages of the first book, when Bella leaves Phoenix to live with her father in Forks:

I [Bella] felt a spasm of panic as I stared at her [Renee's] wide, childlike eyes. How could I leave my loving, erratic, harebrained mother to fend for herself? Of course she had Phil now, so the bills would probably get paid, there be food in the refrigerator, gas in the car, and someone to call when she got lost, but still...(*Twilight* 4)

Bella sees her role towards Renee as a parent's and she sees Renee as a child. All the key features of childness are present in this first description of Renee: She is naïve and innocent (as indicated by the "wide, childlike eyes"), "erratic" and depends on others to look after her ("How could I leave [her] to fend for herself?"). The reversed roles of mother and daughter as depicted here even include that Bella "has had to caution her mother about men" as Hawes (171) points out, taking the role not only of the caretaker, but also of the protector. The novels make explicitly clear that this role reversal has not occurred just recently, but that Bella's childhood came to a very early end with her entering a precocious adulthood already years before she is a teen:

Her [Renee's] voice was unsure; as far as I could remember, this was the first time since I was eight that she'd come close to trying to sound like a parental

authority. I recognized the reasonable-but-firm tone of voice from talks I'd had with her about men. (*Twilight* 407)

In the movie adaptation by Catherine Hardwicke this reversed relationship of mother and child is highlighted by depicting Renee in a youthful look with shoulder-length, wavy hair and playful accessories like a cowboy hat or a colourful glitzy scarf. Bella, in contrast, wears a no nonsense look with her hair long and straight, clothes in subdued colours and plain cuts, without accessories.

Renee's and Bella's relationship as role reversal in both the novel series and films is part and parcel of a larger cultural fear. In fact, this constellation is so frequent in contemporary representations of mother-daughter relationships that one could call it a trope and again, it comes with its own history. After all, the derogatory phrase "mutton dressed as lamb", which was and still is used to derise women who dress and style younger than their biological age, dates back at least to the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century. In her elucidating study *Precocious Children & Childish Adults*, Claudia Nelson shows that literature at the turn from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century abounds with representations of girls behaving like women and women behaving like girls. Nelson calls this trope "age inversion" and argues that it is linked to developments in post-Darwinian scientific thinking and attitudes about gender, class, sexuality, power, and economic mobility. It seems that the turn from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century was marked by a similar peak in the representation of age inversion, only that with regard to the female sex, it did not focus on girls and women in general as in the period studied by Nelson, but more specifically on mothers and daughters in their relationship to each other. The following paragraphs shall deliver some exemplary evidence for this phenomenon.

For instance, in the much appraised children's novel *The Illustrated Mom* (1999) by English author Jacqueline Wilson a psychotic mom who does not act her age is depicted from the perspective of her daughter who is forced to grow up quickly because of her mom's episodes. In the iconic British sitcom *Absolutely Fabulous* (1992–1996, 2001–2003, 2001) the mother-daughter relationship between main character Edina Monsoon and her daughter Saffron also seems to be inverted. Most recently, one can find another instance of the very same discourse on British television, namely *Hotter than My Daughter*, a reality tv show which aired from 2010-2011. In the first season, the concept of this reality show was to present a daughter and her mother, one of whom was to undergo a makeover. The daughter was usually blamed for "letting herself go" whereas the mother was guilty of dressing "too young and too sexy", hence the show's title. A randomly picked jury was to decide who of the two needed the makeover more badly. In season two, this jury decision was dropped and instead both mother and daughter were undergoing a makeover to restore a normative role distribution. Each episode starts off with a prologue that always finds a new way of putting into words what is allegedly currently going wrong with moms and daughters in Britain. Here is an example of how the alleged role reversal is described in one of the show's many prologues as a failure of the mother to perform as the

daughter's guide and supporter through puberty, which the show constructs as identity crisis:

Your self-confidence is lower than a snake and your body is changing faster than a twilight werewolf. Lucky then that mom's always on hand to lead you through those hairy, scary waters into adulthood. Well, ... most mums are ... Up and down this United Kingdom moms are refusing point blank to grow up. They are outraging their daughters with their behaviour and their outfits – oh, their outfits! Here at *Hotter than My Daughter* we take mums and daughters whose roles have gotten confused over the years. [...] We meet mums who won't lose their clubbing gear and daughters who don't care what they wear. (Episode 8, season 2)

Like all makeover shows, *Hotter than My Daughter* reinforces a narrative of self-improvement towards a normative identity through a change on the surface. In contrast, however, to American makeover formats concerned with femininity, such as *The Swan* or *Extreme Makeover*, *Hotter than My Daughter* is not just about normative femininity, but about femininity in combination with age and social roles within the family. It shows women not only how to do gender, but also how to do age within the family context, how to perform as “mother” in the Butlerian sense. This means that while in *The Swan* or *Extreme Makeover* women of all ages are always encouraged to try to look as young as possible, *Hotter than My Daughter* weighs this against their normative responsibilities as mothers to “step outside of the limelight and let their daughters shine” (ibid.). *Hotter than My Daughter* constructs a correlation in inverse proportion between the daughter's and the mother's performance of femininity: Daughters can only turn into women as embodiments of beauty and explore themselves as sexual beings if their mothers resign from that (by shedding their “clubbing gear”), thus the format's ageist rhetoric repeatedly suggests. Not only does this show then reaffirm the stereotypes of the good mother as selfless and sexless, and the bad mother as selfish, but it also pits mothers and daughters against each other as rivals for male attention. In most of the episodes the mothers are in fact single and in search for a partner. Naomi Wolf described the construction of this generational rivalry as one major function of the beauty myth that was mobilized to keep feminism down, as it keeps women from discovering strength in their bonds (75). Seen in this context, *Hotter than My Daughter* can be said to create a gulf of hostility between mothers and daughters that – according to the dominant discourse – can only be overcome if the mother sacrifices her sexuality and libido at the altar of her daughter's womanhood<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, the gendered depiction of this role reversal as harmful also can also be found in contemporary psychological discourses. Here, the phenomenon is labelled as “parentification” and it is depicted as more harmful to girls than boys (Jurkovic qtd. in Tenga 105-106).

The lion's share, however, of *Hotter than My Daughter's* ideological work is probably an attempt to negotiate late capitalist consumer culture femininity with the role of the adult female parent. It suggests to women that in the conflict of normative femininity, that is, staying young and sexy forever no matter what, and the traditional role of the mother as a self-sacrificial, sexless entity, two ideals that stand in blatant contradiction to each other, the duties of the good mother will always prevail. The rhetoric of the show highlights the importance of clothes and make up as semiotic signs in performing certain scripts within holistic frames from the beginning of the show where the bad, irresponsible mother is shown dancing in her clubbing gear to the ending where the made-over, good mother is described as looking classy and respectable in outfits that are suggested as suitable for events like parent-teacher conferences. Importantly, mothers are depicted as having to choose between these two options – their identities are not allowed different facets, but are reduced to a stereotype.

In American culture, no such format exists (so far), but television programs have covered the “alarming” trend of mothers attempting to look like their daughters. However, since the notion of women having to stay young is so central to American culture (*The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* are American TV formats after all), the conflict of what that does to the traditional notion of motherhood is often only addressed in a displaced manner: Said news coverage will ultimately always root the problem back to British culture<sup>36</sup>. The problem is thus addressed and at the same time removed from American audiences to “over there”, where it can be evaluated from a safe distance. Here, the conflict at home, however, remains unresolved. Formats like *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* stand in blatant contrast to the negative representations of mothers that style themselves in a youthful and sexualized manner denounced as cougars or milfs (see chapter eight for further elaboration on the representation of milfs and cougars).

Coming back to *Twilight*, it can be said that while Renee is a subtler representation of a mother who is in a role reversal with her daughter, we find the same conflict here as in the British makeover show. Faced with the mutually exclusive roles of the self-sacrificial mother and her self-realisation as a woman, Renee chooses the latter. As on *Hotter than my Daughter*, her choice is portrayed as having direct consequences for her daughter: Renee is depicted as literally blocking Bella's way into adulthood and achieved femininity by focusing on her own search for a partner and refusing to be a self-sacrificial mother. This inadvertently leads to a role reversal where Bella steps into the role of the self-sacrificial mother. It is, of course, never questioned, neither in *Hotter than My Daughter* nor in *Twilight*, why it is that any one of

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<sup>36</sup> For instance, in 2009 ABC's *Good Morning America* covered the story of a British mother and daughter who looked “shockingly alike” because the mother had plastic surgery to resemble her daughter (Trachtenberg) and in 2010 NBC suggested that more and more mothers and daughters might be going under the knife together due to a competitiveness sparked by TV shows like Britain's *Hotter than My Daughter* (Mapes).

the two, whether it is mother or daughter, would have to fulfil this role in the first place. Myth is at work here as it is just accepted as a given that in any such relation, one of the two women involved can enjoy all freedoms and be sexually active while the other has to restrain and sacrifice herself.

While Renee is in many ways depicted as a loving mother for whom Bella has strong positive feelings, she is hence not depicted positively overall. Not only does she cause Bella's precocious, flawed adulthood, but she is also depicted as the cause for Bella's not growing up in the nuclear family constellation that she pines for. While divorces most often are the outcomes of rather complex developments of the relationship between two people, in *Twilight*, the divorce of Bella's parents is clearly pinned on her mother Renee, as she simply walked away from Bella's father because small town life was not enough for her, according to Bella's narration of the past. It is pointed out that Charlie was rather helpless without her and never got over being abandoned. On these grounds Renee's behaviour is implicitly criticized as cruel (Donnelly 187), which becomes more obvious when Bella at one point strategically decides to use her mother's words when leaving Charlie. Bella describes imitating her mother in this situation as follows: "I could think of only one way to escape, and it involved hurting him so much that I hated myself for even considering it" (*Twilight* 344).

Renee embodies the stereotype of the 'bad mother' whose selfishness endangers her child as she fails to conform to the normative role of the good mother: Renee's flightiness and self-centeredness is what puts Bella into harm's way in the first place. Hawes suggests (174) that Bella only walks into the dark forest where monsters await – as which Forks can be read – because of her mother's new marriage, which renders her the monstrous, wicked mother of the traditional fairy tale.

Concerning constructions of childness and adulthood, a correlation is constructed here between mother and child and becomes myth: because Renee is not a "proper" adult, Bella has to step up to the role and enter precocious adulthood. Precocious, because it is not proper adulthood and the novels make abundantly clear that Bella first needs to regress into childhood again and be a "proper" child before she can come of age. Almost obtrusively, Meyer points out Bella's insecurities about herself which are coded as typically teenage and which first need to be overcome to be a "proper" instead of a precocious adult:

I would be the new girl from the big city, a curiosity, a freak. Maybe, if I looked like a girl from Phoenix should, I could work this to my advantage. But physically, I'd never fit in anywhere. I should be tan, sporty, blond – a volleyball player, or a cheerleader, perhaps – all the things that go with living in the valley of the sun. Instead, I was ivory-skinned [...] despite the constant sunshine. I had always been slender, but soft somehow, obviously not an athlete; I didn't have the necessary hand-eye coordination to play sports without humiliating myself – and harming both myself and anyone else who stood too close. (*Twilight* 9)

The depiction of the teenager forced to take care of her/himself early in the *Twilight* saga is the direct opposite of its depiction a decade earlier: In *Buffy* the fact that teenagers have to take care of themselves is depicted positively: they are thus enabled to develop the capacities to do so quickly, hence also becoming aware of their own strength and competence. In the *Twilight* saga, Bella's early, forced self-reliance conversely has negative effects on her self-esteem. While teenagers in *Buffy* become adult more quickly without the protection of the nuclear family, Bella's development is left stunted. Her portrayal can thus be understood as a desire for childhood as a period of full dependence instead of a more emancipated view of children.

Bella's low self-esteem becomes even more pronounced as she begins a relationship with Edward. She now repeatedly asks herself why someone as beautiful and powerful as him would pick her out of all possible candidates. Bella's antagonistic relationship to her body and her low self-esteem are only remedied when she eventually transforms into a vampire, which is the novel's rendition of perfect adulthood. For this transition to take place, however, Bella must first be placed into a different family constellation, the traditionally patriarchal Cullens.

Bella can only turn into a "proper", that is, self-confident, adult within the framework of the traditional patriarchal family, the *Twilight* saga seems to suggest. Unlike the women in *Hotter than My Daughter*, Renee is not made over into the traditional ideal mother for this purpose, but, more radically, is simply replaced by Esme, who perfectly embodies this role. The bad mother is then overall depicted as the destroyer of the nuclear family and, in consequence to that, as the reason her child cannot grow into a proper adult. A childhood in the nuclear, patriarchal family constellation featuring, most importantly, a self-sacrificial stay-at-home mother is thus depicted as a prerequisite to achieved adulthood, thus naturalizing a historical construct of the family that dates back to the industrial revolution.

In the patriarchal family, Bella can first regress into traditional childhood – she no longer has to take any responsibilities, neither for herself nor for others. In contrast to her impotent human family, Bella is offered security and protection through the Cullen family: "The idealised cohesive patriarchal structure of the Cullen family is reaffirmed through its ability to protect Bella from the dangers of James," Stevens points out (34).

Semiotically, this regress is visually supported by Bella now often being carried around like a baby and dancing on Edward's toes like a little girl (Mann 136; Benning 100). From this regress into childhood, her coming of age is relaunched. This time, however, the coming of age is not triggered by an abandonment of the parents, but by the traditional, patriarchal markers of achieved womanhood: marriage and motherhood, which mark a coming of age that is first and foremost depicted as a physical transformation.

### 6.2 The Body and Coming of Age:

#### *Twilight* as Makeover Narrative and Marriage Plot

Much like in *Harry Potter*, the initial movement of the young protagonist of *Twilight* seems to be the setting out on a journey. The first pages introduce the reader to the fact that seventeen-year-old Bella is about to leave home to voyage into the unknown. She travels from Phoenix, Arizona to Forks, Washington, a space whose lush greenery is described as so essentially different from what the protagonist is familiar with that it almost seems as if the protagonist were discovering a new world:

It was beautiful, of course; I couldn't deny that. Everything was green: the trees, their trunks covered with moss, their branches hanging with a canopy of it, the ground covered with ferns. Even the air filtered down greenly through the leaves. It was so green – an alien planet. (*Twilight* 7)

In a way, Bella initially indeed enters upon a quest, as she sets out to resolve the mystery of Edward's existence, i.e. that he is a vampire. Once, however, this fact has been established, the protagonist is again embedded in a domestic setting, the Cullen household, which offers her protection. Bella may now still encounter threats, but she remains passive in the fighting of these, which is taken over by the entire Cullen family. Bella is thus a passive, domestic heroine. She is embedded in a narrative pattern typical of girls' coming of age that is rooted in the sentimental and domestic novel which developed in eighteenth-century England (Brown 3). While boys' coming of age has often taken the shape of a hero's quest, girls' coming of age has been framed as marriage plot due to their historical limitation to the domestic zone. The tasks these protagonists thus faced were "finding a husband, leaving home, marrying" (Brown 8) instead of fighting monsters and saving a civilization. This type of plot can also be labelled as a quest of sorts, but it is the quest of romance which solely consists of finding "an ideal heterosexual love relationship" (Miller 171). More often than not then, these female characters learn how to become defined over someone else instead of learning more about themselves.

The fact that the reader gets to know virtually nothing of Bella's past life until she moves to Forks and meets Edward, apart from the fact that she was more of a mother to Renee than the other way round, is another point of evidence that *Twilight* follows the conventions of the traditional girls' tale in which "youth is merely a preparation for marriage and motherhood (for only then does life truly begin)" (Lehnert 112). The identity of the protagonist is in fact less important than the identity of her love interest in these types of plots.

Contemporary YA literature, of course, offers stories of girls who actively go on hero's quests as well, such as Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games* or Tally Youngblood in the *Uglies* series. However, none of these examples has been as popular as *Twilight* (Jarvis 103), which is rather comparable to American literary representations

of girls' coming of age in the nineteenth than in the twenty-first century. Elaine Ginsberg has differentiated the central motifs and patterns of girls' tales from boys' as follows:

First, unlike some of their male counterparts, the young girls are always introduced to a heterosexual world, a world in which relationships between men and women, males and females, are the most important, if not the only, relationships which need to be understood. Second, whereas to the young men their newfound roles in the world may mean many different things, the young girls seem to see their future roles as women almost always in relation to men. Third, though the seduction-punishment pattern changes considerably in the twentieth century, the initiation process for females is still more often than not seen in terms of sexual experience either explicitly or implicitly. Fourth, there is an interesting anomaly in the fact that so many of the young girls depicted in these initiation stories are, at first, dressed in boys' clothing or bear boys' names, attributes they drop as the stories progress. They begin, it would seem, as little androgynous creatures, changing their names and their clothing only as they become more aware of their approaching womanhood. Fifth, whereas the young male initiates often have a male companion or mentor to aid or guide them [...], the young girls seem never to be aided or guided by an older female who serves as a teacher. More commonly they are accompanied or even initiated by a boy or a man. (Ginsberg qtd. in Bergmann n. pag.).

The first three points of this description neatly fit the *Twilight* saga. First, the developing heterosexual relationship between Edward and Bella is Bella's and the story's central preoccupation and indeed, it is the only relationship that "needs[s] to be understood" by her. For instance, as the story proceeds Bella's education at school is only in so far playing a relevant role in the story as she uses the books she read in school – *Romeo and Juliet*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Pride and Prejudice* – as guideline to understand the romantic relationship between Edward and herself (Steiner 198ff.). Also, other beginning friendships that she initially welcomed at her new school are stunted at an early stage of their development and soon abandoned altogether as Edward becomes the centre of her life.

Second, Bella sees no future for herself that does not include Edward. She has no dreams of what she wants to become once she is an adult woman other than being with Edward. In fact, Bella avoids any rituals of adolescence that she could explore independently of Edward. While a phase of isolation usually functions in boys' tales as a period of self-realization, in the *Twilight* saga the only period of isolation that Bella experiences – an isolation from Edward – is depicted solely as lack, for here she truly realizes that her identity is merely relational once he is gone. Shachar reads this passage of isolation in *New Moon* along the same lines:



When Edward abandons Bella, there are several blank pages that follow, only with the names of months written on them, highlighting her sense of extreme loss. I find these pages telling in their blankness for they almost stand as literal examples of the metaphorical meanings that are conveyed through them and throughout the novel. [...] This “blankness” highlights that she [Bella] has no concept of self-identity or belonging without Edward and the world he can create for her. Throughout *New Moon* Bella is a primary example of Gilbert and Gubar’s description of traditional passive femininity as a “selfless” being who cannot attain an identity or a place within the world of experience without being defined in relation to the masculine (21, 3-44). (152f.)

Because there is no personal growth concerning Bella indicated in most of the story, but rather a regression, Bella’s eventual transformation from teen girl to adult woman, wife and mother is not a gradual development but rather turns out to be an abrupt transition, which is mostly performed on her, not by her. Hawes argues that there is evidence of a “desire to escape rather than confront her insecurities” in Bella’s coming of age. She suggests that Bella can be compared to sleeping beauty because of her passivity:

[...] Bella’s feelings of inadequacy and helplessness isolate her from the real challenges of everyday maturation. When she is not passively awaiting her prince Edward, she is actively avoiding the dancing, dating, shopping and bickering of the social whirl that is high school. (163)

Bella’s avoidance of everything that reeks of adolescence again rather links her back to the heroines of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction than to contemporary representations of female coming of age:

Most girls’ fiction omitted this transitional and troublesome period [of adolescence] until well into the twentieth century, in part because the concept of adolescence itself did not take root until the late nineteenth century. [...] The idea of female adolescence lagged behind that of males, as few girls received a formal education other than domestic apprenticeship. (Brown 7)

Hence, the protagonists of these stories were either children or grown women – the age from 10 to 18 was often entirely skipped in literature as it was considered uninteresting (White 22). Similarly, Meyer seems to not really know what to do with a teenaged protagonist other than to represent her as a mix of a precocious self-sacrificial mother and a lost child that yearns to be protected and pampered.

Bella’s refusal to participate in the typical rituals of female adolescence in a late capitalist society could, within the wider framework of the novel, be read as part of a criticism of the conflicting messages women are confronted with, thus harkening back to the mother-daughter conflict analyzed in the last chapter. After all, Bella’s avoidance

of these rituals of self-exploration and narcissism could be understood as a refusal to adopt her mother's identity. Instead, in a neo-conservative turn, she opts for becoming an embodiment of the traditional mother she seems to have been yearning for.

Coming back to Ginsberg, also point three of her description fits the *Twilight* saga: the central conflict of almost the entire series is the debate between Edward and Bella about when and how they can have sex, which is accompanied by Bella's increasingly aggressive sexual advances beyond the boundaries Edward has established. Here, in fact, one can find one important difference to the traditional motifs: In the *Twilight* saga, the female is the sexual aggressor (Taylor 41). This can be interpreted ambivalently: It could be viewed as a progressive shift away from traditional gender roles of the marriage plot or as a stereotypical patriarchal and Christian depiction of women as seducers in league with the serpent of seduction that will cause men's fall from grace, as solely controlled by their bodies and hence by their lust, while men are depicted as in control of their bodies. The latter version would mean that the *Twilight* saga normalizes the need for women to be controlled by men for their own good, a reading that Donnelly, for instance, proposes. Either way, Bella is here depicted as more active than the typical passive, domestic heroine.

Point four is where probably the most interesting deviation from the traditional pattern of girls' coming of age occurs: Bella does not begin as "little androgynous creature" that bears a boy's name or clothes, which are later shed. However, her approaching womanhood is nonetheless signified through her external appearance as a process of increasing feminization. In contrast however, this transformation eventually is less about what is attached to her body, like a name or clothes, but about the female body itself. From the first chapter of the novel series to its end, Bella's body is the central signifier of who she is.

As Heike Steinhoff and I have already argued in 2011, *Twilight* depicts female coming of age not only as marriage plot, but also as makeover narrative. This reading of *Twilight* as makeover narrative is also discussed in later articles by Jarvis and by Jameson and Dane. The latter suggest that "the narrative of Bella's desire for transformation to vampire in the *Twilight* saga exemplifies the link between neoliberalism and postfeminist media culture identified by writers such as Gill (2003, 2008a, 2008b), McRobbie (2008), and Chen (2013)" (244). At the heart of the analysis of *Twilight* as makeover narrative then is the question of power and agency. To resolve this question, it is necessary to look not only at the before and after states of Bella's body, but first and foremost at the representation of the process of transformation in between, which is structured along a pattern that most readers are familiar with from the mass media.

The typical pattern of the makeover narrative can be illustrated, for instance, by looking at American extreme makeover shows like *The Swan* or *Extreme Makeover*. *The Swan*, for instance, follows a set of women who compete against each other in transforming from "ugly duckling" to "beautiful swan" through cosmetic surgery among other means. The representation of cosmetic surgery in this and similar

programs can be and has been read as both a disciplinary mechanism that functions to transform female bodies in line with patriarchal heteronormative norms of gender and sexuality and an experience of female empowerment where the body becomes a project of absolute malleability, a means of self-realization for the female agent<sup>37</sup>. Because the narrative can include both, women as mere objects and women as empowered agents, or tend towards one side, an analysis of Bella's coming of age as makeover narrative will help to shed light upon the gender politics of coming of age in this text. In other words, the analysis will investigate the question whether *Twilight* belongs to those cultural texts that “desperately tr[y] to contain the adolescent, female body through exercise, plastic surgery, cosmetic creams and other forms of discipline and control” (McGeough 99) or whether the female subject is set free and turns into an empowered, autonomous adult through the makeover.

In the typical pattern of the makeover narrative first the deficient status of the “before” body of the female candidates is established by their own testimony in which they describe their bodies as ugly, as an assemblage of unwanted bulges and other excesses. Often, the candidates portray themselves as socially disadvantaged or inhibited through their bodies. Bella's self-portrayal in the first chapter of the saga runs along the same lines of constructing herself as “ugly duckling”. Though already quoted once earlier in this chapter, the excerpt of her self-portrayal is worth a second, closer inspection for this comparison:

I would be the new girl from the big city, a curiosity, a freak. Maybe, if I looked like a girl from Phoenix should, I could work this to my advantage. But physically, I'd never fit in anywhere. I should be tan, sporty, blond – a volleyball player, or a cheerleader, perhaps – all the things that go with living in the valley of the sun. Instead, I was ivory-skinned [...] despite the constant sunshine. I had always been slender, but soft somehow, obviously not an athlete; I didn't have the necessary hand-eye coordination to play sports without humiliating myself – and harming both myself and anyone else who stood too close. (*Twilight* 9)

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<sup>37</sup> For a study of the makeover narrative in American culture, see Steinhoff, Heike: *Transforming Bodies. Makeovers and Monstrosities in American Culture* (2015).

For cosmetic surgery as a practice of female oppression see, e.g. Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women* (1992). For cosmetic surgery as a practice that is experienced by women as a form of self-care and self-expression see, e.g. Kathy Davis' *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery* (1995). For cosmetic surgery as an ambivalent technology of the self, see, e.g. Sabine Maasen's “Schönheitschirurgie: Schnittflächen flexiblen Selbstmanagements” in Barbara Orland's *Artifizielle Körper – lebendige Technik: Technische Modellierungen des Körpers in historischer Perspektive* (2005). For an analysis of the ambivalent processes and representational politics of the televisual cosmetic surgery makeover see, for instance Brenda Weber's *Makeover TV: Selfhood, Citizenship, and Celebrity* (2009) and Cressida J. Heyes' “Cosmetic Surgery and the Televisual Make-over: A Foucauldian Reminiscent Reading” in *Feminist Media Studies* 7.1 (2007) as well as Andrea Seier and Surma Hanna's “Schnitt-Stellen – Mediale Subjektivierungsprozesse in *The Swan*” in: Paula-Irene Villa's *Schön Normal: Manipulationen am Körper als Technologien des Selbst* (2008). (Steinhoff and Siebert 2)

Bella refers here to the beauty ideals that constitute white heteronormative femininity (“tan, sporty, blond” – basically a Barbie doll) that stand, according to her, in direct relation to social acceptance. In other words, she sees her physical appearance as a factor that puts her at a social disadvantage. The way in which Bella sees herself as deviant from ideal beauty is particularly significant. She pictures her body here as an abject body (Steinhoff and Siebert 5): It is a body without clearly defined, hard boundaries (“soft somehow”), a body out of control, which is threatening both to herself and others. The abject female body as fear-inspiring has been explored by Julia Kristeva in her influential essay *The Powers of Horror*, in which she defines the abject as anything that threatens clear boundaries, makes the distinction between subject and object impossible and thus threatens identity. Kristeva describes the moment of birth when one is half inside and half outside of the mother, half dead and half alive, as primal scene of abjection. In opposition to the abject body, the ideal body “must bear no trace of its **debt** to nature: it must be clean and proper in order to be fully symbolic”, writes Kristeva (102; bold print by Kristeva). The ideal body has defined boundaries, no marks upon it that testify of violation of its boundaries and is clean of “secretion or discharge” (ibid.). In *Twilight*, the statuesque, marble-hard vampire bodies are designed as the body clean and proper. McGeogh finds this represented in a particular pointed manner in the opposition of Edward’s and Bella’s bodies: “Edward manages bodily excesses and, with great effort, contains sexual desire. Bella, on the other hand, is wildly out of control. [...] Bella is in a constant state of becoming. No wonder she not only wants Edward; she wants to be him” (100). But it is not just about Edward – Bella finds the entire vampire clan “devastatingly [...] beautiful” (*Twilight* 17) and constantly poses their graceful, hard bodies in contrast to her own soft and stumbling body. Vampires, in the saga, have the desired body beautiful that is “absolutely tight, contained, ‘bolted down’, firm: in other words, a body that is protected against eruption from within, whose internal processes are under control” (Bordo 24). Significantly, female vampires have no generative powers – they can, physically, not give birth. Whitton remarks on that:

[Meyer’s] neutering of female generative power goes far beyond the reinstatement of an idealized social order; it speaks directly to the deep-seated psychological motivations of that initial idealization. She taps into an ancient seam of male jealousy and fear of women’s reproductive and nurturing capacities [...]. (130)

While Bella’s body is marked as abject and in need of fixing as the “before” bodies of other makeover narratives already in the very beginning of the story, it is not until the last installment of the series that Bella is eventually made over, though one can find numerous small, non-permanent makeovers all throughout the text whenever Alice Cullen dresses Bella and does her hair and make up for special occasions like birthdays or her wedding. It has been remarked that around the event of Bella’s final, permanent

makeover in this last book, *Breaking Dawn*, the series' tone abruptly changes and what used to be a misty-eyed romance in the end has more similarity to a horror story comparable to *Rosemary's Baby* or *Alien* (Smith 261; Whitton 127). This shift towards the horror genre is another parallel between *Twilight* and makeover narratives: Peri Bradley claims that makeover shows like *The Swan* actually utilize the very same signifiers as horror movies to construct their contestants as “monsters” in need of normalization.

The hitherto only subtly addressed abjectness of Bella's body now becomes explicit, but however abrupt this excessive marking as abject may be, it has been implanted in the text from the very start – from her very first description of her own body – and continues all throughout every time she stumbles, falls, gets angry over her own clumsiness or needs to be carried around by the vampires or cannot contain her physical desire. The deep psychological threat lurking behind these scenes comes to the foreground in the end when Bella's body becomes a birthing body. The respective text passage abounds with descriptions of boundary transgressions and violent eruptions from inside:

Her body twitched, arched in Rosalie's arms, and then Bella vomited a fountain of blood [...]. Bella's body, streaming with red, started to twitch, jerking around in Rosalie's arms like she was being electrocuted. [...] It was the wild thrashing from inside the center of her body that moved her. [...] Another gush of blood choked off what she was shrieking. [...] In the bright light, Bella's skin seemed more purple and black than it was white. Deep red was seeping beneath the skin over the huge, shuddering bulge of her stomach. [...] vivid red spouted out from where she pierced the skin. It was like a bucket being turned over, a faucet twisted to full. Bella jerked, but didn't scream. She was still choking. (*Breaking Dawn* 319-322)

As a consequence of birth, Bella's body is destroyed, fragmented, empty, “a broken, mangled, bled-out corpse” (326). At this point it emerges most clearly that *Twilight* inverts the conventions of vampire fiction in a second manner: In 80s teen vampire fiction, the vampirism-infected bodies of the male teen protagonists stood as a metaphor for the body out of control, suffering from the trials and tribulations of puberty. Achieving adulthood meant overcoming these and expelling the vampire in oneself, thus regaining control over the body (Nixon 126). These movies utilize the figure of the half vampire, as Nina Auerbach points out (168): Like Mina Harker in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, these teenage boys were bitten by vampires, showed first signs of vampirism, but still could be rescued and become entirely human again. The motif of the half-vampires in 80s teen vampire fiction functioned to enable a representation of a journey from normative childhood over the unruliness of puberty into normative adulthood. Coming of age is here presented as a short, but necessary period of monstrousness, which hints at the precariousness of the process as it is paradoxically linking the two opposing parts of a binary opposition of child and adult.

In *Twilight*, the metaphors used for depicting the two ends of this process are turned upside down: It is not the vampire body that is marked as monstrous, fear-inspiring and repugnant, but the vampire's body is the body whose deviance has been remedied. It is nominally monstrous, but not symbolically and ideologically. This is due to two reasons: first, the protagonist is female and therefore, her body is from the beginning coded as deviant and thus monstrous, and second, vampirism is coded differently here, as the initial analysis of the family politics of *Twilight* has shown. Vampirism in *Twilight* stands for idealized formations of identity that have been rendered impossible under the current conditions of consumer capitalism and are thus turned into pure fantasy. Through vampirism Bella gets to have it all: She can be a self-sacrificial mother who dies for her child and yet live on as a physically strong, ageless supermodel.

Subsequent to this horrific spectacle, Bella's body is now revived and transformed into this ideal body once the baby has emerged from her. The transformation can be understood as a reward for her performance as good mother: Knowing that the baby will, by all likelihood, kill her, she nonetheless insisted on keeping it when everyone around her urged her to have an abortion. In this prolife narrative (Platt 82) she performs as the self-sacrificial mother by giving her life and is then rewarded by receiving the transformation she has been pining for ever since learning that vampires exist. This is another parallel to makeover shows for here the makeover is also depicted as a gift bestowed upon the candidate by the more powerful and more knowing (mostly male) experts. The process thus, from the start, has a dynamic that renders the receiving female as powerless and soliciting and the other side as powerful and knowing.

Noteworthy in both the process of birth and in the ensuing transformation into a vampire is Bella's absolute passivity:

Renesmee's birth is gratuitously gruesome, and Bella is unconscious from the outset, her depersonalized body "worked over" by Jacob and Edward. [...] Having delivered his daughter, Edward turns to the matter of creating his wife as a newborn vampire. The hypermedicalized process, in which he sedates Bella with morphine and then injects his venom into her heart by dint of a syringe, is a further sophistication of Meyer's adapted creation method, divorcing the male creative force still further from anything smacking of fleshy, female generation. (Whitton 134)

Bella's transformation is comparable to the process in extreme makeover shows where plastic surgeons work on the anaesthetised patients to give them the new, improved self they have been asking for. While other vampire fictions from *Dracula* to *The Gilda Stories* depict the process of transformation using "the hallmarks of motherhood, with a characteristic fixation on the mutual pleasures of suckling" (Whitton 132), *Twilight* uses the technocratic approach of modern medicine to both childbirth and the birth

of Bella as vampire and thus puts female generative power under male control and administration and renders her the object, not the subject, of transformation. This passivity is also highlighted on the formal level of storytelling, for while Bella is the first-person narrator of almost the entire novel series, the events of her giving birth and transformation are narrated from the perspective of Jacob while Bella remains silent.

In spite of this overwhelming passivity on Bella's side so far, *Twilight* can still be said to show traces of "the same combination of female compliance and empowerment that characterizes makeover programs" (Steinhoff and Siebert 3), because of the way Bella's "after" body and her motivation to become a vampire in the first place are depicted. Her transformation could be read as act of empowerment as Bonnie Mann argues on the basis of Bella's gender-conscious motivation behind her wish for transformation. Bella explains her view of gender roles in *Eclipse*:

A man and a woman have to be somewhat equal. [...] one of them can't always be swooping in and saving the other one. They have to save each other equally [...]. I can't always be Lois Lane, [...] I want to be Superman too. [...] I want to be fierce and deadly, [...]. Just wait 'til I'm a vampire! I'm not going to be sitting on the sidelines next time. (*Eclipse* qtd. in Mann 141)

By becoming a vampire, Bella can overcome the softness, fragility and uncontrollability of her body. As a vampire, Bella is strong and beautiful and suddenly possesses a remarkable degree of self-control both physically and psychologically. Because of that, Mann suggests that the vampire body in *Twilight* can be read as a kind of gender-utopia, as it enables an equality of the sexes (ibid.). This reading, however, is problematic for various reasons: First of all, speaking of gender equality when one gender has to become neutered to attain this seems rather cynical. Averill, for instance, offers a reading of this very transformation process as gynocide (234). Secondly, a closer look at the female vampires in *Twilight* reveals that though they have great physical strength, they are still not equals to their male counterparts. Apart from being haunted by the fact that they are no longer able to bear children, they are also trapped in secondary positions, like Esme to Carlisle. As remarked earlier, Esme is also the only vampire in the family who has no special superpower, while the others can read minds or look into the future. While Bella, in fact, does receive one of these special powers, it is again a power that reveals the strong gender bias of the saga: In the second half of *Breaking Dawn*, Bella becomes aware that she can now mentally produce a protective shield around herself, and she gradually learns to extend this shield further and further to be able to include all her loved ones. This protective shield may remind one of the properties of the ideal woman in the Victorian era, who, as wife and mother, was the essential home-maker creating a safe shelter for her family to be protected from the dangerous outside world. John Ruskin describes this ideal in "Of Queen's Gardens":

And wherever a true wife comes, this home is always around her. The stars only may be over her head; the glowworm in the night-cold grass may be the only fire at her foot; but home is yet wherever she is; and for a noble woman it stretches far round her, better than ceiled with cedar, or painted with vermilion, shedding its quiet light far, for those who else were homeless. (122f.)

Hence, while being a mother and wife is depicted as empowering for women in *Twilight* (Silver 123), these are, problematically, the only roles in which they can be in any way powerful. In other words, if one wanted to read Bella's transformation as an act of empowerment, this would be shot through with contradiction. For, in *Twilight*, empowerment for women comes not only at the prize of giving up their generative power, it is, at the very same time, only attainable in the domestic role of the Victorian ideal mother and wife in spite of the inherent contradictions.

There is one last parallel between the *Twilight* saga and extreme makeover shows that remains to be explored: The underlying structure of both can be said to be that of an initiation narrative (Steinhoff and Siebert 1). In *The Swan* candidates are first isolated from their friends and family and placed in an apartment without mirrors, which signals the eradication of their former identity. They are then going through some psychotherapy sessions, dental surgery, plastic surgery and dieting, and all the while, their endurance of the pain and the psychological stress of the process is what the rhetoric of the makeover show marks as a sign of agency and self-determination. Eventually, in a Lacanian moment, they are placed in front of a mirror, where their new self is revealed to them before they can join their family and friends again. The makeover show thus follows the typical pattern of a period of social isolation, death, rebirth and re-entrance into society of a rite of passage. The success of this rite is, according to the show, dependent on the candidates' determination, but of course, it is first and foremost also dependent on their acceptance of patriarchal notions of femininity as defined by beauty, which include whiteness and heterosexuality, of the authority of the mostly male experts (medical doctors, fitness trainers, therapists) into whose hands they are giving their bodies and last, but not least, their acceptance of the makeover paradigm, i.e. the absolute malleability of the body and the equalization of body and identity.

Bella, likewise, is first socially isolated – because of her monstrously accelerated pregnancy, the Cullens cannot let anyone see her without endangering their secret – then dies and is reborn as vampire. In between, she also undergoes great physical pain that she has to endure all on her own. In fact, an entire chapter is solely dedicated to a description of her pain and of how she endures it bravely, silently (*Breaking Dawn* 341-356). Of course, both in the case of *The Swan* and the *Twilight* saga, the text codes this as a sign of determination and agency, but the silent acceptance and endurance of pain could just as well be read as a sign of rather passive qualities like willing subordination or even self-contempt. Jarvis, for instance, draws attention to the fact



that women going through plastic surgery could be interpreted as inflicting violence on themselves out of a wish for self-destruction and that this could also be true for Bella (110).

Like the candidates of *The Swan*, Bella even has her own “mirror moment” in *Breaking Dawn*, in which she first struggles hard to accept this new identity (371f). Both in *The Swan* and in *Twilight*, the social environment of the female welcomes her back with a display of their esteem for her transformed new self, reaffirming that she is now better, prettier, more valuable and more suited to be a member of their society.

In the beginning of this chapter, a parallel between *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* was drawn in that both books seem to begin with a departure from the domestic zone, but then almost immediately place the protagonist in a (quasi-)domestic setting again. Coming of age then seems to be postponed – instead, the stories first suggest that the young protagonists need to spend more time under adult protection before they can make the transition. In *Harry Potter* an initiation journey, in terms of a *descensus ad inferos*, only takes place at the very end of the story. The same can be said of *Twilight*. Bella’s self-sacrifice, her ensuing death and rebirth as a vampire are comparable to Harry’s self-sacrifice, death and rebirth. However, one significant difference highlights the gender-bias of Bella’s initiation: While Harry sacrifices himself to save his world from Voldemort, Bella sacrifices herself for her child. The two protagonists thus can be said to embody the idea of separate spheres, with the public sphere as reserved for men and the private, domestic sphere for women, for it is towards these spaces that their respective actions are directed. Because their actions mark their transition into the adult world, the meaning of their adult identities thus also becomes aligned to these respective spheres, which shows that Meyer equates the entrance into adult femininity with the adaptation of the role of the self-sacrificial mother.

At the heart of Bella’s transformation lies the same conflict that also troubles her relationship to Renee: In the dominant cultural discourse, young women are, on the one hand, still expected to mature into wives and mothers in line with traditional notions of femininity. On the other hand, though, they are expected to stay young forever and the logic of consumer capitalism presents this as an achievable project. Bella is all too aware of the latter pressure as a nightmare of herself as “soft and withered” (*New Moon* 3) old woman that visually no longer fits to Edward and her joking remark “frozen forever at eighteen, [...] every woman’s dream come true” (*Breaking Dawn* 25) evidence (Lövgren 85-87). Bella’s makeover can be read as Meyer’s attempt to negotiate these two ideals by dividing social from biological age resulting in a female coming of age that arrests physical aging. But while Bella gets to have it all, a look at other female characters in the text, such as the vampires Esme and Rosalie or the human Renee, shows the female tragedy of being torn between these two ideals.

6.3 “But how could I let him give me things?”<sup>38</sup> –  
Capitalism, Consumption and Coming of Age

For most of the *Twilight* saga, the Cullens are only a play-pretend family as they are revolving around a gap: there are no real children at the centre of the family. Their entire social constellation turns out to be a sham. Read against the background of a decline in the number of births in western societies, this gap at the centre can be read as a representation of a cultural fear at the beginning of the twenty-first century that the disappearance of children might be symptomatic of a decline of the heterosexual family and all the values attached to it.

When Bella first enters the vampire family, she seems to fill this gap: finally, Esme has somebody to cook for, Alice can dress her up like a little doll and the whole family revolves around her to protect the fragile human girl. Like a little girl Bella is carried around by the stronger Edward, dances standing on his feet like a daughter with her father and admires all the members of the family for their physical dexterity like a toddler would admire his/her older siblings and parents. Bonnie Mann argues that particularly for these physical limitations, Bella can in the beginning be read as a child within the Cullen family in terms of social age (Mann 136).

Seen from the opposite perspective, the family finally finds someone to spoil like a little child in Bella: They take great pleasure in organizing birthday parties for her and lavishing gifts on her. In a way, this likens Bella to Harry – both characters seem to be modelled on Cinderella as they suddenly are torn out of their humble lives in the shadows to now be treated like royalty. On closer inspection, however, Bella is rather comparable to Dudley than Harry in several ways:

Firstly, the gifts the Cullens spoil her with always seem out of proportion: the new stereo for her car, the new car once she is engaged to Edward and the wardrobe full of clothes in the new house she receives after her wedding all make her feel abashed, yet she accepts and enjoys these gifts. Smith reads this “spoiling and pampering of Bella” as “some type of compensation”, namely “an extreme fantasy, which reinforces an adolescent’s expectations of success and social display” (266). Quite to the contrary, I would rather suggest that this is Meyer’s depiction not of adolescent expectations of success, but of western culture’s capitalist idea of coddling a child. After all, these expensive gifts go hand in hand with the protection that the Cullens offer Bella – they are just one aspect of their overall performance of parenting.

Secondly, Bella does not have direct access to this sudden wealth, but only indirect access through gifts. The relation between the gift-giver and receiver is an asymmetrical one in terms of power or marks a pre-existing asymmetry, as in the case of Bella and the Cullens. Bella asks “But how could I let him [Edward] give me things when I had nothing to reciprocate with?” as another of her birthdays is approaching (*New Moon* 13). The direction of the gift-giving – from the Cullens to Bella – thus

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<sup>38</sup> *New Moon* 13.

marks a relation of dependence or economic asymmetry typical of the relation of parents to child. Like Dudley, Bella is spoilt with presents, but has no agency over money in contrast to Harry who decides on his own about what to invest the money in his Gringott's account into. Gift-giving can therefore, as in the case of Dudley, be read as an attempt to reaffirm and secure the dependence of the child. While this type of coddling through material excess is depicted by Rowling in the sharp tone of satire, Meyer offers no such criticism on the topic of "spoiling" the child – in fact, the topic of capital and class in general is treated far less ambiguously by Meyer than by Rowling.

Rather, the Cullens' spoiling of Bella is depicted as part and parcel of how 'proper' childhood ought to be achieved by parents. The precocious adult Bella first needs to be thrown back and experience 'proper' childhood to then be able to become a proper adult. As pointed out earlier, this is achieved when she takes the steps that transform her from girl to woman in the gender-conservative world of *Twilight*: She marries a man and gives birth to a child. Her ensuing death and rebirth as vampire are the fantasy elements that mark that she is now fully grown up. Also, this marks her upward mobility in terms of class, and the fact that her adult identity is still relational:

She chooses not just Edward, but an identity and a lifestyle that has been throughout glamorized, marked by consumer capitalism (complete with prestige cars, the details of which are painstakingly laid out for the reader) and unlimited cash-flow. As Negra argues, 'luxury consumption' is celebrated within postfeminism, where capitalism becomes 'salvation', signalling 'unapologetic class stratification in America' (2009: 118–19). Consistent with this logic, the *Twilight* saga is a tale of class mobility: 'The chief point of this story is that the couple aren't equals, that his love rescues her from herself by elevating her to a class she could not otherwise join' (Miller, 2008, original emphasis). [...] As in most romance fiction, Bella acquires myriad forms of power (and immortality) only through 'acquiring the hero' (Cohn, 1988: 5). (Taylor 41)

Only when she has become Edward's wife and mother to his child does she directly access and make use of the wealth at her hands. But while money in terms of agency is used as a marker of adulthood in *Twilight*, Bella's particularly feminine adult role as mother again complicates this relation and limits the way she will use the economic power at her disposal. The way she uses the money is very different from how the other vampires use it: the Cullens literally are ideal, glamorous capitalist consumers for they spend money on fast cars and fancy clothes without bothering about numbers, for money is something they simply have on their hands (*New Moon* 13). Bella, on the other hand, because she is the ideal self-sacrificial mother, only once decides to spend the enormous wealth she now has access to and that is when she needs money to ensure her daughter's safety. The ideal mother is therefore a subject that is out of line with the capitalist logic, for her selflessness is a negation of all desire

and thus negates consumption. On the whole then, the *Twilight* saga first seems to follow a similar formula as the *Harry Potter* series in that it depicts direct access to capital as marker of agency leading into adulthood and gift-giving and -receiving as an indirect access to capital that marks dependence and therefore is the relation of childhood. However, gender here emerges as a disturbing factor in that logic. *Twilight's* celebration of capitalism and its celebration of the gender-conservative ideal of the self-sacrificial mother stand in a sharp contradiction that is not negotiated in the text.

### 6.4 Childhood as Lack: the Vampire Child

So much weight had been on her tiny shoulders.  
It was time she got to be a child again –  
protected and secure. A few more years of  
childhood. (*Breaking Dawn* 694)

While becoming a vampire is ultimately depicted as not only unproblematic for Bella's coming of age, but as its pinnacle, this does not mean that the issue of vampirism's clash with natural aging is not explored in *Twilight*. The novel series features a conventional motif in vampire literature to problematize the inhibition of coming of age: the vampire child. The last book of the series, *Breaking Dawn*, not only marks Bella's final step in coming of age, but also explores the topic of childhood innocence by introducing this stock feature of vampire fiction. Already in Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, an ageless vampire child enters the stage to thwart the normative coming of age of a human girl named Clara. Carmilla seeks to monopolize Clara so that the latter cannot go the conventional path of women growing up at the time, which was leaving home to marry and have children. Because Carmilla seems to come from the same class and because she is such a beautiful child, it is easy for her to infiltrate the family and get access to her prey. The latter will remain a central feature of all vampire children to follow: their very childness, since associated with innocence, enables them to find and kill their prey without raising suspicion before it is too late. By contemporary standards, however, Carmilla would rather be categorized as teenager than as child as both she and Clara explore their sexuality together.

For a long time after *Carmilla*, vampire fiction is devoid of prominent vampire children until Anne Rice's Claudia, a little girl turned vampire by the novel's central characters Louis and Lestat, comes along. The five year old girl struggles with her identity when she notices that she has physically stopped aging and will never be a woman in the eyes of onlookers. Rice places a particular focus on the clash of the bestial ways of vampires and the appearance of "a golden-haired child, a holy innocent, a little girl" (115). Her stepfather Lestat enjoys dressing her up like a little doll, and Louis' descriptions of her appearance may remind one rather of the idealized

version of the female child that porcelain dolls represent than a real child (e.g., “she was gone in a flurry of bonnet ribbons and clicking slippers” (Rice 125)). For Karen J. Renner, who explores the different types of representations of evil children in western culture, the combination of Claudia’s delight in killing and feeding with endearing girlhood is even “one of the most horrifying aspects of the novel” (4). Generally speaking, the figure of the vampire child is employed to problematize the psychological troubles arising from the inhibition of coming of age. At the same time, the paradoxical values attached to childhood in western culture – the “holy innocence” of children versus their “precivilatory, bestial ways” (Jenkins, “Introduction” 2) – are brought to light and juxtaposed in a blatant manner in the vampire child.

Renner describes the vampire child in general as a type of feral child which she considers fundamentally different from the second major type of evil child, the possessed child. The possessed child is an innocent child which has been possessed by a demonic influence of some kind. Stories of possessed children often boil down to a warning that children need protection from an intact nuclear family so as not to become susceptible to harmful outside influences (8). Tales of feral children, in contrast, criticize broader social failings like “war, careless pollution, adult violence” (14) instead of focussing on the nuclear family, according to Renner. Renner groups zombie children and vampire children into the category of feral child narratives, for these characters display “appetites and beliefs” that “supersede the pity and empathy that prevent the ‘civilized’ from operating according to similar desires” (12).

This very general analysis of vampire children as feral children, however, turns out to be problematic, for on closer inspection, the difference between feral and possessed children is not as clear-cut as Renner insinuates. Both zombiism and vampirism are more often than not depicted as illnesses or even epidemics. The boundary to the category of the possessed child is hence rather fluid, because in both cases the child is under some influence that alters its “natural” behaviour. Also, as in the case of the possessed child, vampire children are sometimes healed from vampirism in these stories and return to their prior innocent state (such, for instance, is the case in *The Lost Boys* and *Near Dark*). These stories then do not permanently challenge the myth of childhood innocence. In other tales of feral children these, however, enjoy their bestial ways and are not returned into an innocent state. Therefore, generalizations about whether the feral child tale is deconstructing childhood innocence or not cannot be made.

Last but not least, as Renner herself admits, stories about feral children may just as well as stories about possessed children depict the failure of the nuclear family as the cause why the child became vulnerable to these dangerous influences. Family politics are, in fact, most of the time at the heart of plots around vampire children. Both in *Carmilla* and in *Interview with the Vampire*, for instance, the vampire children are in desperate search of a missing mother figure. These tales then often function to normalize family constellations that are nuclear: While the very idea of vampirism

does away with the biological need for a mother and thus avoids the abject female body, the importance of the social role of the mother is then highlighted through these child characters.

The preceding analysis has already shed light on the importance of mother-child relations in the *Twilight* saga and how these are problematized. This is further explored when Meyer, like Rice, creates characters that allow for a play with the opposition of childhood innocence and children's precivilatory ways in the last part of the series. As Bella is pregnant with what seems to be a vampire baby, Carlisle explains to her why creating vampire children came to be forbidden, in fact, a taboo, in the vampire society by relating the tale of the "immortal children" to her:

"They created vampires out of humans who were barely more than infants." I'd had to swallow back the bile that rose in my throat as I'd pictured what he was describing. "They were beautiful," Carlisle had explained quickly. So endearing, so enchanting, you can't imagine. You had but to be near them to love them; it was an automatic thing. However, they could not be taught. They were frozen at whatever level of development they'd achieved before being bitten. Adorable two-year-olds with dimples and lips that could destroy half a village in one of their tantrums. If they hungered, they fed, and no words of warning could restrain them. Humans saw them, stories circulated, fear spread like fire in dry bush... (*Breaking Dawn* 30f.)

Because Meyer's vampire children are solely ruled by their appetites and cannot be argued with, they also fall under the label of feral children. However, it is less the broad societal failings that Renner associates with feral children that are addressed by this motif, but again, the dynamics of family are problematized through the figure of the vampire child, in particular those of mother and child, for the narrative focusses subsequently on the tale of a particular female vampire who created a baby boy vampire. Her motivation is depicted as incomprehensible and irrational (see *Breaking Dawn* 32: "what had he meant to her that would cause her to cross this most uncrossable of lines?") and her action as an irresponsible violation of vampire law that deserves the maximum penalty for it endangered the entire vampire society in spite of the fact that Carlisle admits that "you had to be but near them [the vampire children] to love them" (30). The tale of the immortal children explores the dark underside of children's innocence, namely their aggression and their lack of empathy and reason, and turns the unconditional love parents feel for their children, which is depicted as instinct in the dominant discourse, into a dangerous threat for society. Particularly the bond between vampire mother and child is depicted as perversely strong, for the vampire mother is depicted to endanger everyone else in her clan to save the vampire boy she created (32). The story thus gives a monstrous twist on the motif of the innocent child and the self-sacrificial mother, for here the mother's unconditional love for her child turns into an immediate threat for the community. The vampire mother

of the immortal child can be read as another single mother marked as deviant mother, for she acts on her own and outside of a nuclear family constellation. Whitton highlights that mothers in the *Twilight* saga “in the literal sense – as approved to father-approved surrogates like Esme – are selfish and inadequate, and more often than not come to a bad end” (133). This may at first seem contradictory, but indeed, the mother’s self-sacrificial love is here depicted as something selfish, for she ignores what her actions mean on a greater social scale, that is, beyond the relation of mother and child. Thus, while the self-sacrificial mother is on the one hand idealized in the text, she is, on the other, also demonized and thus turns into a figure that needs control by a patriarch’s superior reason.

Not only in the portrayal of Carlisle and Esme, but also of Edward and Bella as parents to a vampire child, Meyer eventually displays the ideal, patriarchal family constellation as the only functioning one, demonstrating through various plotlines that if the mother is so passionately devoted to the child that she is beyond reasoning, she is then balanced out by the father whose superior reason and wisdom eventually lead to making the right choices. The image contained in this relation harkens back to the notion of men and women as binary opposites: women/mothers as pure emotion, men as having reason. The normalizing of the nuclear family constellation in the *Twilight* saga thus again works with notions of gender that root back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

While the importance of self-sacrificial maternal love is stressed repeatedly throughout the novels, it is in the end the fathers who have the most important and healthiest influence concerning the upbringing of their children. At the example of Carlisle and the shape shifter Sam, Whitton argues that “the mother’s parenting role is marginalized – the father is the source of guidance and support, and is far more involved with his charges’ inner lives and personal struggles” in *Twilight* (129). This is most apparent in the way Edward, Bella and their baby Renesmee are depicted, for while Bella’s love for her child is an instantaneous reflex, it is Edward who can read the baby’s mind and who is thus closer to its inner life. In addition, the name Bella has chosen for her child is shortened to “Nessie” against her will, which, according to Whitton, “is just another example of how Bella’s authority as a mother is sidelined by authoritative males” (135). The relationship between mother and child never develops beyond the cliché of unconditional love as maternal instinct, for whenever Bella and Renesmee see, they declare to each other their endless love as mother and child, but beyond that declaration, no interaction takes place between them. Because of Renesmee’s special abilities as vampire/human hybrid no nursing, feeding or other form of taking care of her is necessary so that the relationship of mother and child is actually never depicted in action. In fact, most of the time, Renesmee is in the care of other members of the family and barely spends time with her mother. The reduction of the mother’s role to self-sacrifice and the depiction of men as central figures in the lives of children, is, in Whitton’s eyes not a “reflection of the current the Western fashion for ‘new men’”, but a recreation of “the norm from the Classical period”, in

which the father was the central parent as parenting pamphlets addressing solely the father evidence (129f.).

Renesmee's role within the family not only gives further insight into how women's maternal power and role are diminished within the novel series, but also gives another glimpse of the anxieties around children's precivilatory ways already indicated by the tale of the immortal children. Also, the design of the character further strengthens the novel's construction of adulthood as perfection and childhood as lack.

The vampire/human hybrid Renesmee ages more quickly than a normal child would. This does not only mean that her mother's pregnancy is accelerated but that Renesmee quickly grows from a baby into a child and then into a young woman. Her journey from birth to adulthood only takes seven years. Then, she will stop aging altogether. While Bella feels wistful that her daughter only has "a few more years of childhood" (*Breaking Dawn* 694), Renesmee's aging process reaffirms the novel's overall construction of adulthood as a static phase of perfection as embodied by the vampires and of childhood as a state of lack, which means that the child needs protection, but which ultimately needs to be overcome.

Renesmee is maybe the most un-childlike child to ever occur in a work of fiction. She can communicate with everyone around her soon after her birth (albeit only telepathically) and shows the intelligence and empathy of a child many years her senior. Both physically and psychologically she is growing at a rapid pace. When Bella first sees her child two days after giving birth, she observes:

She was maybe twice the size of the baby in my dim memory and she seemed to be supporting her own torso easily as she stretched toward me. Her shiny bronze-colored hair fell in ringlets past her shoulders. Her chocolate brown eyes examined me with an interest that was not at all child-like; it was adult, aware and intelligent. (*Breaking Dawn* 405)

Instead of a monstrous child like the immortal children who cannot be restrained, i.e. civilized, Renesmee turns out to be perfect in that this lack has been eradicated: She is a child that is "too-aware", that really is a miniature adult, not a child at all – also on the visual level. Different constructions of age as identity category come with different sets of conventions for visualizing age. For instance, in the Middle Ages, children were regularly depicted as miniature adults in paintings. Analysing the background information on how the filmmakers of the saga's movie adaptation tried to visualize Renesmee helps to realize how much this depiction of a child is out of line with our current cultural construction of the child. The bonus material of the American DVD box *Twilight Forever* contains a clip called "Chucklesmee" in which the producers talk about different attempts of bringing the character to screen, the first of which included using an animatronic doll. Supported visually by some shots from the set, they explain that this attempt of visualizing a baby that did in some way look adult



resulted in a “grotesque” figure, “a fake thing” that viewers would not consider loveable at all, but rather horrifying, hence the allusion to the murderous doll Chucky. As Steffen Hantke points out, the choice of technology and its quality in depicting deviant images of infants plays an important part in whether audiences feel afraid of it or not (42). The animatronic doll, apparently, not only seemed alien to the setting, but also triggered intertextual associations of other deviant images of children in film, albeit in a different genre.

As the visual material highlights, creatures that transgress the boundary between children and adults physically are usually the stuff of horror for the naturalness of this boundary is thus challenged. The movie *Child's Play* (1988) is a prime example for the disturbing quality of such figures for it features Chucky, the spirit of a murderer trapped in a baby doll, also depicted with the help of animatronics. Like the immortal children, Chucky is an image of a wolf in sheep's clothing, of a threat with the most inconspicuous outer appearance. But while Renesmee transgresses age boundaries in a way that may seem “unnatural” to readers and viewers, she is not a figure of fear-inspiring deviance in the novel, because her deviance consist of learning to control herself, be it physically or psychologically, faster than she is expected to. She deviates towards the ideal, i.e. adulthood as a state of perfect self-control, and thus does not pose a threat to society, unlike Chucky, the immortal children or Rice's Claudia. On the contrary, she is even depicted as a less troublesome and burdening creature than any ‘normal’ child would be. Ultimately, therefore, the filmmakers decided for a visual realization of Renesmee that draws less attention to her ‘unnaturalness’ and is free of intertextual associations with evil infants in the horror film. Her face was subtly changed through CGI all throughout the film to look slightly older and more feminine, which again reaffirms the notion of female coming of age as a process of feminization and beautification.

Coming back to the novel, the fact that the only child that actually appears in the main plot is really a miniature adult is symptomatic for a fear of children as “presocial” and uncivilized. The extremes depicted in the immortal children seem so hostile that they cannot be negotiated but only deleted if children are to be depicted positively. In the ideal world, there is no place for children, because they are not ideal – their identity, in *Twilight*, is first and foremost marked as lack – lack of awareness and lack of self-control. Renesmee can be read as the analogy to the neutered vampire mother, because she is a version of the child from which everything that is unsettling has been cleansed. The text addresses, in both cases, the contradictions and excesses western culture needs to repress to make coherent identity possible, then casts them under again. The shift from the representation of Bella's body as horrific, abject spectacle during giving birth to her vampire body as docile body is congruent with the shift from a fear-inspiring representation of children as feral killers to the child as miniature adult.

Ostensibly, the saga celebrates traditional family values and idealizes the patriarch, the stay-at-home mom, and their beautiful, lovable child – or so it has been

read. Yet, as the depiction of the immortal children, of Renesmee and of the different vampire mothers in the saga shows, this ideal is haunted by the essences that constitute it – the self-sacrificial, devoted mother, her generative power and body, and the innocent child. In an exploration of the dark underside of these myths, the self-sacrificial mother turns out to be a monster that threatens her entire world by uncompromisingly loving her child, her life-giving gift is seen a horrific vision of blood and gore that threatens all boundaries and meaning, and the innocent child is revealed to be a precivilizational murderer that cannot be argued with. *Twilight's* most Gothic moments are those in which the self-destructive ideological power of the ideal family is revealed, moments in which the family threatens to collapse under its own ideological weight. *Twilight* can be read as a hail to family values, but it also can be read as a tale of the impossibility of the traditional family, of the horror at its heart.

#### 6.5 The Representation of Age in *Twilight*

At many points, *Twilight's* representation of children, adults and coming of age overlaps with *Harry Potter's*, though the stories seem quite different from each other at first glance. Both stories juxtapose images of good, self-sacrificial mothers with images of bad, selfish mothers who block or boycott their children's coming of age. At the same time, the importance of the role of the mother beyond her self-sacrifice is diminished, for it is the patriarchs and male mentors that guide children through their coming of age in both sagas. From a feminist point of view then, the representation of mother roles in both of these novels is highly problematic.

The issue of this conservative view of femininity is, however, much more explicit in *Twilight*, because it features a female protagonist. On the one hand, this protagonist enters adulthood through an act of self-sacrifice, just like Harry Potter, yet this act is not committed in order to save the world, but to save the family. In the defining moment of identity transition then, the restriction of female identity to the domestic zone is cemented in *Twilight*. In *Harry Potter*, school as the preparation for a later professional life and as training ground for the protagonist's adventures has a central role, for he is to enter the macrocosm of the real world after leaving school. In *Twilight*, the significance of school is barely existent for its protagonist does not have to be prepared for the outside world – all that she needs to learn about is her place in the family as wife and mother.

While *Twilight* thus is more in line with Victorian notions of femininity and the marriage plot found in nineteenth-century girls' coming of age stories than with other contemporary fiction for young adults, it does, however, also address the contradictory pressures and paradoxes young women have to face today. For instance, the saga paints a detailed picture of a role reversal taking place between Bella and her mother. The story thus echoes fears of a parentification of young girls by their selfish mothers

and participates in a wider discourse of crisis. This discourse centres on the notion that mothers who refuse to grow up, that is, to internalize and perform the stereotype of the good mother as selfless, sexless and self-sacrificial, thus force their daughters into this role and disturb the normal course of their coming of age. Hence, this discourse stands in blatant contradiction to normative femininity in late consumer capitalism, which defines femininity as beauty, beauty as youth and creates the imperative that because women now can look young forever with the help of dieting, exercise, styling and plastic surgery, they must stay young forever. This contradiction leaves mothers torn between the body project of eternal youth and the abdication from the preoccupation with lifestyle, looks and their own self-realization. The latter is at odds with the logic of capitalism because the body project is also about consumption – it necessitates an enormous investment of money and time. The self-sacrificial mother, however, as one can see at the example of Bella, does not spend money on herself. If she ever resorts to the capital at her hands, it is only for the benefit of the family. Thus, while *Twilight* celebrates the ideal of the domestic, passive heroine in an imitation of nineteenth-century female coming of age literature, it cannot hide the ways in which this ideal is at odds with our present cultural moment. This is resolved through the fantastic figure of the vampire which allows a performance that integrates the contrary pressures: Bella must die as the self-sacrificial mother and gets to live on as eternally young and beautiful woman at the same time through becoming a vampire.

The same strategy is applied to the paradox of family and childhood, for the only functional family is as fantastic as *Harry Potter's* school for wizards. Casting vampires as both ideal adults and ideal nuclear family hints at the impossibility of these ideals. *Twilight* celebrates family values, yet its ideal family only pretends to be a family. It celebrates motherhood, yet insists that women must be neutered to become perfect. *Twilight* glorifies the child as centre of the nuclear family, for its need for protection legitimizes this constellation, yet this figure is absent from the family for most of the story except for haunting memory of monstrous children, and when a vampire child eventually enters the story, it is really already a miniature adult. Through the figure of the vampire as perfect adult, *Twilight* heightens contemporary western culture's obsession with discipline, self-control and static, clean and proper bodies as expression of these virtues. One could even go so far as to label *Twilight's* representation of western culture as being anti-child, for there really seems to be no place for children as figures identified with permanent becoming and a state of lack in the kind of world charted here.

## 7. Childhood and the Discourse of Crisis: The Haunted Return of the Father

Both the *Harry Potter* series and the *Twilight* saga try to give meaning and consecution to the concepts of childhood, adulthood and coming of age by drawing on long established forms of representation for these concepts, such as the hero's journey or the marriage plot. The representation of childhood in particular is twofold in both story worlds: On the one hand, an ideal version of childhood is constructed, which is both times enabled through a fantastical space. In the case of *Harry Potter* this is the wizard school Hogwarts; in *Twilight* it is the family of the Cullens. In both spaces, the protagonist can perform as an ideal child which s/he had been hindered from in previous settings. These spaces are spaces of the past that are depicted as desirable, and turn Gothic, but through the device of the fantastic their particular historical locatedness is blurred so that they appear to present a universal version of childhood. Thus, these representations participate in constructing and reaffirming the myth of childhood and the child.

In both novel series, this image is contrasted with a representation of childhood that is clearly and explicitly marked as contemporary: Both stories refer to widely disseminated contemporary discourses that evoke the feeling of crisis concerning childhood, adulthood and coming of age as the comparison to contemporary representations in the mass media, particularly reality TV programs, has shown. In *Harry Potter*, concerns over the relations of dependence between children and adults with regard to the intertwinement of the emotional level and the economic level are addressed in the passages focusing on the Dursley family. The series thus participates in broad discourse of crisis which purports that because of parents' emotional dependence on their children, they tend to spoil them. This spoiling mainly takes the shape of a prolonged economic dependence, which ultimately threatens to inhibit their children's successful entrance into adulthood in a capitalist society. The problem depicted here is specific to an economic state of surplus and leisure associated with late capitalism, yet the way the different roles of the parents are depicted with regard to this problem echoes older anxieties about parenting. The fear of an effeminizing influence of the mother on her son – here signaled through Petunia Dursleys' pet names – in the absence or obliviousness of the father already exists in the Romantic period and continues into the second half of the twentieth century as psychoanalysis begins to link a male persistence in adolescence to a mother complex. Marie Louise von Franz, for instance, roots the increase in what she considers a pathology of stunted development in the condition of a fatherless society in the twentieth century (7). This term can refer literally to an absence of the father as divorce rates increased and to a dismantling of paternal structures and authority through the philosophers and literary critics of the baby boomer generation as well as a refusal to adopt the authoritarian style of parenting of the preceding generation (Coats 61).

In contrast, in the depiction of Harry as ideal child not only does one find an ideal mother who commits the ultimate sacrifice for her child, but she then consequently has no further role in the upbringing of her child, thus enabling the figure of the *Übervater* Albus Dumbledore to take center stage in strongly and safely guarding the young progeny towards coming of age. This figure can stand for the father, but also for patriarchal institutions, for the text suggests that the emotionally uninvolved and stricter guidance that schools offer (or rather used to offer in that imagined golden age of childhood) is the only truly ideal space for children to come of age. The figure of the self-sacrificial mother is thus integrated into a classical model of education, where the upbringing of children is still the task of the father.

The text thus constructs a crisis of childhood by juxtaposing a fantastical ideal with a contemporary image of deviance. The impression is created that childhood as it always has been and always should have been is now suddenly troubled – children are no longer innocent, but greedy and calculating, because their parents are no longer performing their roles correctly and because the schools of the era of the boarding school have come out of fashion. Due to these changes coming of age is now inhibited.

*Twilight* operates much in the same way to produce a feeling of crisis. While the fantastical setting offers a picture-perfect family life where children can be innocent, nurtured and protected, this is contrasted with a contemporary family model showing a “broken home” consisting of a selfish mother and an emotionally distant father. Particularly the mother is linked to the spirit of the 1960s and 70s again and in the same conservative fashion as in *Harry Potter*, this leads to a negative portrayal of this role. On the one hand, her refusal to take up the role of the parent has muddled up her teenage daughter’s coming of age, and on the other hand, the mother’s urge for self-realization leads her to disrupt the otherwise wholesome nuclear family early on, thus leaving the child unprotected and forcing Bella to try to grow up before her time.

The ideal space for childhood created in the text is a family consisting of the self-sacrificial mother, who, apart from her sacrifice, plays no major role in the upbringing of her child, and a dominant father figure whose task is the leadership of the family and the guidance of the children in particular. This ideal is even mirrored in the text to strengthen its importance (Bella and Edward turn into mirror images of Esme and Carlisle as soon as they become parents). Again, childhood is depicted as being in crisis, because families no longer offer the structures that enable childhood.

Therefore, both texts can be interpreted as conservative: they offer a conservative perspective on school and family, rearing nostalgia for an imagined time when these spaces supposedly managed to protect children and guide them safely towards adulthood. On this level, both stories are fantasies of a return of the father – both, in the sense of the patriarch and in the sense of patriarchal myths. This nostalgia feeds on a critique of contemporary childhood as in crisis, suggesting an immanent threat of a disappearance of childhood and of a failure to come of age.

While the critics that condemn adults reading children's and YA literature often claim that these try to return to their own childhoods through the text, the interpretations at hand rather suggest that what these texts offer as nostalgic vision is no one's childhood in particular, but a reaffirmation of commonly held ideals of childhood. This would seem to reaffirm Zohar Shavit's claim that crossover literature

enables adults briefly to re-experience aspects of a lost childhood, though this is no longer a "pure" childhood, but rather an image of childhood that adults wish to reconstruct. Texts that address both children and adults make it possible to reenter a fabricated childhood – one that never really existed, but nonetheless pretends to be the nostalgic childhood adults always love to remember. (95)

The preceding analysis however, has shown that *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* do not leave it at the nostalgic, image of ideal childhood, but depict this as troubled through the juxtaposition with past and contemporary images of deviant families and childhoods in order to create the feeling of a crisis. Thus, the image of childhood they offer is complicated, maybe even deconstructed, through the figures that haunt ideal childhood in the text. From the ideal boarding school childhood of nineteenth-century England rises the haunting specter of Lord Voldemort as an embodiment of the racist and classist prejudice of the time that reminds the reader of the historic specificity of the image and of its dark underside. Likewise, the ideal, patriarchal family of the Cullens as a safe haven for children is haunted by its past of raping and murdering patriarchs that function as dark doubles to the good patriarch Carlisle Cullen. These haunting figures then boycott the nostalgia for ideal childhood and for a simple and linear coming of age as first suggested in the text. At the same time, the representations of contemporary family life and children in these texts mirror current fears of a disappearance of family and childhood altogether and hence directly confront the reader with these anxieties. Thus, when literary critics describe crossover literature plainly as a source of nostalgia for adults, they simplify the ideological complexity of these works.

Moreover, not only is nostalgia for a lost myth of childhood first raised, but then boycotted by these threatening figures rising from the myth – in this reading of the novels, the texts already contain the very prohibition which signals that a return is to childhood is not possible. Both *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* chart figures that attempt to return to youth or persist in childhood instead of following the normative, linear flow of age as villains and monsters, such as Lord Voldemort as monstrous infant and revenant and *Twilight's* immortal children as eternal pre-civilized killers.

In conclusion to this analysis and interpretation of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* with regard to their representation of age, it can be said that these novel series have not only been the object of a discussion about a disappearance of clearly delineated stages

of life, but this discussion is the very subject of these stories. While on the one hand, they try to fill the categories child and adult with meaning and offer patterns of imagining coming of age, they, on the other hand, cannot do so without addressing the inherent contradictions these categories and patterns are haunted by. Fiona McCulloch argues that contemporary children's literature typically does not "show us a world where children can remain forever young, as with *Peter Pan*, but instead, they must cope with the hostilities of life" (42) and indeed both series at hand present a story which insists that one must come of age. While in J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* Peter Pan was allowed to stay a child happily ever after in Neverland, contemporary children's and YA literature cannot allow for the existence of eternal childhood for anyone. Figures that attempt to do that are shown in a very different light than Peter Pan. Characters that are trapped in perpetual childhood as *Twilight's* immortal children or that repeatedly and conversely transgress fixed age categories, like Lord Voldemort, are demonized and ultimately need to be destroyed. If one reads western culture from the monsters it creates, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggested, then these figures bespeak anxieties of a collapse of stable identity categories at the most fundamental level – they are monsters as harbingers of a category crisis with regard to age. The images of achieved adulthood that the stories close with, of happy hyperfamilies where all major characters are suddenly integrated into the familial bond and where the happy and well-protected progenies signal that the future of childhood is safe, do, in their overcompensation, bespeak how deeply troubled our notion of childhood and coming of age really is. They reveal that our notions of the adult and the child are still patriarchal figurations and whilst they are haunted by the underpinnings of patriarchy, these stories seem to suggest, paradoxically, to the reader that at the same time there is no other way to create meaningful age categories.

Part II: Readers of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*





## 8. The Kidult: Adulthood and the Discourse of Crisis

Starting in the last decade of the twentieth century and continuing throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, the success of the *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* novels with adult readers bestowed a lot of media attention upon said readers and the books. In an act of what seems to be wilful ignorance of literary history, these instances of crossing over from the children's to the adult book market were treated as if they were not standing in a long literary tradition, but instead presented a new, unprecedented and alarming phenomenon symptomatic of a cultural decline. The popularity of crossover literature was interpreted as a sign that more and more adults were refusing to grow up.

The past chapters served to debunk the claim that adults reading children's or young adult were simply seeking to regress into their childhood. The ideological complexity of these books, in particular with regard to their representation of the identity category age, was highlighted. If the cultural work of children's and young adult literature is more complex than a simple regress into childhood, and if the crossing over of children's literature is not a novel phenomenon at all, the question arises why said discourse of crisis existed in the first place around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The subsequent chapters are dedicated to offering answers to this question. By analysing the marketing of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* to adults and the representation of adult readers of the two novel series in the press, the unsaid premises that this discourse of cultural decline is built upon are extrapolated.

### 8.1 The Adult Readers of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*

In 2003, when *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, the fifth book of the saga, was published, it was the first of the series to be available in a regular children's edition and also in an adult edition right on the day of the launch. The adult edition was identical to the children's edition except for its dust jacket. Prior to that, adult editions had already existed, but they had always only been published with some lag after the children's edition. This simultaneous launch was probably based on Bloomsbury's realization of the increasing popularity of the adult covers. However, at the time Bloomsbury was still experimenting with the style of the adult cover, apparently unsure about how to make it look more mature and at the same time not too bland. The following analysis of the double marketing of *Harry Potter* will therefore not focus on the look of the original adult edition of *The Order of the Phoenix*, but will work with the design that Bloomsbury eventually decided for and that they then continued for the entire series, illustrated by the example of the hardcover editions of *The Goblet of Fire*.

In comparison to the children's edition, the adult edition seems almost minimalist: the reduction to a single item of the title (the goblet of fire) and the reduction of the number and brightness of colours lends the adult dust cover a more serious air (Karg and Mende 23f<sup>39</sup>), connoting both maturity and quality. This double publishing for children and adults is by no means a new phenomenon, but stands in a long established literary tradition as Hans Heino Ewers demonstrates with the example of the publication histories of E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Nußknacker und Mäusekönig" and Lewis Carroll's *Alice*-novels (125).

In addition, in 2003 Scholastic, Rowling's American publisher, started advertising the *Harry Potter* books in American magazines that were clearly directed at adults, such as the *Rolling Stone*. Scholastic's declared intention was to reach out to a new demographic consumer segment: "[I]here's a strong 18-35 demographic that may not have come into contact with Harry, people who probably don't have children [...].What we're saying is: Harry Potter is for someone who likes to shop, likes to read gossip columns, likes to have fun with their books." Thus, Barbara Marcus, president of Scholastic Children's Books, announced and explained the ad campaign to the press (Italie n. pag.). Apparently, then, these ads followed a different, complementary strategy in relation to the adult editions of the *Harry Potter* books. While the latter ones were to communicate, quality, "serious" literature, the ad campaign communicated that Harry Potter was "fun", something to consume lightly, a leisure activity for adult readers, just like watching a football game and, of course, also a lifestyle choice, just like shopping or being a biker or a skater (Scholastic "biker ad", "football boys", "skater ad", "shopaholic ad").

There is, however, more to how these ads work. The general layout of the ads resembles the typical composition of print ads for luxury foodstuffs like vodka or cigarettes with a big colour photo that has a short slogan on it as the centrepiece of the ad, a section at the bottom that is partitioned off through its white colour that contains more text and a photo of the advertised product in the right-hand bottom corner of the ad. Through this parallel, the ads subtly evoke connotations of leisure and more importantly, of devil-may-care enjoyment. At the same time they also transport that they are exclusively directed at the adult market. Significantly, the ads use pictures of the children's edition of *Harry Potter*, not of the new adult edition. This helps inspiring a desire for the novels as they are now coded as goods that the id wants, though the super-ego says that they are not good for them, just like tobacco and alcohol. *Harry Potter* thus becomes a forbidden, desirable object.

Furthermore, the "biker ad" displaces the terms "death eaters", "fire whiskey" and "flying cars" from the magical world of the wizards in *Harry Potter* into a new context. The tattooed and long-haired, grim-looking man in the front, clad in black leather, his motorcycle, the dark alley and the graffiti on the walls all denote outlaw motorcycle clubs and connote danger. The milieu depicted is remote from what one

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<sup>39</sup> Karg and Mende (21-28) offer a detailed comparison of all editions of *Harry Potter*, which only appears here in a reduced, exemplary form.

wants “innocent children” to come into contact with. It depicts the side of life that children ought to be protected from to preserve their innocence. The three terms from the novel are thus loaded with new, un-childish meanings and now associated with a lifestyle of drugs (“fire whiskey”), fast cars (“flying cars”), and notorious outlaw motorcycle gangs like the Hell’s Angels (“death eaters”). Thus, the ad attempts to make *Harry Potter* “cool” for an audience that believes of itself that rebellion and “living on the edge” are part of its habitus. The representation of masculinity is of particular significance here to fight the image of *Harry Potter* as “childish”: the biker depicted could even be labelled hypermasculine, signalled by his stare off-pose. This focus on masculinity can also be found in the second example, the “football boys ad”, though here it is not hypermasculinity that is depicted, but a more average image of masculinity associated with the guy next door. The second ad follows the same structural principle by taking the terms “butter beer”, “the tri-wizard tournament” and “Quidditch rivalries” and putting them into a new context. Under these three terms the ad depicts two men in their twenties or thirties, wearing casual clothes, eating pizza and drinking beer. The facts that one of them is pointing a remote control outside the frame, that the frame is lit by a light source outside of it and that the men are reacting in a very engaged and positively excited way to what they see outside the frame implies that they are watching something on a television screen, most probably some kind of sports game. The above-mentioned terms from *Harry Potter* are thus re-contextualized, as Carrie Grace Cooley suggests, as part and parcel of normative masculinity:

The caption which refers to these two men as "guys' guys" want the viewer to believe that these are your typically masculine men. The message of the image is that it is socially acceptable for these stereotypical men, these "guys' guys", to enjoy something that has historically been marketed as a product for children, and generally looked down on as unmasculine. The ad tries to make liking Harry Potter socially acceptable for men by emphasizing the "masculine" qualities of the book: butterbeer, the Triwizard Tournament, Quidditch rivalries. (n. pag.)

Thus, the first two ads seek to dissociate *Harry Potter* from the children’s market by juxtaposing it with a domestic version of normative masculinity (the football boys) and a rebellious hypermasculinity (the biker).

The “skater ad” also depicts two males; however, these are much younger than those in ad one and two. They are clearly identified as skaters and the three terms from the *Harry Potter* books, “flying broom sticks”, “nosebleed nugats” and “skele-gro”, also fit into the context of skateboarding as they relate to sports that are fun and dangerous (flying broom sticks refers to Quidditch), blood and pleasure (nosebleed nugats), broken bones and pain (skele-gro). The ad thus probably addresses male consumers for whom sports that are dangerous and adrenaline-kicking are part of

their habitus. The fact that the two males in the picture are rather young in comparison to those in the other ads does not necessarily mean that the ad only addresses men of this age group, but it is probably directed at those who have taken over part of male youth culture into their own adult life and thus already do have an understanding of age restrictions and lifestyles as rather fluid.

Only one of the four ads depicts a female, namely the “shopaholic ad”. This could be read as evidence that there are already many adult women reading *Harry Potter*, so that this segment of the market does not have to be explored as heavily. It could, however, also be grounded on the circumstance that while they are different desirable identities for men in western culture, ideal femininity, in contrast, is rather monolithic and does not offer different options of performing this gender identity. Moreover, the ad is strangely self-referential as it asks women to consume *Harry Potter* by depicting them as consumers – the woman in question is depicted here as shopping for shoes. The re-contextualized terms from *Harry Potter* in this case are “the Mirror of Erised”, “Rita Skeeter’s gossip column” and “invisibility cloaks”. The terms could now be read as referring to shopping in particular (“mirror”; “cloak”; “erised” = desire) or, to stereotypically female guilty pleasure in general (which, of course, includes shopping, but also gossip (“gossip column”) and vanity (“mirror”)).

However, the fourth ad not only stands out in terms of gender, but also in terms of class: While none of the ads is very particular in terms of the class-affiliation of the depicted subjects, the habitus in the first three examples would rather not be associated with the upper class, but rather anywhere from middle to lower class. The image of the woman, however, is decidedly one of a tough urban professional, who rather moves on the upper rungs of the social ladder. She looks right into the camera, yet is not smiling – a pose that could also be described as the stereotypically male stare-off pose. Her angular facial features, small breasts and dark clothes add to this sense of aggressive strength that would probably lead most onlookers to rather categorize her as successful businesswoman than as a caring housewife and mother. The fact that the latter two are the only identity choices of women in advertising, could explain why the campaign only features one image of a woman: as the declared aim is to address adults without children, this is the only female identity left for them to address.

Notwithstanding their differences with regard to gender and class, all of the ads of this campaign allude to the potential double-codedness of the literary text, that is, the idea that adult and older teenage readers will read the novel series differently from a child reader, as there might be some allusions in the text that the child reader might not be able to catch up on or cannot put into context (Ewers 123-126). The ad seeks to deconstruct *Harry Potter*’s genre affiliation as children’s book by highlighting how its reading depends on contextualization, which is a choice of the reader. Not only does it depict *Harry Potter* as multiply-addressed – that is, to both adults and children as readers in their own right (Ewers 123) by suggesting that there is something for everyone in it – it even potentially deconstructs the idea of a fixed, general genre

affiliation on a more global level as it suggests that a book's genre depends more on the reader and the reading process than on the book itself.

Thus, both the British and American publishing house of *Harry Potter* sought to normalize adult's consumption of the book series, making it easy and untainted for adults to buy and read what was originally marketed as a children's book. They were addressing adults as readers, not as gatekeepers of their children's literature, in contrast to how the first adults allegedly came into contact with the *Harry Potter* novels (Charles n. pag.; Stubenvoll 218).

As Ewers elaborates, the gatekeeper may be an addressee of a novel, but s/he is not its reader – s/he functions merely as a mediator. Thus, her/his process of reception is not “reading”, but “reading along” (120). Hence, while all children's literature is dually addressed, only some is multiply addressed. Multiply addressed children's literature can be enjoyed by adults, not as gatekeepers for someone else's literary consumption, but as readers reading for their own pleasure (123), which is what this marketing campaign wants to communicate about the novels. It is thus synonymous with all age literature or crossover literature.

Especially in the light of this definition of crossover literature, *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* have to be clearly differentiated with regard to how they first tapped into the adult readership, because of their differences with regard to both marketing and content. At first glance, the *Twilight* novels seemingly do not fulfill the economic criterion offered by Ewers to identify multiply-addressed novels. The original U.S.-edition has a minimal design, mostly in black with simple objects (e.g., an apple held by two hands, a flower, a red ribbon or a piece of a chess board) in red and white on the covers. The style of these covers is, from the very start, very similar to the adult edition of *Harry Potter* (black background, one central object, white print). In other words, the original marketing of *Twilight* had an all-age appeal from the outset of its publication in 2005.

A year later, in 2006, *Twilight* was first published in Britain by Atom, and this time, the marketing strategy was a different one. First of all, the dustjacket was clearly more colourful than the original American edition, though not quite as bright as the *Harry Potter* covers for children. The colour scheme suggests a targeted age group older than the *Harry Potter* readers but not yet adult. With regard to content, the cover of the first British edition shows a girl in her teens, presumably the protagonist, whose skinny frame and astonished, big-eyed over the shoulder glance evoke the impression of a frail and innocent character. The lockers in the background imply a school setting and the one-point perspective of the image has a doorframe as vanishing point.

In combination, the pose of the girl, her fragility and the perspective create the impression of an innocent, weak girl, fleeing from a more powerful persecutor. Her extremely thin, almost bony frame and the fact that the blurb on the flipside of the dust jacket has been printed in a font that resembles letters scratched into stone further implicates that she may have been kidnapped and held prisoner for some

time<sup>40</sup>. In terms of gender relations, this design suggests an interpretation of the relationship between Edward and Bella that subverts the dominant reading of the text. More importantly, however, for the context in which the cover is discussed here, this image does not aim at an all age audience. On the whole, the colour scheme, the young age of the girl on the cover and the school setting communicate to prospective readers that this is a story about a young teenage girl meant for young teenage girls. Indeed, in contrast to the first *Harry Potter* novels, which were originally targeted at boys aged 9-12, the *Twilight* novels initially were targeted at girls in their teens (Click 3). Atom, however, soon noticed that they were scaring off part of their potential market in Britain with this exclusively teen dust jacket and henceforth adopted the original covers of Little, Brown and Company that were also appealing to adults.

Whether *Twilight* was from the start marketed as all age literature, as in the U.S., or initially only to teenagers, as in Britain, there is one contrast to *Harry Potter* that remains constant: Because the targeted age group was a couple of years older than that of *Harry Potter*, adults can rarely have been in a situation where their first contact with the *Twilight* novels was as a gatekeeper, i.e. while they were reading out the novels to their children. More likely, most adults started reading *Twilight* all for themselves after the younger generation had directed their attention towards the books in a reversal of the gatekeeper dynamic. Such is the suggestion of Leogrande who conducted a survey with *Twilight* readers finding that

[a]s mothers watched their daughters not only enjoy the Twilight series, but reread the books over and over, talk about them with friends, read fan websites, and write fan fiction [...], they became curious. “Twilight Moms” founder Lisa Hanson read the books on a suggestion from teens in her neighborhood. (Leogrande 158)

Why this happened and how these books appealed to adult women does, of course, not only have to do with the dust jacket, but also with the novel’s content and genre: unlike the first *Harry Potter* books, these novels were written not for children, but for adolescents, hence they are more accessible to adults. In addition, the old-fashioned, conservative values of the romantic love-story are a central factor of the series’ appeal to adult readers. As Kirsten Starkweather, media director of *TwilightMoms.com* points out, “Bella ...is a responsible caretaker – she cooks, she cleans, she takes care of her family. Those are maternal traits that a lot of moms can relate to.” In addition to that, “[Edward’s] impeccable manners, his sense of morality, his way of speaking, [are] all old-fashioned....More like a man in a nineteenth-century novel than a modern teenage boy” (Em & Lo n. pag.). Moreover, the world of teenage Bella Swan is, when

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<sup>40</sup> There is an alternative possibility to interpret the choice of font here: In combination with what they are saying, which is a devoted love declaration by Bella to Edward, the scratched look of the letters may also remind one of teenage girls so obsessed by their first crush that they carve his name into their arm. This interpretation of the design choices probably would render the dust-jacket even more off-putting to adult readers.

it comes to intertextual references, not a teenage world at all, but rather adult, as Ann Steiner argues (196f). Instead of references to contemporary phenomena of youth culture, the intertextual references in the novels, such as Bella's favourite books *Wuthering Heights*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Romeo and Juliet* and her favourite song "Clair de Lune" by Claude Debussy are familiar to adult readers as well. Thus, in *Twilight* – in contrast to other teen fiction - intertextuality does not function to exclude adults from being able to fully decode the text.

On the whole then, in contrast to *Harry Potter*, adult readers of *Twilight* from the very outset read the novels for their own pleasure, speaking for an even stronger all-age appeal than in the case of *Harry Potter*, where adults often first read the novels along with their children. In addition, in many countries the novel was from its kick-off marketed in an edition that matched a more adult taste, as *Twilight* was categorized as a YA novel.

As logical as crossing over hence may seem and as keen as publishers were on marketing both book series across the age divide, as intent were literary critics to uphold the perceived boundary between children and YA literature on the one hand and adult literature on the other. In the discourse unfolding thus around the adults reading *Harry Potter* or *Twilight*, these readers are labeled as "kidults." They are equated to children – but only in one respect: While children in western culture are constructed ambivalently as, on the one hand, innocent and thus in need of protection and on the other, as lacking and thus in need of education and guidance, the kidult discourse only transfers the latter half to the image of the infantilized adult. Kidults are depicted as childish, not child-like, to resort to Peter Hollindale's elaboration on the different aspects of childness. By the example of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*, the following analysis will shed light on how this association is established by interrelating kidulthood with fandom and how kidults are differentiated with regard to gender.

### 8.1.1 *Harry Potter* and the Kidult Reader

Within the ten years in which J.K. Rowling successively completed her heptalogy about a young wizard battling dark forces, the mystery of why this story fascinated both children and adults was repeatedly marvelled at in the press. Far from neutral coverage, there was a clear dividing line among journalists splitting them into the camps of *Harry Potter* fans and *Harry Potter* haters, apparently just like most of their readers. On the one hand, there were enthralled reviewers like Melanie McDonagh from the *Mail on Sunday* who appraised Rowling for "the extraordinary achievement" of getting adults to buy her books not for their children, but for themselves (n. pag.). On the other hand, there was *The Independent's* Philip Hensher who showed himself alarmed about adults who would read and enjoy a novel whose appeal lay "in a sort of



‘And then, and then, and then’ which children find irresistible” (n. pag.), but which does not offer any of the merits of serious – read: adult – literature. Hensher comes to the conclusion that the *Harry Potter* mania among grown-ups is a symptom of the infantilization of adults and so does Ron Charles from the *Washington Post* in his article “Harry Potter and the Death of Reading” as well as author A.S. Byatt in her editorial “Harry Potter and the Childish Adult” for the *New York Times*. In 2002 Hensher calls these “infantilized” adults “kidults” (n. pag.), a term that was given new weight in 2007 by American political scientist Benjamin R. Barber in his book *Consumed*. In Barber’s definition a kidult is: “A new species of perennial adolescent, [...] an ethos of induced childishness: an infantilization that is closely tied to the demands of consumer capitalism in a global market economy” (3). Within the first 25 pages of his analysis of capitalism’s infantilization of its consumers he refers to Rowling’s novel series and its film adaptations six times, implying that its consumption was a defining feature of the “kidult”, just like Hensher and Charles.

The coinage kidult even made its way into other languages in the early 2000s: The German newspaper *Welt online* ran an article on “Die Suche nach der verlorenen Kindheit” where the German reader was introduced to the term “kidult” (Küster n. pag.) and in 2010 the web service MSN picked up on that article again, publishing a photo-stretch on the “new trend kidult” in cooperation with the newspaper. One of the shots shows Daniel Radcliffe as Harry Potter, and it is subtitled: “Self-made marmalade like mom’s or cartoons on the children’s channel take us back to a wholesome world. Books like ‘Harry Potter’ or ‘Twilight’ find their fans among the parents of those kids for whom they had originally been intended”.<sup>41</sup>

In popular culture, references to the crossover novels *Harry Potter* have become shorthand for depicting adult characters as infantilized. In the comedy *Yes-Man* from 2008, for instance, protagonist Carl (played by Jim Carrey), who has been talked into a covenant to say “yes” to anything, is thus forced to accept his immature bosses’ invitation to a Harry Potter-themed costume party. The main question this movie poses is what kind of behavior is proper for a present-day adult. Protagonist Carl starts out as a rational and serious adult, but also an unhappy and unloved party pooper. The movie follows a similar narrative as that identified by Karen Coats in her Jungian interpretation of *The Kid* (63): The protagonist can be described as the senex, into which the puer archetype needs to be integrated to form a wholesome identity. While such stories suggest that the child is part of a healthy adult identity, they still mostly pertain that adults cannot stay in an eternal childhood. Through the “yes”-covenant he is forced to open up to previously discarded opportunities to make new experiences, to do things that are silly and dangerous, but also fun. He is thus forced to reconnect with what the more esoterically-bent might call “the inner child”, but in the end has to find a way to negotiate this with being a serious adult. Through the course of this journey, the filmmakers deemed it necessary to display to the audience

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<sup>41</sup> My translation from German.

where the borderline to being too childish lies and this is mainly done through the depiction of Carl's aforementioned boss Norman. Judging from his teen lingo and attempts to become friends with his employees, whom he wants to convince that he is "cool", Norman is still mentally and emotionally compensating for high school experiences where he apparently was not one of the popular kids. The aforementioned behaviour makes Norman come off as a silly, pitiable and naïve character and his *Harry Potter* party, where he excessively makes intertextual references like "Ok guys, all aboard the Hogwarts express!" belongs to the most embarrassing sequences of the movie. To stress that Norman's demeanour and lifestyle is not the kind of identity that Carl should and could adopt through the "yes"-covenant he is dressed in a child-sized *Harry Potter* costume when he comes to Norman's party, explaining that "the only one they had left was for toddlers". By putting an adult man in a child-sized fantasy costume it is indicated that indeed the whole idea of a *Harry Potter* costume party is in fact ridiculously inappropriate for 'proper' adults – it just does not fit, or so the scene seems to signify.

Similarly to Norman, *The Big Bang Theory's* infantilized fanboys are also avid *Harry Potter* fans. This shows, for instance, when Howard accuses Sheldon of being a muggle ("The Prestidigitation Approximation"), Rajesh buys a "handcrafted Harry Potter wand" ("The Rothman Disintegration"), and Sheldon acidly comments on the dead two percent of pixels on Rajesh's screen: "Oh look, it's Harry Potter and 98% of Sorcerer's Stone!" ("The Toast Derivation"). The show's depiction of fandom in general and *Harry Potter* fandom in particular prompts its viewers to connect fandom to a particular mode of consumption and both of them to the infantilisation of adults, a connection that will be analysed more closely within the next subchapters.

As this exemplary evidence shows, references to *Harry Potter* work in the depiction of adults in popular culture as shorthand for infantilisation. Adult *Harry Potter* fans are depicted as kidults in mainstream television and movies and are presented as evidence of an increasing infantilisation through consumer culture. Even though *Harry Potter's* crossing over into the adult market was by no means unparalleled but rather has to be considered part of a long history of books crossing over into one or the other direction, *Harry Potter's* connection to the kidult discourse has become a widely spread meme in western culture comprising all negative stereotypes linked to crossreading.

### 8.1.2 Modes of Consumption: Kidults and Fandom

“Get a life!”  
William Shatner

The typical kidult, the infantilized adult who reads *Harry Potter* or *Twilight*, is always depicted not just as a reader, but as a devoted fan. Where exactly the borderline between a reader and a fan is to be located is a contested issue within fan studies. While early scholars such as Henry Jenkins, Camille Bacon Smith and John Fiske focused on fans who used fandom as a form of resistance, Sheffield and Marlo argue that this is too narrow a focus as “a large group of fans – those who greatly enjoy a text but do not participate in any other interpretive fan activities – were not seen as fans” (209). They argue with Matt Hills that fandom “cannot be separated into neat categories, but is a performative, psychological action that differs according to person, fandom, and generation” (ibid.).

However, even if one chooses the narrow definition of “fan” put forward by Fiske, Jenkins and Smith, the adult *Harry Potter* readers depicted in popular culture fall under this label for sure as they consume merchandise and participate in events, such as *Yes Man*’s Norman and *The Big Bang Theory*’s lead characters. In fact, the four nerds of the latter TV show are an exact replica of the derogatory representation of fans that Henry Jenkins described in the 90s using a *Saturday Night Live* sketch about Trekkies as an example.<sup>42</sup> There, Trekkies were depicted as, according to Jenkins: “brainless consumers who will buy anything associated with the program or its cast”, who “devote their lives to the cultivation of worthless knowledge”. They “place inappropriate importance on devalued cultural material” and are represented as “social misfits who have become so obsessed with the show that it forecloses other types of social experience.” Fans are frequently “feminized and/or desexualized through their intimate engagement with mass culture” and depicted as “infantile, emotionally and intellectually immature”. Furthermore, they seem to be “unable to separate fantasy from reality” (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 10).

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<sup>42</sup> Of course, there is a slight difference detectable: the fanboys in *The Big Bang Theory* are depicted slightly more sympathetically, whereas the *Saturday Night Live* sketch is devised to create as much distance between the viewer at home and the Trekkies on screen as possible. Firstly, the viewer is asked to look at the Trekkies from the perspective of William Shatner who functions here as the voice of reason (no irony intended), as normative identity, a proper adult, a real man., who, in the end, shouts at the fanboys to “get a life!”. In *The Big Bang Theory* such a character is absent. Instead, the fanboys are contrasted with Penny, a hillbilly girl from Nebraska who is just as far from normative as the boys are. Secondly, while Sheldon, Lennard, Rajesh and Howard’s obsession with comic books, video games, mangas, roleplay, science fiction and fantasy is usually the source of humor, this humor is more extensively than in the Trekkie sketch reliant on whether the viewer gets the intertextual references. However, this does not necessarily mean that *The Big Bang Theory* does not depict fandom as “other”. As Jenkins explains, even within fandom, “[t]here is always someone more extreme whose otherness can justify the relative normality of one’s own cultural choices and practices.” The fans he encounters “always know others who, unlike them, are really hardcore” (*Textual Poachers* 19). *The Big Bang Theory*’s fanboys function as this ultimate, hardcore fan group, as absolute other for audiences thus normalizing the fandom of the viewer at home.

The representation of fans as “desexualized” and “infantile, emotionally and intellectually immature” is where fandom and the kidult discourse interlock. All the above-listed features makes up the fan’s depiction as “other”. Jenkins explains: “The fan, whose cultural preferences and interpretative practices seem so antithetical to dominant aesthetic logic, must be represented as ‘other’, must be held at a distance so that fannish taste does not pollute sanctioned culture” (*Textual Poachers* 19). Because the fan/kidult is infantile and emotionally and intellectually immature, s/he opts not for sanctioned culture, but for low or children’s culture, which are equated here. This very logic is what Philip Hensher suggests in his article “Harry Potter Give Me a Break”, where he criticizes that Rowling’s narration proceeds

in a sort of “And then, and then, and then” which children find irresistible. But the world of these books is thin and unsatisfactory, their imagery derivative, their characterization automatic, and their structure deeply flawed. If I had read them when I was seven years old, I would have loved them, just as I loved *In The Fourth Form At Mallory Towers*. But I am not seven years old, and can see a little better than I could then whether a book’s appeal stands some chance of lasting in a reader’s affections. The Harry Potter books do their job, and it does them no favours at all to talk about them in terms of literary classics. (n. pag.)

In the same vein, Anthony Holden, a judge of the Whitbread Book Awards for which *Harry Potter* was nominated in 2000, argues: “[A] victory for Harry Potter ‘would have sent out a signal to the world, like the monarchy and the Dome, that Britain is a country that refuses to grow up and take itself seriously’” (n. pag.). He considers adults reading *Harry Potter* “Beano subscriber[s] clutching a comfort blanket” and contends that “[g]etting in touch with your inner child is all very well, but reluctance to put away childish things is [...] rather more worrisome” (n. pag.). Here the child reader as well as the childish reader are both constructed as opposite to the literary critic as ‘proper adult’ in order to safeguard the aesthetics of sanctioned culture, or rather literature in particular. Children’s literature is treated as if it does not qualify as literature at all and its readers are depicted as intellectually inferior philistines. Both the boundaries of high and low culture and of high and low social class are thus cemented by Holden.

Not only the object, but also the way of consumption is contested. Mainstream culture depicts fans as brainless consumers, cultural dupes, who, as Jenkins put it, “will buy anything” ever so vaguely connected to their object of devotion. Consider, for instance, Rajesh’s purchase of a *Harry Potter* wand on *The Big Bang Theory*:

Raj: Would you look at this? I pay \$25 to some kid on eBay for a handcrafted Harry Potter wand. He sent me a stick. He went into his backyard and picked up a stick.

Howard: It's numbered.

Raj: Ooh, limited edition--nice! ("The Rothman Disintegration")

While there certainly are adult fans who consume merchandise, it is interesting that adult readers of *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* are always depicted as fans willing to spend large amounts on worthless fan articles and never just as readers. Thus, an intermittent conclusion might be that the derogatory depiction of fans which already features infantilisation is utilized in the kidult discourse to even further other adult readers of children's and YA literature. As a reason for why adult readers of children's literature are othered so immensely at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Rachel Falconer suggests "a discomfort over the way child and adult cultures are clashing, intersecting and hybridizing in our own time" (3).

One of the implications made in this discourse is that the kidults' choice of reading could only be explained through assuming that they have fallen prey to the machinations of marketing. Deeply embedded in the kidult discourse lurks an anxiety of the power of franchises – which, ever since *Star Wars*, always had an all age target group – in a multimedia culture of sharing. As evidence of that, see for instance Ron Charles' article entitled "Harry Potter and the Death of Reading", in which he first complains about adults "horning in on [their] kids favourite books" (n. pag.) and then goes on:

Perhaps submerging the world in an orgy of marketing hysteria doesn't encourage the kind of contemplation, independence and solitude that real engagement with books demands -- and rewards. Consider that, with the release of each new volume, Rowling's readers have been driven not only into greater fits of enthusiasm but into more precise synchronization with one another. [...] There's something thrilling about that sort of unity, except that it has almost nothing to do with the unique pleasures of reading a novel: that increasingly rare opportunity to step out of sync with the world, to experience something intimate and private, the sense that you and an author are conspiring for a few hours to experience a place by yourselves -- without a movie version or a set of action figures. (n. pag.)

It needs to be pointed out first that his premise is an erroneous assumption here, because, of course, Rowling's readers had to read her books in solitude and on their own before becoming part of the hype. However, Charles' article serves as evidence that the kidult critique brought forward in mainstream texts and representations therefore is not only a critique of what is consumed, but also of how it is consumed. In addition to a deep and understandable distrust towards marketing and franchising, there is also a distrust towards a culture of sharing (instead of solitary contemplation), one of the most typical features of the generation 2.0. Whether it is sharing that takes places online or shared experiences – like a *Harry Potter* party – this kind of reworking of what one has read through connecting with others is depicted as nothing like book

clubs, for instance, but as activities of the brainless, out-of-control mob as the terms “orgy” and “hysteria” indicate. Implicitly, Charles constructs here an image of himself as the perfect reader as representative of the cultural elite sitting in the solitude of one’s private library with a good glass of red wine, deeply immersed in a good book. The critique thus again links consumption to class boundaries by juxtaposing the intellectual from the upper classes with the brainless mob of the lower classes that is manipulated by the mass media.

In contrast, Jenkins’ analysis of *Harry Potter* fandom online shows that community building enables fans to act strategically and deliberately, especially when it comes to countering the marketing strategies of big industrial players like Warner Bros. When the latter company wanted to force fans to shut down their *Harry Potter* websites, sending them intimidating letters and threatening them with a lawsuit, the fans’ communicated that to each other on online platforms, where the community’s anger gathered momentum and eventually produced so much negative publicity for Warner that they gave in (*Convergence Culture* 185-191). Thus, while forming a fan community certainly does not further “contemplation, independence and solitude” it however, can be said to empower readers to have a say in cultural production instead of being passive cultural dupes hanging on the strings of the entertainment industry.

### 8.1.3 Gender and the Kidult: *Twilight* and the *Twilight* Moms

With regard to gender, kidult readers are strictly segregated in the popular perception. Adults reading *Harry Potter* are always depicted as male, whereas readers of *Twilight* are always female. The one exception is Rajesh KoothroPaali: as the effeminate Oriental, he is, of course, the only one of *The Big Bang Theory* fanboys who has not only read *Harry Potter*, but also reads *Twilight*, which is just one of his many gender transgressions. Apart from this one character, because *Twilight* is considered part of girls’ and women’s culture, we do not find any representations of adults reading *Twilight* in movies or TV shows. Nor are they discussed in big quality papers like the *Washington Post*, the *Independent* or the *New York Times*. It is mostly in more remote channels that female culture is mentioned – there, however, one can find that female kidults are scorned even more aggressively than male ones.

While Behm-Morawitz and others found out that adult women evaluate the characters and plot development differently with regard to gender roles than young readers, which shows that their reading position is clearly different from a teenage one (151), in the media discourse about them, they fall into the same “kidult” stigma as adult *Harry Potter* readers. Like male readers of children’s and YA literature they are depicted as “infantile” and “emotionally and intellectually immature” as Henry Jenkins put it in his description of the negative stereotype of fandom (*Textual Poachers* 10). While *Twilight* Moms are less often the topic of media coverage than young *Twilight*

fans, one will find that whenever the attention of the public does fall on them, it is again – as with adult readers of *Harry Potter* – particularly highlighted that they are fans and not just readers.

Furthermore, when the movie adaptations *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* and *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* had been released, it was stressed that *Twilight* moms were just as obsessed as younger *Twilighters*: “These [*Twilight* moms] are fortysomething mothers who, in Beatlemania fashion, are queuing with their teenage daughters to see *Eclipse*, the third movie in the *Twilight* saga” (Carroll n. pag.). Or similarly: “A self-proclaimed ‘Twi-Mom’, Thompson said she had been standing in line since noon to snag a signed copy [of the *New Moon* DVD] for her ‘*Twilight*’ memorabilia collection” (Mears n. pag.). What is more, the mindless and boundless consumption of merchandise that is part of the negative stereotype of fandom as analyzed by Jenkins resurfaces also with regard to adult *Twilight* fans: “MacDougall [...] buys the new memorabilia for the movie as it comes out, such as the board game, ‘*Twilight*’ candy and, of course, the DVD of the film so she could watch it repeatedly” (Walsh n. pag.).

Yet, adult *Twilight* fans are also to be differentiated from young ones: “She [*Twilight* mom] said her fiancé thinks she is crazy, but will faithfully stand by as she spends hours trying to win a clock at a fair with the face of her favorite character, teenager-turned-werewolf Jacob Black” (ibid.). In the latter quote, there is an interesting addition to the all too familiar discourse about fans with the reference to the fiancé who thinks that the *Twilight* mom is crazy, subtly reminding us that these women are old enough to know better. It becomes more obvious as the article continues: “Abati has the clock she worked so hard to win, as well the board game and other ‘*Twilight*’ memorabilia that she knows was probably designed for an 11-year old” (ibid.). Thus, it is implied that these women are, as their choice of consumption shows, in an infantilized state of mind.

*Twilight* fans have received a lot of negative attention from the media. In contrast to *Harry Potter* fans, it is not only adults that are discredited as intellectual inferiors, but also the initial target audience of young females itself is depicted as somewhat mentally inferior, if not even crazy. As Click points out, the negative, sometimes even contemptuous depiction of female fans reproduces a Victorian discourse of patronizing women by describing them as hysterical: “The media have belittled the reactions girls and women have had to the *Twilight* series and the actors who play their favourite characters, frequently using Victorian era gendered words like ‘fever,’ ‘madness,’ ‘hysteria,’ and ‘obsession’ to describe *Twilighters* and *Twi-hards*” (n. pag.). While fans – as elaborated in the last chapter – have always carried the stigma of being positioned as the other, the female fan is particularly unwelcome, even among other fans: “the girls and women who showed up to support *New Moon* at Comic Con ‘ruined’ the fan convention” in the eyes of the male attendants” (Click n. pag.).

The stereotype of the hysterical fangirl is transferred onto adult *Twilight* fans, thus othering *Twilight* Moms even further than young female *Twilight* fans – because they are older, thus runs the logic, their behaviour is even more unacceptable. An

article entitled “‘Twilight,’ Take Me Away! Teenage vampires and the mothers who love them” published in *New York Magazine* is illustrated with a photo showing said moms in emotional uproar holding a “*Twilight* moms”-poster.

Their wide-eyed faces express delightful despair, excitement and anticipation – some are even clapping their mouths, barely able to hold back tears. One of them is quoted saying “The books made me feel like a teenager again” (Em & Lo n. pag.), which supports the idea that *Twilight* serves a purely escapist, nostalgic purpose for adult women. Accordingly, these are to be categorized as books for the new “species of perennial adolescent” described earlier by Barber. *Twilight* Moms are not only “out of their minds” because they behave hysterically, but also because their behaviour is that of teen girls and thus not appropriate for their age. In other words, *Twilight* Moms are represented as acting out of their place in a double way, as hysterical female fans in a mob and kidults at the same time.

On top of that, they are also represented as perverted: “The unkind observer might say that a *Twilight* mom is the worst combination of cougar and deluded teen fan” writes *NY Magazine* (Em & Lo n. pag.). UrbanDictionary.com, a website that offers (often not so serious) user-generated definitions contains two definitions of “*Twilight* mom”: the second, less popular one - 116 up, 190 down ratings - simply says, “A group of enthusiastic moms who have proclaimed their love for ‘Twilight’” (CaliMary n. pag.), while the far more popular first one with 273 positive ratings ranges from ridicule to outright insult. It says, for instance: “A woman older than 25, has children, can be married who has a very old saggy crusty vaj. She sits at home at her computer masturbating to pictures of Edward Cullen” (the members of ONTD n. pag.). Here, *Twilight* moms are at the same time depicted as frigid, which is in tune with the often-quoted label “abstinence porn” for *Twilight* (Seifert qtd. in Leogrande 164), and paradoxically also as sexually perverted in an almost incestuous way, because they are desiring a teenage boy. The appropriateness of this desire is also alluded to by headlines phrased like Walsh’s “Mom’s Got a Crush”, for example.

Strikingly, when it comes to sexuality, male kidults are rather likened to little children who, supposedly, have not yet been introduced to the secret world of sexuality, whereas female kidults are rather likened to teenagers, who are victims of their rampant hormones, yet still need to learn to master this into culturally sanctioned channels and for so long make do with erotic daydreams. First of all, this has to do with a general discourse of women’s bodies as out of control. More specifically, the kidult discourse again makes use of the already existing derogatory discourse on fandom to other adult readers of children’s literature in a very gender-specific way. As Jenkins explains, this discourse differentiates male and female fans as follows:

the feminine side of fandom is manifested in the images of screaming teenage girls who try to tear the clothes off the Beatles or who faint at the touch of one Elvis’ sweat-drenched scarfs, or the groupie servicing the stars backstage after



the concert in rockumentaries and porn videos. Not only are these women unable to maintain critical distance from the image, they want to take it inside themselves, to obtain “total intimacy” with it. (*Textual Poachers* 15)

Looking through the aforementioned descriptions of *Twilight* moms one will find subtle and not so subtle references to this discourse of the female fan as trying to obtain this “total intimacy” and female fandom as sexualized. Because these particular fans are mothers, their strife for “total intimacy” may also trigger negative reactions because it turns them into feared abject mothers.

The first article quoted, for instance, likens the *Twilight* mom’s behavior to the Beatlemania and the photograph displayed in the *New York Magazine* shows an electrified female audience, barely able to contain themselves and last but not least, the crude definition of a *Twilight* mom from urbandictionary.com claims not only, as quoted above, that they masturbate to images of Edward Cullen, but also very explicitly claim that *Twilight* moms want to obtain “total intimacy” with the objects of their adoration describing them as

uneducated middle aged women who sneak onto the set of the Twilight movie, but "keep their distance" so they stay on good terms with the production company. However, to a Twilight Mom, keeping distance means illegally taking video and pictures from a full yard away. (the members of ONTD n. pag.)

Yet, in spite of this congruence, Jenkins’ conclusion that in representations of female fans “the female spectator herself becomes an erotic spectacle for mundane male spectators while her abandonment of any distance from the image becomes an invitation for the viewer’s own erotic fantasies” (ibid.) cannot be transferred to the representation of *Twilight* moms as female fans, because they are not depicted as sexually available women, but mothers. Hence, their eroticization is foreclosed by the hegemonic discourse of femininity in the west that includes the notion that (good) mothers are desexualized or asexual beings. Thus, the readers are not invited to see them as erotic spectacle, but to judge them for the violation of their normative social role for their selfish sexual desires stand in the way of being selfless mothers:

She [the Twilight mom] doesn’t bathe her kids, or feed them, instead locks them in a cage and tosses in a couple crackers now and then ... A group of 40 something pre-menopausal women who have been neglecting their children, spouses, jobs since 2008 to post their ramblings about a dazzling 107 year old vampire... (the members of the ONTD n. pag.)

According to this, the *Twilight* mom fails to conform to the normative role of the good mother. Through this kind of ridicule, adult women reading children’s or YA literature are punished for their transgression and silenced by degradation. Comments

such as the above-quoted are meant to inspire shame in adult *Twilight* fans, which ultimately shall lead them to either hide or even completely give up on their reading.

However, there are also scholarly voices speaking of the positive aspects of mothers reading *Twilight* who – quite conversely – argue that family life can benefit from this shared experience of mothers and daughters. In the case of *Harry Potter*, even Potter haters admitted that the book series had the positive effect that more parents read stories to their kids again, thus strengthening parent-child bonds. Again, the situation is slightly different with *Twilight*: as mothers do not read the novels to their daughters, but receive them from them, the act of reading itself is not what makes up the shared experience. What enables the generational bonding over *Twilight* is the felt need to talk about these novels, springing from the fascination with them: A key factor seemed to be the way *Twilight* captivated mothers and daughters, summarizes Cathy Leogrande, who conducted a survey on mother-daughter bonding via *Twilight* (161).

In Leogrande's analysis the shared passion for *Twilight* between mothers and daughters emerges as an opportunity for them to improve their relationship with each other unpretentiously. Participants in the survey reported how talking about *Twilight* had facilitated otherwise tricky conversations about love, sex and violence between mothers and daughters, as the story-world offered neutral, distanced grounds to play out these discussions (164 ff). The conversations enabled through the novels allowed them to connect as women, thus bridging the dividing categorization of child and parent (163). In this context, the possibility that *Twilight* allegedly takes adult readers back to their teenage years is for once not evaluated negatively, as mere escapism, but as having a positive effect of connecting mothers and daughters through shared experiences (164).

Seemingly, reading *Twilight* is permissible for mothers when the novels are used by them as an educational tool: Conclusively, Leogrande sums up the positive effects of *Twilight* on the mother-daughter relationship with an appeal to mothers to “grab the opportunity, read the books, watch the movies with your kids, and while you're enjoying these guilty pleasures, take the opportunity to have some good talks [with them]” (167). Doing so, she quotes Claudia Knorr, who, in an instructional *Common Sense Media* video, even offers a set of sample questions for mothers to start a conversation about *Twilight* with their daughters.

While this may seem like a very positive take on the *Twilight* mom readership, it subtly reproduces some of the very same ideas and values of the derogatory discourses about them. By stating that reading the books and watching the movies is a “guilty pleasure”, which implies that is only admissible when it serves a pedagogical function, Knorr actually reaffirms the notion that adult women reading these books for their own pleasure are acting out of their place. Tellingly, the crossreading of the *Harry Potter* novels is also analysed for its pedagogical purposes (see Malu), but the term “guilty pleasure” is never mentioned there. According to the *Twilight* mom discourse then, reading escapist literature is only legitimate when it functions as part

of their role as mothers – thus runs the implicit argument – not when it is an individual, selfish act. This reproduces the logic that mothers taking time for themselves, for instance, for activities like reading, are suspected of “neglecting their children, spouses, jobs” as [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com) more crudely has it.

### 8.1.4 Modes of Consumption, Continued: Kidults and the Dangers of Reading



Fig. 1. A humouristic depiction of a reading nanny who neglects her duties published in the satirical magazine *Postbeiri* in 1863. Quoted in Bluhm, Detlef. *Von Autoren, Büchern und Piraten. Kleine Geschichte der Buchkultur*. Artemis und Winkler, 2009: 139.

The discursive construction of *Twilight* moms as bad mothers neglecting their children, grooms and household and as sexually deviant echoes a much older discourse. Ann Steiner draws a comparison to the depiction of female readers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (202). The increased production and consumption of books, in particular novels, and their advance even into lower-class households triggered anxieties concerning the influence of reading on the reader. Pearson notes that though numerous publications in the period first seem to want to discuss the dangers of reading in general, most of them rapidly slip into the discussion of “women’s reading in particular, which marks the special anxieties surrounding the growth of women’s literacy” (18). Apart from gender, age was another factor in the debate about the dangers of reading. Children were seen as just as endangered as

women and those two groups were often tellingly conflated: “The implication is often that women are children of a larger growth, and such formulations as ‘fair customers’ elide the distinction between vulnerable young girls and mature women” (Pearson 18).

The dangers, thus the argument, of letting women loose in the library to follow the selfish interest of reading were the ruin of the family, neglect of the household and children and even moral degradation (Pearson 2; Steiner 202). Sexual transgression in particular came to be rooted back to “unwise reading” (Pearson 8). Medical discourses warned that reading could become a “form of bodily addiction” (Littau 42), saw reading as one of the possible cause of hysteria (Flint 58), and even suggested that unsuitable reading could lead to madness and suicide (Pearson 66). Thus, every advice manual had to include a section in what was appropriate reading for women detailing both the genres and the elements within the stories that were to be avoided. Sexual explicitness and violence, for instance, were thought particularly inappropriate for female readers (Pearson 19). The attempt to control women’s reading can thus be read as an attempt to protect and secure normative femininity, for the recommended texts are a reflection of the preferred social role for women. Conversely, the discourse of the woman reader not only constructed and reaffirmed the view of women as fragile, emotional and easily susceptible, it also rendered books marked as “women’s reading”, e.g. novels, romances and lyric poems, as inferior to the “better books”, like epic, satire, classical literature, history and science, men were reading (Pearson 19). The connection established between reading and gender thus served to naturalize hierarchies bilaterally, i.e. it cemented the hierarchy of the sexes and the hierarchy of low and high literature.

Turning back to present-day discourses on reading, some similarities occur in the perception of how the two novel series at hand affect readers. In 2003 a strange diagnosis by one Dr Howard Bennett made its way into the headlines of the *London Evening Standard* and *The Guardian*: Bennett had written to the *New England Journal of Medicine* because “he was alerted to the problem [of the Hogwarts Headache] by a succession of children who visited his surgery in Washington shortly after the book was released in June” (n. pag.). Those children, aged eight to ten, were suffering from lingering headaches due to marathon *Harry Potter* reading sessions. While this news item mostly was presented as an amusing curiosity, the discourse unfolding around the *Twilight* moms more seriously and extensively emulates eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anxieties concerning the effects of reading.

The repeated depiction of *Twilight* fans as exclusively female or as deviant masculinities – as exemplified through Rajesh as effeminate Oriental – serves to devalue the books through a linkage to irrationality, emotionality and deviant sexuality. Thus, the discourse on the adult female reader of *Twilight* also functions bilaterally in that it constructs the women reader as dangerous and endangered and women’s reading as inferior writing to men’s reading.

Furthermore, in the light of the findings of the preceding chapter, the nineteenth-century caricature of reading as female addiction printed on the first page

of this chapter (fig. 1) might as well depict the *Twilight* mom in spite of the three waves of feminism in between. Not only is the *Twilight* mom represented as neglecting the duty towards her children for her own, selfish reading pleasure, but also her household and partner. Moreover, her reading stands in some vague relation to sexual perversion or excess – similarly to women readers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries whose reading – such was the fear – could lead them to forget about all decorum. Then as now, this discourse is grounded in fears of women’s self-sufficiency, women’s social role as agents outside of the domestic realm, i.e. as consumers whose interests become increasingly important for the cultural industries with their fandom becoming as publicly visible as men’s, and last but not least, women’s sexuality.

It is particularly the *Twilight* moms’ sexuality that receives much scrutiny and scolding, because in the first decade of the new millennium the sexuality of women who were somewhere in the second half of their lives slowly made its way out of the invisibility it had been displaced into. Not coincidentally are *Twilight* moms described as the “worst combination of cougar and deluded teen fan” in the *New York Magazine* (Em & Lo n. pag.). The terms “cougar” and “milf” emerged during the late nineties and spread in mainstream culture during the first ten years of the 2000s, describing women of forty and older who still were as sexually attractive and active as their twenty-year old consensuals and were attracting younger men. As Marc Penn documents in *Microtrends*, the number of women living with a younger male partner doubled from 1997 to 2003 (7). During the course of the decade more and more women who formerly would have been relegated into the desexualized mommy-zone because of their age, such as *Sex and the City*’s Samantha, the cast of *Desperate Housewives* as well as tellingly titled *Cougar Town*’s Jules are represented as sexual agents in mainstream popular culture. Thus, the *Twilight* mom discourse must also be read as a conservative reaction against the re-sexualization of women who could be somebody’s mother (whether they really are or not seems to be of little significance for their objectors) which depicts them as silly, hypersexual teenagers or frigid old women.

## 9. Age, Gender, Class and Economy

When *New York Magazine's* authors inquired about *Twilight* Moms online before publishing an article about them, an anonymous poster answered: "The only people obsessed with *Twilight* are teens and fat suburban moms from the Midwest" (Em & Lo n. pag.). In this statement, there is even more hostility detectable towards the *Twilight* Mom than towards the teenage girl reading *Twilight*. The former is doubly stigmatized, not only on the grounds that she is female and acting outside of her age role, but because housewives and mothers make an easy target. As the analysis of discourse helps us understand power structures, the *Twilight* mom discourse seems to indicate that housewives and mothers are considered a group that is low in status and power in the public sphere.

Consequently they seem to have little control over how they are represented which leads to the proliferation of a negative image as uneducated, naïve, provincial, sexually frigid or perverted and lazy women. In the light of this image it is also interesting to think about how Rowling and Meyer's *Cinderella* stories that have been romanticized in the media start out with them "just" being mothers before they become "someone". The highlighting of Rowling's and Meyer's identities as mothers, of course, stands in a long tradition of the paratexts of children's literature. By the example of the portraits of E. Nesbit and Enid Blyton owned by the UK's National Portrait Gallery, which depict them with their daughters at their feet, Grenby explains that such representations suggest that though "[i]t is difficult to imagine two more professional authors than Nesbit and Blyton, [...] their authorial success, the portraits assert, emanates from their motherhood, not their literary prowess or acumen" (16). While on the one hand these representations give the respective author more legitimacy in addressing children appropriately (presumably from their own, individual experience as parents), they, at the same time "are demeaning, for by rooting children's literature in the domestic they necessarily construct the children's author as an amateur, however gifted" (ibid.). Hence, the representations of Meyer and Rowling as mothers may on the one hand help boost sales, because parents feel safe buying their books for their kids or teens, on the other hand, it may hinder their recognition as professionals and their books' esteem as literature.

Both, the kidult stigma of adult *Harry Potter* readers, and the double stigma of the *Twilight* mom as kidult and female fan allow for conclusions about shifts in identity categories and power structures in contemporary western culture. The fact that the kidult stigma of the adult *Twilight* reader is mainly built on the basis of her gender, furnishes some important insights into the power dynamics of gender today:

First, while the adult readership of the *Harry Potter* series was stigmatized as kidults, gender did not play a role in this criticism. This repeats an often occurring pitfall in Western culture, where women have gender just like non-whites have race: The *Harry Potter* series had initially been intended for boys aged 9-12, and, as so often in western culture, it was therefore not presented as if its consumption was gendered

in any way, positing male-oriented culture as neutral and female-oriented products as gender-specific.

Second, female consumption, especially of adult women, is dangerous. As argued by Ann Steiner the enormous economic success of the *Twilight* franchise as exclusively female-oriented franchise has demonstrated the increasing economic and cultural significance of female consumers (206). This is a trend that certainly will not disappear: While the power of social media has mostly made headlines with regard to politics – think of the Arab Spring or Obama’s Twitter election campaign – their industrial power is also not to be underestimated. In fact, *Twilight* is considered a showcase of how good marketing through social networks becomes a key factor for the financial success of a product or an entire franchise (Green), even when it originates in the book market. What is more, in 2012 a study conducted by BT in Britain found that while a majority of 54% percent of women regularly use social media, only 32% of the men surveyed did so also (Guest no pag.), which might prompt speculations on women’s future influence on mass cultural production.

The immense visibility of this development in the case of *Twilight* has led to a counter-reaction which displays fears of its possible consequence for a patriarchally structured society. While the derogatory discourse surrounding the term *Twilight* mom is made up of strategies to cope with and to contain this development, it also tries to negotiate fears concerning the blurring of identity categories dependent on age, such as the distinctions between girls and grown women just as the kidult-stigma of the adult *Harry Potter* reader was a discourse that functioned to contain fears around the blurring of child and adult culture. However, with the *Twilight* moms the focus specifically lies on women’s unruly sexuality, the domestication of which had formerly been promised by the discourse of the good mother. Now, with the rise of the so-called cougar and milf in the new millennium women insist on being sexual creatures, no matter what their age. The *Twilight* mom discourse is a derogatory depiction of such women which tries to shame them back into place. By depicting the *Twilight* Mom as childish, naïve, perverted, a misled cultural dupe, her significance and liberty as cultural and sexual agent is diminished.

Both of the kidult discourses, around *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*, mobilize the already existing negative stereotypes on fandom that Henry Jenkins analysed in the 90s to articulate anxieties surrounding shifts in media production and consumption. It can be concluded thus that the kidult discourse is not only produced to negotiate fears concerning the mixing of children’s and adult’s culture, but specifically sees this danger embodied in a particular form brought forth by consumer capitalism and media conglomeration: the franchise. Like any other change concerning the rise of new media, cultural channels, forms and ways of production, like, for instance, the mass production of novels, franchises are demonized, their dangers lying in turning their consumers into mere puppets, a brainless mob, daydreamers who are oblivious to the real world and therefore either – if male – are desexualized like children because their most intimate relation is with a fictional product – or, if female – sexually hyperactive

like a teenager because all their inhibitions have been eroded. Sexuality, age and consumption are thus interlaced to eventually also protect class boundaries: Children's literature is depicted as naturally inferior to adult literature and the adult readers of children's and YA literature can hence be marked by the literary critic as brainless mob of the lower classes which he places at a safe distance from himself as representative of the cultural elite.





## 10. Conclusion

Both *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* were omnipresent phenomena of popular culture hard to avoid for both children and adults around the turn of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The visibility of adult readers of children's and young adult literature within this context led some to the conclusion that a sudden increase of adults reading children's and YA had occurred. This perception, however faulty, served as the basis for a discourse of crisis. Yet, the feeling of crisis, of a general infantilisation and dumbing down of society has turned out to bear no factual basis. Already a brief glance into the history of children's literature shows that ever since the creation of a separate market for children, books have been crossing over into the adult section. The phenomenon of crossover fiction thus is in no way new. What is more, the perceived increase in the sheer number of adult readers cannot be substantiated with numbers for a simple lack of data on earlier crossreading. The crisis thus turns out to be merely a felt crisis. However, this does not diminish its significance, for its ideological function of securing conservative notions of age boundaries, habitus and cultural capital – and thus class identity – and last, but not least, sex and gender, remains intact. An analysis of the creation of this crisis has brought to light insights about the aforementioned identity categories as well as about the status quo of the public perception of children's and YA literature.

Whilst in academia, the study of children's and YA literature has become relatively well established, there persists to be a popular discourse that denounces its literary quality, putting into question whether it is literature at all. The critics participating in that discourse proceed by transferring the negative aspects of childness, namely the lack and immaturity subsumed under the term "childishness" onto children's and YA literature and its adult readers. By stigmatising said readers as kidults, these writers seek to establish their own expertise as cultural connoisseurs and draw a sharp line between high and low culture taking age as a marker for the boundary. Children's culture is thus depicted as naturally inferior and adults reading children's literature are positioned as the opposite of the cultural elite, as brainless mob of consumers.

In addition, the kidult is not just depicted as reader, but as fan, which means that his/her relation to the text is more intense, including the consumption of other products assembled around the text. The construction of the kidult can hence draw on the pre-existing negative stereotype of the fan as cultural dupe. In addition, fans are marked as other through depicting them as sexually deviant: Male fans are depicted as effeminate, eternal adolescents with no sexual experience, as little children. Female fans are also marked by a deviant sexuality: They are depicted as perverted, desiring boys who could be their sons. Instead of little children, they are made to resemble hysterical teenagers in the media and are stigmatized as bad mothers who neglect their children for selfish pleasure. Mass culture is thus demonized as eroding all inhibitions and sense of duty in women and desexualizing men. In addition, the particular stigmatization of the *Twilight* mom may be grounded in the increased visibility of

female cultural consumption within mainstream culture and a fear of women's refusal to be regaled into the desexualized category of the selfless mother.

On the whole then, the kidult discourse functions to marginalize both children's literature and its adult readers by mobilizing negative stereotypes concerning age, class and gender. By claiming that adults who read children's and YA literature seek to return to their own childhood or adolescence respectively, this literature is reduced to mere escapist reading. Nostalgia certainly plays a part in the representation of age in children's and YA literature, but it neither is anyone's personal nostalgia for their own childhood nor is nostalgia the predominant and untroubled sentiment in these works. While these stories partly stir the shared nostalgic notion of childhood in western culture, their overall representation of childhood is far more complex, for this simple sense of nostalgia is then complicated in the text by referring to multiple contemporary discourses that depict childhood as in crisis due to various cultural, social and economic changes that occurred during the twentieth century. The shift in the economic relationship between parents and children, fears of a disappearance of the model of the nuclear family and of women's emancipated refusal to perform the role of the self-sacrificial mother all are addressed in these stories. Both *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* in the end refuse a simple flight from these fears through a nostalgic representation of ideal childhood, for this ideal image is embedded in the aesthetic patterns of the Gothic in both stories – it is haunted by its very ideological underpinnings and thus reveals the true horror of returning to a patriarchal construction of age as identity category. Overall, then, describing the representation of childhood in children's and YA literature as merely nostalgic bespeaks a wilful ignorance of their complex cultural work.

Both stories clearly depict a fantasy of the return of the father (meaning both the patriarch and patriarchal structures) as haunted and thus address that there really might be some kind of upheaval taking place as indicated by the kidult discourse, though certainly not in terms of a process of dumbing down.

In a recent *New York Times* article film critic A. O. Scott surveyed the most popular TV shows of the last decade and came to the result that they are dominated either by dying patriarchs (e.g. on *Mad Men* and *The Sopranos*) or funny, quirky, feminist girls and women who refuse the dull role of the good mother. Consequently, he raised a question:

What all of these shows grasp at, in one way or another, is that nobody knows how to be a grown-up anymore. Adulthood as we have known it has become conceptually untenable. It isn't only that patriarchy in the strict, old-school Don Draper sense has fallen apart. It's that it may never really have existed in the first place, at least in the way its avatars imagined. Which raises the question: Should we mourn the departed or dance on its grave? (n. pag.)

In contrast to all the conservative voices quoted in the kidult section of this PhD thesis, Scott's answer to this question is that the "death of adulthood" really is a kind of liberation: "These symptoms of arrested development [i.e., according to Scott, reading YA fiction, living with our parents, collecting dolls and action figures and watching cartoons] will also be signs that we are freer, more honest and happier than the uptight fools who let go of such pastimes" (ibid.). For once, patriarchy's strict conception of age here is revealed for what it really is: a strategic, oppressive construct. Certainly, we are not as free as Scott so optimistically diagnosis – there is a strong opposition to more fluid understandings of age as identity category as the preceding analysis has shown. Said strong opposition may indicate that this liberation may actually be worth putting up with the conservative resistance against it.



## 11. Epilogue

“I’ll believe that Trump is growing into the presidency when his staff stops talking about him like a toddler.”  
(Daniel W. Drezner)

In hindsight, the discourse of moral crisis surrounding *Harry Potter*’s kidults and the *Twilight* moms may be read as a fin de siècle phenomenon similar to what Claudia Nelson describes in her analysis of “age inversion” in the literature of the Victorian Era. The fear of a somewhat faulty transition from one century to the other seems to be triggered by these perceived thresholds – think of precautionary measures many Americans took in fear of the millennium bug as a particular example for how anxiety peaks around the turn of a century.

However, while the particular terms in use during this fin de siècle period, such as kidult, or the tying of age inversion to children’s and young adult literature may no longer be the focal point of the production of moral panic concerning age by now, the unreflected usage of the image of the child and the child/adult binary remains problematic up to the present day. Notions of the inappropriateness of childishness in adults, of children as universally innocent and of child and adult as categories with impermeable boundaries persist to be key ingredients of the discourse on age and identity. Also, the child continues to be a hollowed out image that can be utilized for whatever political purpose.

The past year (i.e. 2017), for instance, has seen plenty of moments in which the image of the child was prominently used as a vehicle of political commentary: Frequently, the current president of the U.S. has been criticized in the mass media as being childish: On American television, *The Daily Show* host Trevor Noah described him as “having the mindset of a toddler”. The *Guardian*’s Tim Jonze sees Trump’s victory as president-elect as an instance representing a larger trend – the rise of the “manfants”, as he calls them, and pleads for a return of what he considers “proper” men. Daniel W. Drezner, professor of politics and regular contributor to *The Washington Post*’s *PostEverything*, started collecting all statements of the White House staff in which they talked about the president as if he were a child and published them under the headline “I’ll believe that Trump is growing into the presidency when his staff stops talking about him like a toddler” on Twitter. In response to this discourse, *The New Yorker*’s Masha Gessen objected that “Trump doesn’t govern like a toddler” only to elaborate that “he governs like a teenager”. While not using the particular term “kidult” (though “manfant” comes quite close), the criticism of Trump expressed through a portrayal as an adult who has not grown up properly reinforces the same age normativity as the discourse of the kidult. And, whilst primarily intended to criticise Trump as inadequate for fulfilling the role of most powerful politician of the U.S. on the grounds of his childishness, this claim at the same time also reaffirms the notion that children should be excluded from politics. Most commentators seem to be

unaware of the fact that their statement works both ways: It attacks Trump, but it also attacks toddlers – or rather, it also reaffirms the popular image of children as lacking, irrational, selfish and thus inept of full citizenship. Only Matthew Yglesias, who writes for the *Vox*, displays a sensitivity for the ageism of this discourse when he responds to it by stating: “Calling Trump a toddler is an insult to my 2-year-old.” Yglesias stresses that labelling Trump as “toddler” forestalls the discussion political commentators should really be having, which would be about “America’s culture of impunity for the rich” (n. pag.). In terms of gender politics, it also belittles the actions of a man who thinks it to be legitimate to “grab” women “by their pussies”.

Meanwhile, at the U.S.- Mexico border wall, French artist JR propped up a giant photo of a toddler peering from the Mexican side over to the American in Tecate, California in September 2017. The installation can be and has been read as a protest against Trump’s immigration policy. It mobilizes the other side of the myth of childhood: The child as innocent victim. Whilst utilizing another facet of the image of the child than the claim that Trump reigns like is a toddler, it bespeaks and reaffirms the same perception of children, namely that they are unfit to be agents within the political arena. In this artistic form of protest, as well as in the mainstream media, the child remains the silent object and never the subjects of politics. Its image can only be made to bespeak something by adults, who regularly use it for or against a particular political agenda.

The persisting virulence of images of children and/or childness within the mass media and in particular within political discourses should be evidence enough to justify the inclusion of age into the holy trinity of identity categories (i.e. race, class and gender) that cultural studies continues to mainly focus on.

## 12. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my first and second supervisors Anja Müller and Anette Pankratz, for their expertise and support as well as the “Kölner Gymnasial- und Stiftungsfonds” for their stipend. I am also very thankful for the love and support of Tim Peters during the writing of this dissertation and for Emma Peters who was the most calm and relaxed embryo a mother-to-be who is writing the final chapters of her Phd-thesis could hope for. Heike Steinhoff, Sophie Einwächter and Vanessa Gerhards also all helped this project in one way or another. Also, I would like to thank Simon. A final second mention goes out to Anette Pankratz for being so much more than just a second supervisor.





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### 13.2 Film and Television

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At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the widely visible popularity of children's and young adult literature with adult readers lead literary and social critics to ask whether the inhabitants of Western culture were refusing to grow up. Whilst books had been crossing over the line between the adult and children's book market ever since the separation into two markets had been introduced, the perceived rise in this traffic led to a felt crisis concerning age and identity. At the example of the *Harry Potter* and the *Twilight* novels, Maria Verena Peters analyzes the discourse about childhood, coming of age and adulthood inside and outside the pages of children's and young adult literature as the 20<sup>th</sup> century came to an end and a new millennium was beginning. Her analysis suggests that this discourse was determined by an anxiety that without the patriarchal, heterosexual, nuclear family, age cannot serve to produce meaningful identity categories.

Beyond the policing of gender and sexuality, the discourse of age in crisis – as the examples of *Harry Potter's* kidults and the *Twilight* moms serve to show – also functions to naturalize notions of class and consumption. In addition to the prominent two novel series of the title, the PhD thesis covers a wide range of popular culture artefacts, from *Near Dark* to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and from *The Big Bang Theory* to *Hotter than my Daughter*. It builds upon key findings of fan studies to uncover the intersectionality of age, gender, class and consumption in the marketing, reception and critique of children's and young adult literature.