



Title: The study of fear and character
representation(s) within young adult fiction

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THE STUDY OF FEAR AND CHARACTER REPRESENTATION(S)
WITHIN YOUNG ADULT FICTION

BY

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UNIVERSITY OF BEDFORDSHIRE

THE STUDY OF FEAR AND CHARACTER REPRESENTATION(S) WITHIN YOUNG
ADULT FICTION

By

Tasmeena Ali

A thesis submitted to the University of Bedfordshire, in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Research Institute
for Media, Art and Performance.

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Abstract:

This project will consist of two chapter excerpts to a novel, *Fear*, and a contextualising thesis looking into the current representations of the emotion and character within the Young Adult genre. *Fear*, a Young Adult and Dark Fantasy novel, is told through the perspective of the protagonist, Imogen, and explores her coping with the loss of her father and finding misguided strength, power, and control through Fear and inflicting the emotion upon others. I will look into how fear has been represented throughout the Young Adult genre, and how I have chosen to represent my characters in regards to the genre. As well as this, I will explore how the relationships between protagonist and antagonists have been employed in existing literature in comparison to my own narrative. The stereotypical conventions of writing for young adults will also be analysed, exploring what makes them popular and why, what tropes I felt best to use and subvert. Grief and fear are heavily considered aspects in this piece, being demonstrated through the use of atmospheric language.

Declaration:

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Masters by Research at the University of Bedfordshire.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Name of candidate: Tasmeena Ali

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T Ali'.

Date: 11.12.2017

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Chapter One

Droplets trickled from my sodden coat onto the hallway's hardwood floor, each one landing with a dull thud. I felt as though the sound were loud enough to be heard by the flats below, a monotonous drumming above the residents' heads disrupting their evening routine. I stared at the wall between the two doors in front of me, eyes drawn to the miniscule flecks of grey spattered across the once clean surface. When was the last time the landlord had inspected the walls? Or done something to remove the filthy specks of dirt and grime? Then again, maybe no-one else cared. I'd never heard anyone complain. After all, I'd only noticed it because of how long I'd been stood out here, just staring and waiting. With the busy day-to-day rush, the constant to and fro of living life, who really had the time to look at faint marks on the hallway walls? The soft drip of water rang in my ears, I looked down to see a small pool had started to form around my feet. I tried flexing my fingers and winced. The cold had numbed my hands during the walk home, and only now could I feel a slow stinging sensation prickling my flesh. The heat was a welcome pain. My fingers ached in protest as I rummaged around in my rucksack for my key, the rough material like sandpaper against my skin.

I could hear raucous laughter from the flat nearest, followed by a rhythmic round of applause, voices too low to be intelligible. A gameshow of some kind, maybe a nice escape for the Kyles. I could picture Mathew with his feet up on the coffee table, discussing potential answers with Angela over a steaming cup of tea, both of them

cheerfully booing at the contestants when their answers didn't match. Maybe they'd even fall asleep together watching the show, his arm around her waist as she nestled into him, her head finding a comfortable spot on his chest. If they'd had any plans for the night, this was a much better option, cozied up indoors. There certainly wasn't much else to do with the rain beating down on anyone who dared venture out. I almost longed to be in there with them, to sink into the warmth of a sofa worn from being sat on, the comfort of background noise ringing in my ears whilst a kind voice asked if I wanted anything, tea, coffee, inquisitive about how my day had gone. Really, what I wanted was that intimacy. That essence of a home.

Finally, my fingers clasped around the small jagged point of the key and I pulled it out with little difficulty, slotting it in to unlock the door. Before pushing it open, I hesitated for a moment, casting a final wistful glance at the neighbouring flat, wishing again to join in the Kyles' escape. To curl up on their laps like a little kid and let their chatter soothe me to sleep. Just for tonight, I could pretend they were substitutes for my parents. If only it were that easy.

With a gentle shove, the door creaked open, light from the hallway behind me shedding a yellow glow along the living room floor. My shadow stretched out in front of me across the rectangular patch of light, waiting expectantly to be snuffed out when I closed the door. If I looked closely, I could see my dark counterpart quiver, shivering in time with me, as though the shadow had a life of its own.

For a second or two I did nothing but stand in the threshold, hoping for Mum's voice to come wading through the darkness. It had become a habit of mine, lingering and yearning for her to shout a greeting like she used to, thinking that maybe this time the sadness was beginning to fade and she was starting to find her way back to normality. When there was no response, my heart sank a little despite itself, my hope shot down again. Looked like tonight wouldn't be promising either.

I stepped through the doorway, feet squelching uncomfortably inside my water-ridden pumps. Softly kicking the door shut with my heel, I watched as the light slowly vanished, taking my shadow with it. The darkness enveloped me, leaving me colder than I had been outside. Every inch of the living room was shrouded in an endless black, with the familiar realisation echoing through it, bouncing off the floor and walls. Mum wouldn't be making an appearance tonight; it'd be a miracle if she'd even left her bed at all. I was alone.

Disappointment seemed to taunt me from within the depths of the shadows, unease gnawing away at my insides. There was no comfort in being stranded in the dark. A small tremor worked its way up my spine, a chill that didn't resemble the cold rain plastered to my skin. The darkness almost shifted, a fraction of a movement, as though something was lurking, waiting. It wasn't just disappointment any more, or at least it didn't feel like that was all. I ran my hand along the wall, small air bubbles in the

wallpaper like road bumps beneath my palm. Where was the light switch? Again there was a flicker in the shadows.

But that could be anything, I tried to rationalise, my eyes adjusting to the dark, my mind playing tricks on me, the shadows enjoying their game, wanting me to believe there was something in here with me. I just needed to find the light switch and then the thoughts would go away. There was nothing there. And yet, the fear of maybe was already in my mind. *Maybe* I wasn't alone, *maybe* it wasn't just my eyes getting used to my surroundings, *maybe* there really was something waiting. And just like that, the panic grew worse, the maybes making the fear escalate, trying to push for certainty. I clawed the wall this time, hunting for the switch again. It had to be there, it couldn't have vanished into thin air. *But what if it had?* I shuddered, hating that niggling doubt in my head. *What if whatever's in here with you, took it? It really wants you alone. There is definitely something there.* I tried not to listen to the whisper, or think about the ever persistent maybes. The dark made everyone a little illogical. But I couldn't convince myself, as a thin layer of cold sweat prickled my skin.

With the frustration pushing me to get the light on faster, I slammed my palm onto the wall in various different spots and finally a bulb blinked to life above me. The naked glass emitted a dull glow, temporarily relieving me of the cruel darkness. It wasn't as bright as I'd hoped, but there was just enough to see by and to keep the shadows at bay. The only ones left were from the sofa and table, cast across the floor ahead of me.

My own shadow had returned, this time to the left of me, quivering still as I rubbed my hands together, fear slowly subsiding. I let myself shake along with it for a few seconds, a nervous laugh slipping through my lips. "See? Nothing to be afraid of. Idiot," I muttered, shaking my head.

The last few minutes already seemed like they had happened a lifetime ago. I couldn't help but feel silly for even thinking something had been in the room with me, much less actually believing it. Being churned up over Mum was getting to me a lot quicker than usual tonight. I shivered again, almost glad that it was from the cold, and realised the heating probably hadn't been turned up all day. The air was lukewarm at best, and soon the chilly temperature would eat away at what little warmth there was left inside the flat. Whatever Mum had been doing since I left this morning was beyond me, but freezing to death clearly hadn't crossed her mind.

From this vantage point the flat almost looked clean, as though it had spent the day being taken care of. It almost resembled a home. A photo of Mum and Dad on the wall calmed my shivers, the sun beaming behind them creating a picture perfect snap at the beach. Dad had his arms around Mum's waist, resting his chin in between the curve of her neck and shoulder, his eyes as blue as the clear sky above them. Mum looked equally as happy, sunglasses propped up on her head, the corners of her eyes crinkling from her cheesy smile. I felt a lump rise in my throat. They'd been so in love. So happy.

I closed my eyes and tried hard to imagine Dad here, wanting the sound of his off-key singing to chase away the cold I couldn't shake. He'd have been rummaging around in the kitchen by now, usually home for a short break the same time I returned from school. "Hey, kiddo!" he'd warble from near the kettle, "Fancy a brew?" Five days a week, I'd come home to that question, and I couldn't help but sing my answer in return, "Yes pleeeeeease." Sometimes I'd ask if he ever got tired of tea. Working in a café should surely put him off. He'd just laugh and shake his head,

"Tea is as much a part of me as the blood in my veins, Gen. Can't live without it." Even when I'd felt at my lowest and locked myself away in my room from a bad day, he'd be there to pop the kettle on, insisting there was nothing a cuppa couldn't fix. And he'd been right.

But no amount of tea in the world could fix this. It couldn't ease the pounding ache I felt in my chest every day. It couldn't take away how much I missed him. And most of all, it couldn't bring him back. Tea couldn't work its magic now.

I opened my eyes and found that my cheeks were wet. Tears must have seeped through my closed lids without me realising. As I wiped them away, I walked towards the kitchen, lightly stroking Mum's face in the picture hoping she'd done something today. I switched on the light for the kitchen, torn between hope and reality.

The closer I got, the harder it was to ignore the smack bang stench of an overflowing bin, the various bits of rubbish inside it kept too long over the week. I could

barely keep myself from gagging. The odour of rotting food latching onto tins and wrappers left an unwanted, sour taste on my tongue. Liquid from the lumped pile would have trickled its way down to the bottom of the bin bag by now, which was bordering on the edge of exploding inside the metal casing. That was the only thing stopping the putrid mess from leaking onto the kitchen floor. Not that that was clean either.

Crumpled tissues had spilled over from the worktop and lay scattered across the tiles. Murky water spots marred the once pristine white of several square pieces of lino, the rest were coated with a thin film of grime. It had seen better days, the whole flat had. But by the end of each week it seemed little more than a miniature waste dump.

Exasperation tugged away at me, my body already aching from the weight of it. I glanced over at the sink and noticed the same pile of dishes I'd left this morning, on top of those that had been left to soak the night before. A few stray rice crispies floated carelessly on top of watery milk, ready to tip over the edge when the tap let loose a stream of water. A thin layer of scum had started to form at the sides of the sink, and through the murky liquid a spaghetti covered plate could be seen blocking the plug hole.

Slowly, I began to peel my coat off, wanting nothing more than to change into warm clothes. But I knew that if I did, the temptation to leave the washing up until tomorrow morning would be too great. And by then the mess would have grown, the pile would become bigger, the water murkier, the stomach churning smell from the bin all the more gag inducing. None of it was working to lure Mum into action, into doing

something other than stewing in bed all day. The mere sight of a spill or dirty dish left for more than a night used to make her skin crawl; the untidiness would eat away at her until she'd cleaned the flat up and down. A domestic goddess on the warpath against filth and grime. She'd be ready to tackle it with a bottle of Dettol in one glove-clad hand and a trusty cleaning weapon of choice in the other.

Looking around me now, I wondered where that woman had gone. The woman who detested an unclean home, who was always hell bent on having everything as spick and span as possible. Even after the tiring days when she'd help out at the café, cleaning would be the first thing she'd start on when she got home. I'd get in to find her scrubbing away at something. It used to drive me up the wall, her constant need for tidiness. "Clean your bedroom, Imogen. Wash that glass up please, Imogen. Could you vacuum the living room, Imogen." I used to wish for a break from it, the nagging and chores. Now I'd do anything to hear the stern warning in her voice, just enough softness lacing her words to ensure I'd listen and get the job done.

The kitchen felt smaller with the mess, and I wondered why I did this to myself every week. The tissues, the dirty dishes, the crumbs of toast and biscuits coating the worktop, all of it was a reminder of how I'd failed to get through to Mum. Again. I stared at the kettle, the only clean thing in sight, and I heard Dad's voice calm as though he were with me, *There's nothing a cuppa can't fix*. I smiled and took it to the sink and turned the tap on, pushing the plates and dishes aside to make enough room to fill the

kettle. I tried not to look too closely into the murky water, fearing the congealed mixture of milk, sauce and pasta that waited at the bottom. Once the water had filled up to the halfway point, I turned the tap off and placed the kettle back on its holder, flicking the switch on. The low rumble of water boiling was a small comfort in the empty room.

Tossing my coat onto the nearest chair, I made a start on the washing up, letting the tap run lukewarm water and trying not to let my bubbling anger guide my actions. It would do no good to break the dishes and plates. Even if it would save time on scrubbing and rinsing them.

This wasn't the same as being told to clean, and I'd hoped seeing the disease-like mess spread around the flat would force her to do something. Scold me, be so repulsed at the state that she'd burst into a cleaning frenzy. Something, anything. It would be better than nothing. But it was my own fault as much as it was Mum's. I did this. I didn't need to let the flat become a pigsty by the end of each week, and yet like a fool, I hoped that finally it might work. Maybe one week, I'd come home and there'd be nothing to clean. The old Mum would be back.

I bit back the urge to curse her and looked around for some gloves, opening the cabinet beneath the sink only to find an empty packet wedged in between bottles of surface cleaner. Rage flared up again as I slammed the doors shut and glared at the sink, already dreading the idea of touching the gelatinous clump of food and feel it squelch

between my fingers. The kettle emitted a sharp ping, letting me know that water had boiled. The steam clouded above it and I tried to mirror it, hoping the anger would dissipate if I exhaled enough. I reached up and opened a cupboard above me, the door creaking at the hinges. After getting one of the few clean mugs that were left, I put a tea bag in and poured the hot fluid from the kettle, stirring it slowly as the dark liquid spread through the clear water. I went to fetch milk before remembering I'd used the last of it this morning, turning back and fishing the tea bag out. Black tea would have to do. Taking a sip to soothe me, the brew soon worked its magic and I felt calmer within minutes. The relief was short lived.

Once I turned my attention back to the sink, my nose crinkling in disgust, I inched my hand into filthy water and scooped out the sodden mush of spaghetti and cereal from the plughole. Within minutes the dirty water had glogged down, leaving only a greasy line of crimson sauce and rice crispies in its wake.

Rain drummed against the window pane, rhythmic and calming as I worked. Soapy foam coated my hands, pleasant and airy in comparison to the pulpy mixture I was scrubbing away at. The tap chugged out tepid water as I used the last of the weak warmth to rinse the final bowl. The bin was next on the list, then the worktops, the floor, the stove, and anything else that had been left in a state of disarray. It had been left too long.

As I worked, a strange sense of unease scabbled inside me, the warmth of the tea quickly fading. I tried to ignore it, but I kept thinking of Mum and what she'd been doing all day? If she'd stayed in bed as usual, or even tried to eat the breakfast I'd left her. With each swish of the mop, the feeling grew worse. Out of the corner of my eye, there was a movement, a hint of a shadow. The mop quickly slipped from my grasp, clattering to the floor as I spun around. My heart felt like it would jump out of my throat as I turned to face my threat. When nothing greeted my gaze, I surveyed the kitchen. It was now spotless, a zesty fragrance of lemon in the air from the cleaning products. There didn't seem to be anything in the room, and yet I was certain I'd seen a movement. I scanned the room again, biting my lower lip, and spotted a sponge on the floor. I let out a breath I hadn't realised I'd been holding, relief washing over me. A sponge. All the fumes from cleaning had clearly gone to my head. I was being paranoid over nothing.

After a painstaking half an hour had passed, the mopping was done and the dishes had been dried and put away. The kitchen was as in a liveable state again. But it wouldn't last. The weekend had only just started, and I knew by the time Sunday rolled around, the kitchen's filthiness would be reborn. Until a new plan came to mind.

I wiped my damp hands across my jeans, palms and fingers resembling the outside of a raisin, too many creases to count. Exhaustion hit me again, niggling like a small child, desperately begging me to do as it wanted. I scanned the living room

quickly, relieved at the little amount of tidying needed there; there were a few papers scattered across the coffee table and a cup left alone and unwashed, but that was it. It could wait. Sleep beckoned.

My phone vibrated in my left trouser pocket, two quick successions alerting me to a text message that had just come through. I fished the device out and pressed the home button, screensaver a picture of me and Dad during a snow day at our old house. We were stood either side of the snowman we'd spent the afternoon building. One of its eyes was bigger than the other when we'd failed to find two stones exactly the same size, and its carrot nose was tilted up too high. Neither of us had bothered to wear gloves, and Mum had scolded us both as though we children, saying we'd catch our deaths in the freezing weather. We'd laughed her off. Even when our fingers were numb from the cold, we hadn't caved to admit she'd been right. Instead, we'd smiled at the camera, proud of our creation; it didn't matter if it wasn't perfect. I stared at the image until the screen turned black, heart heavy with sorrow. I pressed the home button again, remembering the message waiting to be read, and smiled at our picture before tapping in my passcode. Thirteen, zero-three, sixty-seven. Dad's date of birth. The screensaver changed to show various icons, the time displaying 18:25pm on the top right hand corner. I tapped the yellow envelope icon, a list of my text messages coming up, the most recent one in bold lettering, showing it hadn't yet been read. It was from Alyssa.

Hey, Immie, me n Faye r goin 2 cinema later 2 c The Boxtrolls.

Showing @ 7.30. Come with? Will b a laugh. X

I read the text a few times, trying to work out what to say. It didn't feel right going out. I knew Alyssa was just trying to help, to take my mind off Dad being gone, be a good friend. I knew a part of me should say yes, go out with my friends and try to forget for one night. But I couldn't. I wouldn't be able to focus on the film, or enjoy myself. She'd only end up regretting inviting me along.

Typing up a quick reply, I tried to ignore the tug of guilt in my stomach. It was for the best, I'm sure she'd understand.

Thnx 4 the invite. Not feelin it 2nite. Maybe nxt time? X

I pressed send and then turned the phone on silent mode, not wanting to have it vibrate with more messages from Alyssa or Faye trying to change my mind. I was too tired from all the cleaning anyway, and needed to get some rest. My stomach grumbled hungrily in protest, but I ignored it. I'd eaten a jacket potato, salad and a packet of crisps for lunch, and even accepted Alyssa's offer of cookies on the way home. That was plenty food to keep me satiated throughout the night.

Making sure the heating was on, and the kitchen light was switched off, I picked up my coat from where I'd thrown it and dragged myself on tired legs towards my room. Once again my stomach grumbled, and I swatted at irritably, refusing to turn back just to feed it.

It was difficult to guess how long this routine could go on for. How long I could try to keep coaxing Mum out with mess. The exhaustion felt like it was pulling at me from all directions, I wanted so badly to sleep. But not just for tonight. I wished I could fall into a deep slumber, long enough to allow for everything to go back to normal. Or as normal as it could possibly be.

Feeling all alone was taking its toll, and sleep seemed like the only way to escape it. Mum was home, I knew that, she was home every single night, and yet she may as well not be. The bitter, cold reminder of isolation was a stinging slap in the face. The flat was laden with it, pallid walls screaming it at me as soon as I took a step over the threshold, the dank air suffocating me with the emotion. It clawed its way into me and filled me up, all consuming. There was no choice in the matter; there never was, I couldn't ignore it, I couldn't forget it. Loneliness was there all the time now, just waiting, where Mum should be.

The smell of damp clung to my clothes as I stopped three steps short from my room, wet fabric uncomfortable on my skin. I was itching to tear the clothes off and be free of their clammy grip, to slip into something warm, crawl under my covers for added heat and let sleep take me into its loving arms. The call of escape was alluring, but another was stronger in this moment. And I wasn't going to ignore it. Maybe it was coming home to mess again, maybe it was the guilt of having declined my friend reaching out to me, or maybe it was grief reaching its limit, but there was a small pit of

frustration building up and waiting to be let loose. Before I went to bed, I had to see Mum.

I considered turning the light on, but it wasn't too dark outside yet, the window at the end of the hallway allowing enough natural light to see by. Closing the gap between myself and my room, I walked farther until I was past it, legs no longer heavy like lead. Infuriation propelled me forward with ease. The corridor echoed my resolution back, floorboards creaking in agreement. It wouldn't be a pleasant check in, not this time. Enough was enough. As I neared their room, I could hear a soft snore slink through the open gap of the door. The space allowed me a glimpse of a slumped body, illuminated by the only light the evening sky could offer with the downpour still raging on. I pushed the door open and slipped in. On instinct, I closed it behind me, moving quietly over the threshold.

Fresh air hadn't set foot in this room for so long that there was a permanent smell of stale breath and body odour clinging to the walls and floor. The room itself would have seemed almost clean if not for the sea of tissues along the floor, the crumpled balls multiplying so quickly it was becoming a new layer over the old carpet. There were plenty of tissues floating around on the bed, too, some teetering on the mattress's edge, whilst others lay wedged beneath the tear-stained pillows. For a moment I did nothing but stand there, looking around with a mixture of awe and disgust. I caught sight of the breakfast I'd made for Mum this morning sitting on top of

the dresser. Most of it was still there, toast, eggs, bacon, a bite or two eaten at best. Dad would have scoffed it down. He'd have been happy to have breakfast in bed. My frustration eased a little as I approached Mum and slowly placed a hand on her duvet covered body. A faint rise and fall of the covers did little to indicate how deep the sleep was, a small tuft of dark hair poked out from the top end of the duvet, limp and greasy strands snaking from her head and across the pillow. I shook her gently,

“Mum? Wake up,” I whispered. There was no reply.

“Mum, please. You can't keep doing this.” Nothing.

“Mum. I need you.” Not even a stir.

I stepped back and took a breath, my eyes fixed on the slumbering form, the anger resurfacing. I focused on the feeling inside, egging me on.

In one swift movement I yanked the covers back and grabbed the untouched glassful of water on the bedside table. Before rational thinking could make a play, I tipped the day old liquid over Mum, watching it first slap onto her exposed face, and then spill over onto the pillow and duvet, drops splashing in all directions, the water sinking into the covers fast. A shriek shattered the silence then, and Mum shot up from her resting pose, eyes wide and frantic, her mouth agape with shock. Her hair was a tangled mess of black, more strands breaking free of the bun she'd tied it up in, dangling loosely down her face. There were heavy bags under her eyes, the skin around them puffy and red. Small red spots were scattered across her forehead from oil build up, the

skin around her nose and lips dry and flaky from dead skin in stark comparison. The water had trickled down her cheeks, droplets hanging just beneath her chin.

This couldn't go on any longer.

I watched as the haze of confusion cleared from her expression, green eyes narrowing as she zoned her attention on me. Just then I saw a glimpse of the old her, the Mum I knew before all this. But it wasn't enough. Not in this moment. She wasn't the only one allowed to miss him.

"What was that for?" Mum asked, glaring at me, her voice hoarse from sleep. She swatted at the strands of hair and wiped her face, looking from me to the empty glass I was holding.

"Get up." I barely held back the urge to drag her from the bed and force her to look in the mirror, see what she'd let herself become over the past month. It was weak, it was selfish, and it was unfair. She wasn't the only one around here who had a right to be upset.

"Imogen, I don't have the energy - " she started to inch her way beneath the covers, the Mother I knew lost once again to this self-pitying woman before me.

"Don't have the energy?" I spat, grabbing her arm again, bending so my face was level with hers. I needed her to see it, she couldn't go on ignoring me anymore. "And what's got you so exhausted, Mum? Hmm? Lying around all day doing nothing? Feeling

sorry for yourself? Letting Aunt Kate handle the café all on her own whilst you stew away in here, day in day out, doing bugger all? Yeah, that's gotta be tiring. Maybe I should just go and let you rest, right?"

A balled up tissue plummeted to the ground as Mum shifted uncomfortably, the bedsprings squeaking from her movement. She yanked her arm back and held my gaze evenly before looking away, staring ahead of her at an invisible spot by the dresser. "Look, I don't want to hear it. Just go to bed."

My vision was blinded by a mist of red, her words only adding kindling to a growing inferno. "Would you just stop!" A crash reverberated around the room as I threw the glass, the clear crystal shattering upon impact against the wall. Shards were strewn all over the floor, glistening in the soft evening glow. I stared in shock at the broken fragments, not understanding how I'd thrown the glass so hard, or why I'd done it. Mum stared up at me, cracked lips trembling, puffy eyes tearing up.

I need her to understand. I want my mother back. Her face began to blur as my eyes mirrored hers, tears of rage and regret overflowing and wetting my cheeks.

"Do you think I want to be like this? Do you think you're the only one who misses him, Mum? Hmm? I ache to feel his arms around me like you do, to see him making another damned cuppa. To hear his..." the words caught in my throat, but I pushed on, swiping away at the tears, "To hear his voice booming through the halls? Calling out to one of us when he walked through the door. Do you think I don't miss the way he'd

wake everyone up in the morning by stomping around looking for his house key? Or that he'd leave the letters on the kitchen counter instead of the coffee table." It felt like the floodgates had been burst wide open, tears gushing from my eyes like an endless waterfall. "I miss all those things, Mum. I miss him too."

Mum shook her head, and raised an arm, finger pointing towards her bedroom door. "Please go. I can't. I don't want to." Snot bubbled at the end of her nose, popping as she buried her face in her hands, sobs crashing through her body in a disjointed rhythm. I almost reached out to touch her, arm half outstretched, my hand hovered above her shoulder waiting to feel the soft cotton of her nightie against my palm. But I pulled back, the anger had drained from me, tiredness replacing it. I was suddenly at a loss for what to say, unable to summon up the rage to drive my words again. Maybe it was watching her sniffing between sobs, or maybe I'd just said all I had to say.

It hurt to see her this way, and yet I couldn't bring myself to hold her, to pull her in close and comfort her like she'd done with me so many times before when I had been upset. It didn't feel right. If I held her now, if I told her it was okay, nothing would change, she'd remain cooped up in here only coming out when she needed to. And I couldn't let her be selfish with his memory anymore. If she'd lost her husband, then I'd lost my Dad, and I had just as much a right to grieve as she did. I'd kept it together so long for her, to be strong because she needed me to. But, who was being strong for me? When would I finally get my old Mum back?

A siren screamed out in the distance, the faint trill of it accompanying Mum's ragged breathing. It filled the silence between her gulps of air, and I wondered where the emergency service was headed, who it was going to save and whether it'd make it on time or arrive too late, failing the person needing it. Just like it had done with Dad. My stomach churned as I pictured a faceless nobody mumbling in the torrent outside, begging for help, waiting until they came, hope nothing more than a dying flame. A cough broke me free of the unpleasant image and I noticed then that Mum had quietened, crying softly now, burrowing back under the covers. She curled up in a ball and hugged the duvet close as if to comfort herself. It was the only comfort she'd be getting tonight. I couldn't bring myself to hold her. The room felt colder and darker, a light draft raising the hairs on my arms. I glanced over at the window, and watched for a breeze moving through the curtains. They stayed stock still, and I rubbed at my arms, confused. Where had the waft of air come from?

Mum's sniffing broke me out of reverie. I walked over to where I could see the broken bits of glass, picking the pieces up and placing them in a tissue by my foot. It was unused, still flat and new, clearly a stray which had come loose from the box. Once I'd piled up as many bits of glass as I could find, I balled up the tissue and tossed it into the waste bin in the corner. Hopefully now there was no risk of Mum cutting her foot.

Rising from my crouched position, I surveyed the room one last time before backing away, the broken form of Mum still shivering beneath her duvet. It was then I

let the guilt seep in. But the time to offer words of solace was gone. Saying anything now would only come across as an afterthought, an obligation. I should want to comfort her, not have to. With each step I took towards the door, Mum's muffled whimpers seemed louder. My hand reached out for the knob, the cold brass shocking my palm. Even as I pulled it open, I couldn't help but pause to look at the grief ridden wreck I was leaving behind. Her face was still buried into the duvet in her arms. Maybe she felt protected from me like that, shielded from the accusations and the anger, and I felt a pang of guilt wade its way in. My own mother was scared of me.

"We can't keep going on like, this Mum," I said, feeling deflated. "He wouldn't want us to." Dad would've wanted us to be there for each other, to try and remember him fondly. I was doing the latter at least. Was Mum? A mangled croak emanated from the cocoon in response and I left. The door clicked shut behind me and suddenly tiredness felt like a fast flowing river, the current hauling towards my bedroom. It urged me to collapse onto the worn mattress and let the covers envelop me. There I could close my eyes to it all. There I could sleep, and there I could forget, if only for a couple of hours. But I had to get there first.

The floorboards creaked in their usual greeting, faint smell of lavender body spray lingering in the air. I clawed away at my half damp clothes, not bothering to turn the light on. There was enough of a glow afforded by streetlights outside, and the room was so small there was no chance of fumbling aimlessly. I knew it inside out. With the

warmth of pyjamas, soft and dry against my skin, I finally slipped into bed and pulled the covers up close leaving no gap for a draft to get in. The sirens had stopped now, an eerie silence creeping in, broken every so often by a car horn blaring in the distance. Even the rain had ceased with its monotonous thrumming, swept up by the dull hush of the night settling in.

The clock on my wall told me the time was only 19:00pm, and for a second I thought of Alyssa and Faye. They'd be making their way to the cinema now, a relaxed start to their weekend. A small part of me chastised my decision not to go, I could've tagged along and tried to immerse myself in the silly animated film and avoided the urge to confront Mum. I wouldn't have thrown the glass and I wouldn't have shouted at her. I'd have slinked off to bed when I'd returned from the film, too tired to let the anger get the better of me. But it was too late to turn back the clock now. The damage had been done.

Minutes passed in restless wait. The promise of a getaway slumber seemed more and more like a lie as I stared up at the ceiling, making out the small bumps and indents above me. Where had the gnawing fatigue gone? The sense of desperately needing to rest, the aching weariness from having to force a confrontation with Mum, the tugging call of my bed. All of it had vanished the second I crawled under the covers, and now I felt cheated. Instead my mind started to fill up with questions.

Why didn't I comfort Mum?

Why couldn't she snap out of it?

Why was she being so selfish?

Why did Dad have to play have to be hit by a car that night?

Why? Why? Why?

The ceiling seemed to shift above me, a shadow slithering across it. I sat upright, rubbing my eyes frantically, unsure of what I had just seen. I looked up again, apprehensive, one leg hanging off the side of the bed in case I needed to make a run for it. There was nothing there. Just the plain white of the ceiling, staring back at me. What was wrong with me tonight? I'd never felt this jumpy before, scared of every movement in the darkness. I watched horror films for fun, to try and feel afraid, and yet tonight I had been frightened at nothing in particular, my mind conjuring imaginary shadows out to get me.

I settled back into bed, and the questions resumed their onslaught. It was a vicious circle. Round and round they went, accusations, questions, worries, all demanding answers. Answers I didn't have, but wanted so desperately. A dull ache pulsed just behind my eyes making me wish for sleep to pull me into its arms. A headache would only make it harder to drift off, but the questions were whirling faster and faster. Mum's slumped body cropped up in my mind and a pang of guilt hit me. Maybe I had been too harsh on her? Grief wasn't something that faded overnight.

But it's been more than just overnight, and is it really fair to act like she's the only one to suffer, here? Is it right to continue enabling her? To let her wallow day in and day out? Don't I deserve to grieve? Doesn't Aunt Kate? She's practically running things on her own now at the café, and all Mum can do is be selfish.

But then I pictured her sobbing, receding back into herself, barely wanting to make eye contact. That wasn't the Mum I knew, as if the strength and kindness and devotion that made her who she was had just been beaten out of her. Maybe it had.

Time had been given the title of being the world's greatest healer. How much more time before this, before Mum, was healed? Before the pain stopped being so prevalent, and the thought of remembering him didn't feel so gut-wrenching any more. When was time finally going to work its magic and heal this for us? Things needed to change, I knew that much. Coddling, enabling, it wasn't going to help. Perhaps tonight *had* been a step too far, I'd pushed too hard and said one too many harsh words, but it had to be done. My eyes stung, tears blurring the shadows around me. I didn't want to hurt her any more than she was already, but I didn't feel like I had any other choice left.

The quiet stillness gave way to my shallow breathing, tears seeping into my pillow as I clutched the duvet tight to my chest. A mixture of anger and sadness churned around inside me, the pulsing behind my eyes worse, the headache pounding away. Things had to get better. Somehow, they had to.

A dark figure walked in front of me and I followed, my feet moving automatically. The sky was blanketed in black, heavy grey clouds threatening to let loose a torrent of rain. A crack of yellow streaked across the horizon just then, the spark of light captivating for all but a second before being swallowed up by the mist. Low rumbles came from above and the calm quiet of the night was shattered in an instant, the clouds finally pelting the Earth with an icy volley. The figure moved ahead, unaffected by the rain.

The grass was soon sodden and with my every step, a soft squelch sounded out in the lull of the sombre graveyard. Headstones spilled out around me endlessly, dates, names, beloved messages a rushed blur of words as I walked past them. There were old and there were new. Some had been chipped and cracked over the years, stone a murky grey, patchy and blackened from being beaten down by the weather. The lettering was just about legible. And yet they still stood strong despite this, looming over the deceased they were assigned to. The figure moved effortlessly between the graves, feet making no sound, leaving no footprints. It touched each headstone as it went, lightly tapping the tops with a bony white finger as though keeping count.

I couldn't help but picture the images of various bodies, men, women, children, all on the days of their burial, corpses looking as though they'd slipped into a deep sleep.

Newer headstones were easier to spot amongst their elderly counterparts, a light, brisk shade of grey, engravings still so fresh and bold. Even in the dimly lit cemetery, the messages were clear. The dead beneath the older ashen stones were likely

little more than bones and dust by now. Still, the faded headstones would remain as a reminder. Someone was still there. But the newer graves, the bodies under them were still fresh. Given a few years, they too would be like the others. Decayed and gone to bones, nothing left but a skeleton and an ageing headstone to their name. The stench of rotten meat suddenly seemed to come from all directions. It grew stronger the further in I followed the figure.

Rain showered down, drops like small pellets fast soaking my clothes and numbing my skin. So many graves scattered around me and still my legs pushed on, of their own volition, guiding me forwards, trailing the figure. A few feet away, it finally stopped and I could spot the headstone it had been leading me to, the crisp gold etchings calling out to me, waiting. Again, my legs thrust me towards it, closer, and I could feel a warm layer of nervous sweat building along my brow despite the icy touch of rain. Something didn't seem right about the headstone. The closer I got, the stronger the feeling became. There was another set up right next to it, too close to it in fact, and as I neared, the nervous sweat escalated, and dread formed a knotted ball heavy in my stomach.

*HERE LIES ANNA SAUNDERS, BELOVED WIFE AND MOTHER, 24TH
JANUARY 1969 — 10TH OCTOBER 2014.*

I read the headstone again and again, rubbing at my eyes fervently, scratching at them in desperate hope to make the slab disappear. The putrid smell was suffocating, so

strong I could almost taste the foul flavour on my tongue. This had to be a trick of the mind, a sick joke. That date was two weeks ago. Exactly a month after the death of the person whose grave was next to it. Dad's. Terror seized hold, my body as cold as the rain hammering down on me. It couldn't be real. But as I reached forward, hand trembling, fingers tracing the lettering, the dread in my stomach grew worse, and I bit back the urge to cry. The figure simply watched, face hidden from me, as I curled my fingers around the edges of the slippery stone. All I could make out again were its fingers, frighteningly pale, nails cracked with dirt trapped beneath them. I gripped the stone as hard as I could, pushing forward, digging my heels into the moist soil until my feet were almost buried in the earth. If I could push hard enough, I could knock the grave over. This wasn't Mum's grave, this couldn't be.

Tears streamed in free flow as I continued to try and force the headstone away, slipping on the wet ground and getting caked head to toe in mud. Still, I pushed, stopping only to wipe the mud and tears from my face, eyes stinging from the soil trapped underneath my eyelids. The fear clung on, just as I did to the grave, and refused to let go.

Chapter Two

Cold sweat clung to my skin, the bedsheet damp beneath me, duvet coiled around my legs. I could feel my heart racing, hear the rapid pound of it in my ears. Shadows flickered across my vision and for a minute the dream was here with me, the room as cold and as dark as that cemetery had been.

The image of Mum's grave was all too real, consuming, the etched name clear even in the borderline between sleep and awaking. Beads of sweat started to cluster above my brow, my heart feeling like it would tear through my chest. I wanted to run, to listen to the hard thumping inside me and get as far away from this nightmare as I could. If only it were that easy. Movement didn't seem possible, my arms stuck to my sides like glue, my legs cold and heavy. I tried to clear my head, to calm myself enough to be able to get out of bed. To do something other than let the dream get the better of me. I could just about make out the time on the clock across the room. 3:00 AM, in dull red light. A cat screeched outside, its cry distant and unclear in the past-midnight quiet encasing the town. I tried to picture the hustle and bustle of party-goers and drunks crawling the streets, their intoxicated chatter just far way enough to be a comforting pull into reality.

Dad had always loved living close to the town centre, a street away and everything was in reach, shops, grocers, barbers. Even the café. We'd never needed a

car with it all being within walking distance, at most a bus journey away. Dad's perfect home. Mum had had her reservations when we first moved here, and wanted to return to our old home, or find one like it. A nice little countryside house. Somewhere quiet and spacious. She'd moaned for days about how boxed in the flat felt. As though she'd been crammed into a coffin. I shuddered at the description. The last thing I needed to think about right now was coffins.

A sliver of light peeked through the gap in the curtains, and I followed the line of the thin stream, grateful for something to slice through the darkness. Another screech came trilling through the semi darkness. This time it sounded like the tyres of a car rubbing hard against asphalt, the friction creating the faraway shrill. I tried to focus on it, regardless, to clutch onto any piece of the waking world and have the remnants of the dream fade away. But the grave was still here, the shadowed figure close by, watching. I couldn't shake the image, strange to see in the middle of my room, out of place amongst piles of clothes, and books. It didn't belong here. It shouldn't.

Desperate to be free, I closed my eyes and tried to call out for Mum, knowing deep down it would be of no use, she wouldn't respond. My throat had closed up, and terror suddenly seized control, taking my voice, now, alongside my ability to move. I could do nothing. There seemed no escape from this powerless state. The headstone, granite shiny and unworn, pushed past my closed lids, past the darkness and resistance, making me look at it, allowing no choice in the matter. I tried once more to force out

any kind of sound from within me; a whimper would've been better than nothing. My throat refused to cooperate, my teeth clamped together, my tongue rooted to the bottom of my mouth. How could I free myself when my own body was against me?

No, please no, go away. Go. Away. I begged over and over, feeling helpless and scared, and wanting nothing more in that moment than to be a little girl again. To be scooped into the warm arms of Mum or Dad, to have their words soothe me to a pleasant sleep, chasing away the cruel dreams that threatened to pull me into their world. But I wasn't a little girl anymore. There was no Dad to do the chasing, or a Mum that cared enough to comfort. I didn't have them to rely on now. I had to learn to deal with this on my own.

As if on cue, a choke finally escaped my lips, the sound close to resembling a gurgle, low and guttural. The grey slab started to fade, letters undone, the inscription blurring until the granite gradually disintegrated. The grave became unrecognisable in the darkness behind my closed eyes. I breathed a small sigh of relief, and did nothing for a moment but lie still beneath the duvet, sinking into the softness of the mattress supporting me. My clothes were still soaked in sweat and clung onto my body. Sounds screamed out in the silence, the rumble of the heating in the radiators, the rain's ever persistent onslaught, the drunken howls and the occasional blare of a horn trailing off into the night. It was all so clear. Finally, I didn't feel like I was hearing them from

underwater, muffled, and far off; there was no barrier separating me from the waking world now. The dream was gone, and I was fully awake, safe.

And yet, I couldn't quite bring myself to open my eyes. Fear still coursed through me, a chill cascading from head to toe. What if it was still there, waiting? What if the man was there, too, and my mind was just trying to trick me into believing it was okay, that I shouldn't be scared.

Get a grip, I told myself, it wasn't like this was the first time I'd ever had a bad dream. This past month alone had been plagued with dreams of Dad, good and bad, my mind clinging onto him the only way I could. But that's all this had been. A dream. A bad, guilt induced dream. I'd seen Mum before bed, argued with her, fought off the overwhelming sense of tiredness to try and knock some sense into her. The row was no doubt what had triggered all this. I'd already lost a father; I didn't want to lose the only parent I had left. It wasn't completely senseless of my brain to bring that fear to the surface. That had to be it. It was the only reason I could cling to. Mum was alive, I knew that. *Stop being such a baby*. Nothing was going to be there.

Slowly, I opened my eyelids, apprehension heavy in the pit of my stomach. It was ridiculous, a seventeen year old terrified of what the half dark of her bedroom would hold. Scared of a dream that was about as real as the bogey man. As the walls and faint untidiness came into focus, I gave myself a silent 'I told you so' when there was no

gravestone in sight. But the uneasiness didn't let up and I looked around me to try and spot the grave, just in case it was lurking somewhere.

After several once overs, I felt satisfied enough to try and attempt sleep again, pushing the last of my doubts to the back of my mind. I'd have to get up for my shift at the cafe in however many hours were now left of this night. Someone had to go help Aunt Kate. The clock had said 3.00AM. I'd somehow slept for six hours already. It felt like a shorter amount of time, and I didn't feel the slightest bit well rested. Bad dream or not, I needed to get some sleep in if I wanted any chance of staying awake through taking orders.

Squashing the last remnants of fear, I burrowed under the duvet, my cold body quickly warming up again from the heat of the sheets. Sleep beckoned again, eyes slowly closing and for a second I thought I could see a faint outline of the nightmare, the graveyard with its lies waiting for me just behind my lids. No, it wouldn't suck me in, I wouldn't let it. I shook my head in an attempt to force what remained of the images away, and turned over to my right side, welcoming the icy touch of the pillow against my cheek.

The café was jam packed with customers, not one table without a person sat at it. Familiar smells of fry ups, baked cakes and brewed tea wafted through the air.

Picturesque prints of oceans and sunsets lined the Mongolia walls, the colours glossy and bright. The warmth of the images made the room feel like a safe place.

People chatted amongst themselves, words muffled, some scouring over the menu deciding what to order, whilst most were sat content with their beverage and food. One man turned to a small child next to him who looked to be no older than three. He tried in earnest to spoon mushy peas into her firmly closed mouth. She shook her head and glared at the man, offended at the blended green concoction. I smiled and mirrored the girl's action, understanding too well the disgust she felt.

Suddenly a crash echoed through the room, but it sounded stifled and dull in my ears. A ripple effect of silence washed over everyone as they turned to see what had happened. A young woman was bending down to pick up the fragments of a shattered cup, a dark brown stain splashed across her white dress. She frantically grabbed at the tissues on the table beside her.

There were strands of grass by her feet, and more strewn across the cream lino, an earthy smell clinging to the air. I started to move in to help, when a hand on my arm stopped me.

Dad handed me a cloth and pointed to the table with the man and child, who were now packing up to leave. He said something but the words were almost inaudible, coming out as a slow murmur. Dad laughed, but that came out distorted too, low and drawled out.

I stared at the woman again, she was still trying to pick up the pieces of the cup. Wisps of her blonde hair had broken away from its bun, falling into her eyes as she continued to mop up the liquid on the floor.

She's crying, the stain on her dress was bigger, darker, and resembled mud.

The child scowled at her father, picking grass off her dress, her shoes were covered in dirt.

Where had all the grass and soil come from?

The smell of earth shifts, there's something else in the air now, like gone off meat. It's foul, and induces a gag.

I looked around at the customers. They seemed oblivious. Couldn't they smell it?

I ignored the smell as best I could and made a start on cleaning the sink's contents. The soapy water rinsed away the marks of egg yolks, bean juice and various other food stains, the small dirty whirlpool sucked into the plughole satisfying to watch. The tap quickly started to chug out brown water, then clumps of wet mud sprayed across the insides of the white sink. Small specks of dirt splashed across my arm and top.

How was that possible?

I rushed to turn the tap off and, again, the unsettling scent of wet grass tickled my nose. I rubbed at it with the back of my free hand trying to force it away.

Why did I smell that? Was my brain confusing it with mushy peas?

The low chatter had ceased, there was no sound in the cafe. The silence was scarily deafening in spite of the faint echo of the tap's dripping. Hairs on the back of my neck stood to attention. There wasn't even the cheery calm of Dad's laughter to cut through the quiet.

I shifted my gaze from the sink to where I knew the customers should be, expecting to see Dad attending to one of them, scribbling away at his notepad. The earthy smell grew worse. The stench of rotting meat making my eyes water.

What met my gaze had me yearning to see Dad's smile, the kind of smile that made everything better and put people at ease. I'd have done anything to see that smile. My eyes widened, and my stomach knotted in on itself as I held back the urge to scream. I was safe behind the counter, but beyond it was a different scene entirely. The tables and chairs had gone, the pretty images along the walls with their warmth and serenity nowhere to be seen.

There wasn't a single customer in sight. Instead, the café, beyond the counter was a graveyard, the floor replaced with wet grass, rain pouring heavily. There were two graves in particular which stood out to me, and I shook my head in disbelief as an outline of a man stood near them. He was shrouded in the shadows but his voice cut clearly through the downpour, reaching me behind the safety of the counter. I was dry and yet I

could still feel the cold of the rain trying to pull me in. Remind me that there was no escape.

“You did not think your fear would go away so soon, did you?” The low voice seemed to ring in my ears.

The pent up scream finally escaped my lips as I took in Mum and Dad’s names on the gravestones, stink of wet soil attacking my senses. The dark figure stood between the two graves, its skeletal white fingers resting atop the stone. I slid to ground as my eyes blurred from uncontrollable tears. This couldn’t be real.

“And yet, it is.”

I woke with a start, sitting upright in bed. Terror clawed away at my insides fiercer now than before as a slow chill crawled up my spine. The darkness felt as though it would swallow me whole.

It will not be so easy to escape your fears.

The voice wasn’t mine, although it echoed the thoughts I wanted so badly to shake. With an overwhelming sense of dread beating away at me, I turned my head in the direction of the voice and my whole body stiffened.

A figure stood stock still just behind the threshold of the door, half shrouded in the darkness of the hallway. My eyes started to adjust, and at first I tried to dismiss the

fear by thinking it was Mum, but the shape was all wrong, too lean, almost dainty. It resembled the figure leading me through the graveyard, and I could feel my mouth start to dry up.

I could try and fool myself all I wanted, but I knew it wasn't Mum. As my focus sharpened, I could make out the clothing, telling me it wasn't a woman. His clothes were just about distinguishable, not helped much by the shadows. The clothes were too big for him, almost drowning him. A long thigh-length frockcoat hung loose on the skinny body, sleeves bunched up at the wrists. Even the waistcoat underneath it sagged, a button missing from the middle. A tattered cravat was tied sloppily around his neck, tilted off to the left instead of being perfectly positioned in the middle, just below the collar of his shirt. The ends of his trouser legs nearly covered what I assumed were worn through shoes, leaving only the toe-tips exposed. They were scuffed and caked in mud. I squinted, trying in vain to see his face. But the shadows were on his side, keeping his identity hidden. My stomach contracted as fear held me in a tight grip. This had to be another nightmare.

Before my body could shut down on itself again, I kicked off the duvet and scrambled as fast as I could out from the warm confines. Hair blinded my vision, my heart was racing again, the cool floor was a jolt of shock to my skin, a stark contrast to the stifling heat from seconds ago. I felt something brush against my foot and let out a shriek, before pushing my hair back and realising it was only the duvet half tangled

around my feet in my desperate bid to get out of bed. The rapid thud of my heart grew louder as I looked up to find the stranger gone, the space in my doorway empty. There was no sign of him.

Mum.

Terror soon turned to panic and then dread again as I ran out into the hallway barefoot, nearly slipping on the hardwood floor. I thrust my palm into the wall and just about steadied myself, willing my eyes to adjust to my surroundings quicker. I'd lived here long enough, I should know where everything was in spite of the darkness. But it wasn't often I had to leap half blind and manoeuvre my way around. The light switch was all the way behind me now, I couldn't waste a second going back if Mum was in any kind of danger. Finally, the pitch black seemed to lighten and I hurried past a small cabinet, almost knocking a bottle of air freshener off it in my wake.

Mum's bedroom was in direct eye line, it was almost opposite mine. It was only then I stopped to take stock of the situation. What if that man was in there, standing as silently and as creepily as he had done in my bedroom, just watching Mum? What could I possibly do against him? Maybe the best bet was to call the police? *By the time you do that, anything could've happened. You can't risk that.* No, I couldn't. Already precious seconds had ticked by in my indecisive dithering. Mum was a heavy sleeper too, she wouldn't even be able to tell if the stranger had soundlessly entered her room. I closed the gap between myself and her door in a few quick strides, balling my fists in case I had

to use them, praying that she would be safe. With a hard shove, the door creaked open, thudding against the wall behind it. My heart was all but ready to beat itself into overdrive.

The room remained in a state of disarray; there were still a few shards of broken glass at the far left side of Mum's bed. I must not have picked up every bit. She hadn't bothered to clean it up, and by the looks of things had simply crawled back to her position and fallen asleep. Her face, peaceful in deep slumber, poked out from beneath the covers, the rest of her body cocooned in it. I looked around for any sign that the figure had been in here, or was hiding nearby. But I was met with a light snore emanating from Mum's sleeping form. In some ways I was grateful; at least she didn't have to face the man.

I turned and retreated back into the hallway, gently shutting the door, constantly looking out for a skinny figure. My insides were still gripped with that sense of alarm. Despite my better judgement, I decided it'd be better to check the whole flat before deciding to bring the police in.

A part of me wanted to turn around and run back into my bedroom, lock the door shut and crawl into the safety of my bed. It'd be so easy to pull the covers around me and pretend it was a bubble of protection, soft cotton strong enough to deflect harm. But someone had to go out there and check, be sure of what was there. If anything was. Every step was an effort, my mind conjuring the skeletal man, waiting to

pounce in the shadows. The anxious tremors in my body felt the same as when I'd entered the flat, worse now that I had an image. I imagined the rest of the figure was just as withered, skin taut like cling-film around his bones. What would those hands do if they got hold of me? Would the bony fingers curl around my neck, clamping down tight, forcing the breath from my lungs? Or did his oversized coat conceal a small knife hungry for blood?

Every grisly death scene I could imagine played in a loop in my head. He could tackle me to the floor in the dark, finding the nearest heavy object and bludgeoning me with it. If the stranger did have a knife, it could be an easy kill, slicing my neck open in one swift motion and leaving me for dead, blood spilling over the hardwood. Or would he choose a cleaner approach? A cushion or pillow in hand, ready to suffocate me.

I switched on the living room light and gave it and the kitchen a thorough once over, checking behind the curtains, under the coffee table, and even in the kitchen cabinets to try and silence my imagination as best I could. I leaned against the entrance of the hallway, my heart slowly calming down. With bright orange light from the bulb illuminating the room, I let my eyes trail to the picture of Mum and Dad at the beach. They were so happy. Would Mum ever be that happy again?

I brushed a stray tear from my cheek. The memory I'd dreamed of had been ruined. The blissful image of Dad busying himself merrily in the café tainted by that horrifying nightmare.

My skin stung as though the rain from the cemetery was piercing me. I rubbed my hands on my legs, and felt a chill as something shifted in the corner of my eye. I didn't dare look up. Instead, I stepped forward, so I was partially in the hallway, reaching up to turn the light on in there too. Maybe enough of the lights would diminish my mind's power to conjure something out of the shadows. My fingers felt the familiar bump of the switch as I pushed down hard. My instincts told me I had to get to Mum.

The light flickered manically, as though the bulb was being electrocuted, ready to burst at any moment. I waited until the light steadied, allowing me to see clearly. Mum's room was only a few steps away, I could see the door from where I stood, white paint chipped and the brown wood pushing through to the surface. When was the last time we had painted it? It needed a new coat. Dad always hated the paint cracking and how white flecks would end up dotting the entrance to their bedroom. I felt a lump in my throat and tried hard to swallow it. I'd redo the door later, cover up the wood once more. Now, I had to check on Mum.

I forced my feet to move, legs trembling with each sluggish step. Why couldn't I move faster? It was just a dream, surely Mum was okay.

But what if she is not?

I gritted my teeth and kept going. That voice, it was the same one from my dream, except now it was echoing my doubts.

Doubts. Fears. Whichever it may be, you would be foolish to ignore them.

That's all it was, an unpleasant dream. Doubt or not doubt, I knew when I reached that door and opened it, there wouldn't be a gravestone in there. No sodden grass. There wouldn't be icy rain pelting my face and body. My feet wouldn't squelch into mud, no earthy smell filling my nose. The only thing I'd see when I opened that door was Mum, curled up under her duvet, the room in the exact state of disarray as I'd left it in.

Does that truly ensure her safety? Can you be certain she is not –

I reached out and gripped the door handle, willing myself to push it open. The metal felt cold to the touch, my knuckles turning white from the tight grasp. The smell of wet soil and grass clogged my nostrils so much so I could almost taste the grainy earth. It was soon accompanied by the lingering odour of rotting meat, forcing itself on my tongue. I closed my eyes and swallowed hard, the image of the gravestone waiting just behind my lids, Mum's name unavoidable. It was etched as deeply into my mind as it was into the grey slab.

If you open the door, she may not be as you left her. What will become of you then? A child with no father -

Why wouldn't it stop?

Or mother -

Why was my dream haunting me like this? What did it want?

An orphan, abandoned and alone -

Low and husky, the voice was persistent, the image zooming into Mum's name until it was the only thing I could picture. The voice from the dream was loud and clear, it was here with me.

Unless, you let me help.

I felt my heart skip, my eyes opening as the ghastly scene finally faded. I loosened my grip on the door handle, fingers unfurling painfully as I wondered why I was so compelled to listen. But I needed to, or at least, that's how it seemed. Even if this was my mind playing tricks on me, I had to know how, how could the dream help?

Not the dream, sweet child. Me.

Floorboards creaked behind me, the sound echoing off the walls, shattering the illusion of being alone in the empty hallway. I turned sharply, and felt regret bubble in my stomach, making me wish I'd stayed in bed. The hallway lights suddenly seemed brighter, or maybe I'd imagined it. But it made what was in front of me more vivid than it already was. The man from the dream was here, the voice in my head since I woke up gone.

He didn't move, to me, or away from me. He simply stood, staring, pencil-thin eyebrows furrowed. I, as if to mirror him, couldn't do anything either, unable to look away from his elongated, gaunt face. The light made his features sharper, clearer, but

that much worse to look at without the dark to obscure my vision. I could see the scars on his ghostly-white flesh, one from either side of his cheek trailing along and meeting at his chin. The skin hadn't healed well, raw pink poking through the barbed wire mesh of disfigurement.

I pictured a faceless figure with a sharp blade gripped tightly in hand, towering over the terrified man, his faceless accomplice, helping hold him down as he struggled desperately. A scream of anguish tore through his lips when the blade sank into his skin, dragged across from one point of his cheekbone to the other. Blood streamed down his cheeks and nose coating his chin and neck in viscous crimson, his cries now pushed beyond the point of pain. My body tensed, his screams ringing in my ears as the image faded and my eyes focused on the scarred man. I took a step back, more afraid now than I had been before.

That flash of torture felt all too real to be something made up, it certainly didn't feel like I'd imagined it in a way to make sense of his scars. His screams had raised the hairs on my neck, the blood fresh and wet and the metallic smell so strong I could taste it. It couldn't have been my imagination.

"It was not," he said, startling me, breaking the silence between us. His voice was low, but it carried clarity, making sure the words were heard. That didn't help to put me at any ease, it only sprung more questions.

“How...” The one syllable trembled out of my mouth. I couldn’t bring myself to ask what I wanted. I didn’t know if knowing the truth would make this any better. Make me less afraid. But somehow I felt sorry for him. The pain he went through must have been unbearable.

“You are experiencing a great amount of fear. It is of no surprise. My ordeal has elicited the distress you feel now, if not worsened it. What you witnessed was a result of terror and curiosity, it opened up your mind and allowed a glimpse into my past. Allowed *me* to show you.”

The slow beginnings of a headache started to form behind my eyes, what he’d just said sounding like an exaggeration. A lie even. There was no way he could’ve pushed his memory into my mind, using my fear as some kind of gateway. Even thinking the words felt childish. This wasn’t make believe, people couldn’t do things like that. And yet, something about him wasn’t right, not just his clothes, outdated though they were, but the way he spoke, and his posture. For a man with very little meat on his bones and facially mutilated, he stood tall, back straight. And even now, with his delicate tone of voice, he seemed confident, not hunched over or wanting to hide. I looked at the scar and shuddered, the echo of his screams faint in my ears. He couldn’t have put that image in my head.

The floor lino was hot beneath my feet, sweat making my skin stick as I took another step back for good measure. All the while I couldn't keep my eyes off his face, drawn to the hideous markings.

"Rather ghastly, wouldn't you say?" he said, so calmly and so offhand that a part of me almost let my guard down. Luckily the fear was stronger. He touched the part of his scar under his chin, lightly thumbing the uneven skin. "I do not doubt this is the first thing anyone is drawn to when they can see me clearly. My mind automatically recalls the way I was tortured, my pleas ignored." The air felt colder as the man took two steps forward. I took two back, wildly grabbing the nearest thing as a weapon. A letter opener. I cursed my bad luck, and hoped my panic didn't show, holding the blunt blade ahead of me with whatever courage I could muster.

"Don't come any closer or I'll give you new scars to think about!" Even as the words left my lips, I knew it sounded ridiculous. My voice came out in a high-pitched whine making the threat pointless. Who knew how strong he was? Being a bag of bones did little to indicate his muscle power. He could be as tough as the Hulk and flick me aside with ease if I attempted an attack, if I tried to defend myself. And then what? What was he going to do? Inflict the same pain he had experienced?

He took another step forward, and this time I stood my ground, trying to steady my hand that held the letter opener. I wouldn't run. If push came to shove, I'd fight, kick, bite, punch, do anything I could to fend him off. There was Mum to think about,

too. And for a second I felt a mixture of fear and annoyance. Why wasn't she the one here to deal with this? To protect me?

"I mean you no har-" he leaned forward, arm outstretched, and on instinct I ducked to the side and kicked out with my left leg, connecting hard with his knee. Pain ricocheted up my leg, toes taking the worst of the hit. It barely fazed him, his pursed lips the only sign that it had had any affect. My foot throbbed, the realisation dawning too late – kicking barefoot was a bad move.

The man moved forward again, and this time I didn't hesitate. I swung wildly with the letter opener, pushing past him and heading straight for the flat door. So much for not running.

My left foot ached in protest, but the door was only a few steps away. If he was really fixed on me, he'd follow, out of rage or bloodlust, I didn't know. But if he was hot on my heels, he wouldn't be in here to hurt Mum, she'd be safe. Or he might decide to go for her instead. It was a risk I had to take. Without stopping to chance a look over my shoulder, I gripped the weapon tight and ran on. I closed the gap between me and the door, grabbed the handle and yanked it open, hurtling into the hallway. For a second I considered knocking for the neighbours, maybe they could help, or at least fight the creep down. It'd take too long for someone to answer, by the time someone did, I could be dead. Screaming would be quicker, someone would at least come out to see what the commotion was about. I did a three hundred and sixty degree pivot, ready to scream

until my lungs gave out. The cry caught in my throat as I backed myself against the hallway wall.

The man was directly in front of me, a centimetre or two apart at best. Light out here was cruel to his complexion, worse than the living room one, highlighting every single scab half unpicked on his face. Two thin pencil marks lined out his eyebrows, haunted black eyes staring wild and angry. Heavy dirty pink bags sagged underneath each socket, like he hadn't slept for a good couple of years. Thick sideburns matted either side of his face, leading upwards to an unruly mess of dark hair, grey strands scattered across the mane, no doubt growing by the number every day. I had only been focused on his scar before. Now that he was so close to me, I could see every detail of his face distinctly. But, again, it was the deep set scar that demanded all the attention. Up close it really did look like two strings of barbed wire intertwining in a curved line. The skin was bumpy, some bits paler than his actual flesh, some a light pink, and some a dull red, scratch marks showing where he'd scraped away at it. Maybe he didn't realise how much more uglier he'd made the blemish, worsening the hideous reminder of his torture. Again, I couldn't look away, and even though I'd seen how it came to be, it looked like someone had tried to create a smiley face and had got the proportions all wrong. The smile was distorted, sinister, curving in the middle of his chin and lips.

Fear snaked its way through my body, the urge to scream forced to a stop, my grasp on the letter opener loosened a bit, my mind only just able to remember to keep a

hold on it. I felt the hallway wall against my back, the only thing to keep me steady and upright, the terror eating away at my insides. He moved in closer and I let out a slight whimper, hating my body for ending up in this almost paralysed state when I needed it the most. With a hand planted firmly on the wall either side of my shoulder, he licked his chapped and flaky lips, exhaling a little. His breath was cool on my skin, and I was surprised to find it had no smell. The way he resembled a zombie, I half expected a foul stench to hit me, attacking my nostrils. There was nothing pleasant about it either, the nothingness almost as worrying as if he had exhaled the scent of decay. He breathed in and then out again, eyebrows knitting together, creases lining his forehead. The rapid beating of my heart was so clear in my ears, I swear he could hear it too. In his eyes I could see the pain and anger, stuck on perpetual loop. He flicked his tongue over his lips again, breathing once more,

“You need to listen.”

A Brief Introduction:

The aim of this thesis is to explore my choices for writing about fear within the Young Adult (YA) genre. I wanted to focus on character representations of protagonist, antagonist and parental figures, to explore their reactions to fear. As well as this, it was important to explore their individual functions in the YA genre, and within my work, why I felt their relationships to one another was pivotal in the writing.

The thesis consists of seven sections, each of which will defend the ideas behind my writing. I will attempt to discuss the reasons I chose to write in the genres of Young Adult and Dark Fantasy. How reading fictional works in both has helped to influence my work, my own understanding of both genres, and why I enjoy them. It was vital to look into the characterisations used in my work and in those which already exist in novels I had read in order to validate my representations and what I wanted to achieve with them.

I will then explore the concept of fear, focusing on the physiological reactions induced, and the primal need for it. Later, I discuss the role it plays in my work and why I chose to represent the emotion in the form of an avatar. Research into fictions revolving around avatars is plenty, Stephen King and Mark Zusak being key examples explored in my study, however, Fear as an avatar had little to offer in regards to research. Therefore, I defend the influences I observed for the study, broadening my research into as many representations as I could find similar to my own character.

My research process looks at both fictional and academic works to validate my choices, but also to further my understanding of how fear functions. Stephen King's *IT* (1986) and Darren Shan's *Cirque Du Freak* (2000) are analysed to illustrate their differing approaches to fear. I looked at how their narratives influenced my writing, particularly with descriptive language and creation of atmosphere. It is crucial to note the contrast between the genres of Horror and Dark Fantasy, the two aforementioned texts belong in separate categories. *IT* is a work of Horror and *Cirque Du Freak* a work of Dark Fantasy. Whilst elements of both do mix, they are separate genres. I discuss why my narrative is not a work of Horror and what makes my work a piece of Dark Fantasy.

The latter sections of the thesis will establish the importance of identity and grief in regards to my protagonist. The role of identity loss in the YA genre is essential, without it there is a lack of drive for both the narrative and the protagonist. Through research, I am able to examine the reasoning behind identity loss and why it fuels not only my own work but all YA narratives.

Finally, it is important to expand on the other most prominent themes of the YA genre, the absence of parental/authority figures and causes of conflict and resolution. As a writer, I had to question why they are such vital concepts within the genre, and whether or not a piece of work can be classed as YA or even function in a YA manner without the themes. It is necessary to consider *why* conflict is needed and what forms it may take, equally *why* absent parental/authority figures are necessary. With my

narrative in particular, I establish the conflict in the form of the parental figure and antagonist, reflecting upon my previous readings (academic and fictional) in order to better understand the role of conflict and why authority figures are seen as the cause.

Why I Chose the Genre of Young Adult Fiction

I have always had an interest in Young Adult literature and have read many different texts in the genre. These texts ranged from literary fiction pieces such as Dessen's *Just Listen* (2006), Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999), Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012), paranormal romances such as Meyer's *Twilight* (2005), Smith's *The Secret Circle: The Initiation* (1992), Caine's *The Morganville Vampire Books: Glass Houses* (2006 - 2013), to dystopian, Westerfeld's *Uglies* (2005). The reason I have always preferred to read YA fiction is because I felt invested in how relatable the protagonists were, characters who were lost, unsure of themselves or suffering from some form of grief, going through a journey of self-discovery and trying to overcome their personal issues. These are often characters who are in a potentially complicated stage of their life, between childhood and adulthood. The obstacles they learn to cope with result in a step into the world of adulthood, a resolution aiding their growth and understanding of self and their surroundings. These are aspects which have fuelled my interest in reading and writing and similarly what I wished to portray through my protagonist Imogen.

Herz and Gallo's *From Hinton to Hamlet: Building Bridges Between Young Adult Literature and The Classics* (2005) looks into some of their definitions of what creates a 'good' piece of Young Adult Literature:

'The main characters are teenagers. The point of view is most often first person, and it is usually that of a teenager. The narrator is most often the main

character. The books contain characters and issues to which teenagers can relate. In a majority of the books, parents play a minor role or are “the enemy.” The outcome and the story is usually dependant upon the decisions and actions of the main character.’ (Herz, K. Sarah and Gallo, R. Donald, 2005, p.10)

I find this to be true, especially in regards to my own writing, as it features a teenager (a young adult) who is the main character, tying in with his statement that, ‘The narrator is often the main character.’ This is because the story is centred around the main character in order to see the events told from her perspective, readers following it through her eyes. Dilemmas faced by the characters are those which teenagers can often relate to, further supporting the reasoning as to why the narrative revolves around the main character. It is because readers would need the issues to resonate with them, which cannot be achieved if the narrative does not focus on a character the reader can relate to. Issues often feature around identity, family, friends and love. My work in particular explores grief and identity, which are issues I wanted my readership to relate to. When reading my work, the character’s confusion and despair at her life, her struggle to deal with death, would be something which resonates in some way with the reader.

I would fully agree with Herz’s and Gallow’s quote about ‘The outcome and the story is usually dependent upon the decisions and actions of the main character,’ as I have written Imogen so that her behaviour and the choices she makes illustrate the

person she becomes. Her grief affects everything, including the way she treats her Mother. The choices would ideally be something I'd want the reader to question whether (when reading) they feel Imogen's behaviour is apt. Whether her coping mechanisms are healthy, questioning what they would do themselves were they in her place. Both parental figures being absent holds up Herz's and Gallow's claim that 'parental figures only play a minor role in the narrative, or that they are seen as the "enemy"'. And this is because Imogen's father is recently deceased, whilst her mother has succumbed to the grief and become withdrawn, instantly playing a minor role in the story. But at no point did I intend for her mother to be an "enemy" figure. At most she was someone Imogen simultaneously sympathises with and resents due to how her grief takes precedence over her daughter's.

Imogen was an important character for me to get right for myself, because I wanted a protagonist who echoed the characters I had read and loved in YA fiction. It felt vital to represent a character close to what I would read and follow, and what I'd hope other readers would follow, too.

When a person loses a loved one, it isn't an easy thing to overcome, and it was important that I showed this through the depth of her pain, her need for someone to lean on, to show a broken character and the road to eventual recovery. It was vital to show her fear of losing her mother and father to fear being without both parents. This would create a conflict in her life, allowing me to understand and represent a character

desperate for a solution and for comfort. Kubler-Ross's and Kessler's *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss* (2005) was helpful to look at, as it explored the different stages of grief and how people cope. The text terming the stages as: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Whilst my character in this excerpt does not experience all of these stages, it was useful to keep in mind what she might go through at a later point in the narrative.

Why I Chose the Genre of Dark Fantasy

Whilst Young Adult is the genre I like to read and write in predominantly, I also enjoy Dark Fantasy fiction. The inclusion of Dark Fantasy in this piece was equally as important as writing the YA genre through Imogen. The following quote from James' and Mendlesohn's *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (2012) rings true to what I have tried to accomplish within my work:

'What then is Dark Fantasy? I would argue that it is a genre of fantasy whose protagonists believe themselves to inhabit the world of consensual mundane reality and learn otherwise, not by walking through a portal into some other world, or by being devoured or destroyed irrevocably, but by learning to live with new knowledge and sometimes new flesh.' – (James. E and Mendlesohn. F, 2012, p.218)

The Dark Fantasy element comes across because of what Imogen learns about Fear, and what he brings to her life. It is not that he causes a disruption or even destruction to her life now, rather pushes her to re-evaluate the belief in what is she once thought was real. From the first moment when readers are introduced to him she is led to question what is real and what is in her head. I find that 'by learning to live with new knowledge' is accurate to describe Dark Fantasy because of how a character may transition in regards to what they have discovered. And that transition is vital, the newfound knowledge does cause a change. And with Imogen, I would want to show that

change. She cannot return to life as she once knew it and simply forget what she has learnt, she has to adapt.

Joanna Penn in her article, 'Dark Fantasy as a Writing Genre: What is it anyway?' (2009, July 19) states:

'So, to me, a work is dark fantasy if it deals with any elements of fantasy and/or the paranormal in a way that studies the dark and frightening side of our nature, psychology and the weird, sublime and uncanny.' – (Penn, J, 2009)

To me, this establishes the divide between what makes my antagonist a character of Dark Fantasy/YA, as opposed to Horror/YA. Yes, my piece 'deals with any elements of fantasy and/or the paranormal in a way that studies the dark and frightening side of our nature.' I deal with fear, studying the effects of it and the darker nature it may present.

To better understand the difference between Dark Fantasy and Horror, Gail Z Martin provides her definition of the difference in her online article *Dark Fantasy vs. Horror – Where's the Line?*

'I think it depends on whether the adventure is primary and the blood and horrific elements are secondary, or whether the focus is on suspense and fear, and no small amount of blood.' – (Martin, Z, G. 2013)

I'd certainly agree that the difference is based upon the intent of the narrative, as Martin states, in *Dark Fantasy*, 'the adventure is the primary'. We follow the protagonist through their journey, the narrative is *about* them and their journey, whereas with horror we follow the protagonist's coping with the horror elements, the intent being to frighten or cause unease to the reader. Horror applies this to make the reader feel repulsed and disgusted, in a way that enhances the fear. However, YA literature does tend to lean more towards *Dark Fantasy* effects than *Horror*. And this is because YA literature is about the journey, and in regards to YA *Fantasy* and *Dark Fantasy* about the quest narrative. The quest is not just about the end result, it is about the quest for self.

The main focus of my plot is the journey after Imogen discovers the supernatural. It is about the supernatural other and is not aimed to horrify but to follow the character of Imogen through her choices and through overcoming her darkness. This follows in line with the portal fantasy.

'The position of the reader in the quest and portal fantasy is one of companion – audience, tied to the protagonist, and dependent upon the protagonist for explanation and decoding.' – (Mendlesohn, F. 2008, p.1)

The position of the reader in any quest narrative, I would argue, is 'dependent upon the protagonist for explanation and decoding' (Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008)) because we follow their journey, follow their emotions, and experience

the world as they do. Without them to make the decisions which drive the narrative, we as readers are left without a leader. The investment is due *to the character*, without whom, the quest and narrative may fail to function.

The conventions of a typical quest fantasy often involve a physical quest, to seek a mystical object or higher power and defeat impending doom, as shown throughout Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings* (1954). However, within this project I have focused more on an internal quest tying in with the common theme running through YA genre of 'self-discovery'. Because Dark Fantasy is a sub-genre of Fantasy, there are often elements of the quest narrative present, especially when mixed with YA fiction. Although Imogen does not embark on a physical quest, her journey does involve elements of the quest narrative. She is in search for acceptance and eventual freedom from Fear.

What intrigues me most about the genre is the way the supernatural and the other is dealt with and explored in writing. The supernatural is not the defining characteristic of Dark Fantasy and features in the Horror genre as well (Shan's *Lord Loss* (2005) as an example of Horror fiction incorporating the supernatural, and Shan's *Cirque Du Freak* (2000) as an example of Dark Fantasy Fiction). The difference between the two is that Shan uses a great deal of King's gross out level of horror, in *Lord Loss* the intent being to cause repulsion via the supernatural, whereas the intent of *Cirque Du Freak* is to follow the journey of the child once he learns about the supernatural. I wanted to explore the supernatural sub-genre of Dark Fantasy as I felt it would suit my idea

concisely. I wanted to focus on the journey, and the discovery of the supernatural. I know that there are no supernatural beings in reality, and so there is a fascination in reading and writing about how they fit into the human world.

How supernatural or other worldly beings behave around humans and their affect on everything around them, are aspects I enjoy about Dark Fantasy. My work brings together the concept of coexistence, of how Imogen deals with this supernatural entity in her life, and how Fear in turn deals with being part of the world again. Fear is not human, and therefore apart from her world.

The supernatural is an interesting element of the genre. As a reader I find that it is acts as a drive to see how a human deals with the knowledge of other-worldly beings and whether such beings can be regarded as 'good' or 'evil'. Royle's *The Uncanny* (2003) discusses Freud's concept of the 'Uncanny' and states his view on the notion:

'To reiterate: the uncanny has to do with what is not ourselves, not assimilable to ourselves, despite being something that is only experienced by ourselves.' –

(Royle, N. 2003, p.29)

The quote was interesting to keep in mind when thinking about how many Dark Fantasy fictions explore the supernatural, as the elements explored within them are regarded as uncanny and only experienced (initially) by the protagonist, whom Royle might refer to as 'ourselves'. Dark Fantasy texts have a mix of 'good' beings and 'evil' beings, and a human who is initially unsure of the divide between the two, as their own

beliefs are suddenly brought into question. The more they learn about the creatures, the more their overall decision of what they stand for – be it ‘good’ or ‘evil’, is shaped.

If we look further into Freud’s essay *The Uncanny* (1919) he discusses what the uncanny is:

‘*Unheimlich* is clearly the opposite of *heimlich* [...] and it seems obvious that something should be frightening precisely because it is unknown and unfamiliar. But of course the converse is not true: not everything new and unfamiliar is frightening.’ – (Freud, S, 1919, p.2)

Here, Freud talks about what the uncanny is – the unfamiliar (*unheimlich*) being frightening because it is unknown. But the familiar can also be frightening, this is what is implied by ‘not everything new and unfamiliar is frightening.’ (Sigmund Freud *The Uncanny*. 1919). Farther into the essay, Freud discusses what the effect of the uncanny is, and goes on to say:

‘Uncanny effect is produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality.’ – (Freud, S. 1919, p.15)

Here Freud talks about imagination and reality being blurred which could cause the ‘uncanny effect’, and therefore could refer to a sense of unease in the reader when this notion is applied to fiction. There is a suspension of disbelief when reading a work of fiction which means that we, as readers, can accept the uncanny beings/events

presented, and therefore the effects they have on us whilst reading. An example of this can be given from my own work:

‘There was no comfort in being stranded in the dark. A small tremor worked its way up my spine, a chill that didn’t resemble the cold rain plastered to my skin. The darkness almost shifted, a fraction of a movement, as though something was lurking, waiting.’ (Ali, T, 2016, p.3)

Here we see Imogen in the dark and the not knowing of what is there with her – the boundary between her reality and her imagination – causes the unease. That feeling, the not knowing, can transfer to the reader, as they would feel as she does. Despite the familiar (heimlich) setting she is in, it becomes unheimlich. That unease associated with something else being there in the dark can be seen as one form of abjection, which furthers Freud’s theory of the sense of Uncanny. Abjection can come from something which is not us, something which we regard as unfamiliar. However, this is not always the case; much like Freud’s theory, something which is familiar to us can also be abject and therefore uncanny. The familiarity and the closeness to what we know becoming unfamiliar frightens us, and so causes us to reject the knowledge. For instance, when a cut bleeds it is abject. The blood was once a part of us and, therefore familiar, but the presence of it being outside of us, starts to change the familiar into unfamiliar because it is no longer a part of us. The aspect of abjection is examined by

looking into Julia Kristeva's *Powers Of Horror: An Essay On Abjection*. (1982) where she tells us that:

‘The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. [...]The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I.’ (Kristeva, J. *Powers Of Horror: An Essay On Abjection*, 1982, p.1)

This can be applied to many works of Horror and Dark Fantasy. It can certainly be applied to my own work in conjunction with Freud's theory of the Uncanny. Imogen is in the dark, her imagination leads her to question the reality of what is in the room with her, that which is the other, the abject, that which is opposed to her both physically and mentally. However, the dark is also familiar to her; she has been in the dark before. The not understanding of what the dark may contain – is also abjection and makes her abject too, due to the familiar being simultaneously unfamiliar. So when one imagines or is faced with what is abject and the other, the familiarity being tainted – that sense of unease and uncanny is automatically apparent and cannot be ignored.

An instance of this can be seen in Smith's *The Secret Circle* series (1992) which explores the story of Cassie Blake, a girl who, upon moving to her home town, discovers she is not a normal teenager, but is in fact a witch, and is initiated into a coven at her local high school. The initial reaction is that of absurdity at witches being real, but soon after acceptance follows. Once again, the lines between what is reality and imagination

for the protagonist is blurred, and this should stir unease in the reader due to unfamiliarity and the not knowing what is real.

I feel this aspect is the biggest draw to the genre as a whole, likewise something I wished to implement in my own work.

I needed to be able to give life to the Dark Fantasy element of this story, as without it the narrative itself would fall short, and similar to the character of Cassie, I wanted Imogen to struggle with the new found knowledge that life isn't as she knows it. I wanted to bring forth not only her journey of self but her belief in what is real and isn't, and her own confliction between 'good' and 'evil'. Without the character of Fear, I do not think this could have been accomplished. He puts her beliefs into question as well as moulding her sense of right and wrong.

It is intriguing to see how these supernatural creatures are depicted and still have readers who root for them. In the case of Kevin Williamson's television adaptation of *The Vampire Diaries*, (2009) from Smith's *The Vampire Diaries* series (1991 – 1992), you get the morally questionable Damon Salvatore, who does as he pleases, feeding on whomever he pleases and acting with no remorse over his actions, killing with no guilt, for example, when he kills his brother's best friend to cover his tracks.

And yet, again, readers, myself included, root for this character who has shown very little in way of being 'good'. In turn I have found that I almost want the protagonist, who is of course a 'good' character, to be kept in the dark about the true nature of the

antagonist, or if they come to the realisation of how bad the antagonist is, then to find a compromise in it.

The reasoning for this could be the allure of the character; there is a likeable quality which the audience and or readership may find appealing. Why we root for them can be somewhat explained by Richard Gale Keen's article on *Rooting for the Bad Guy: Psychological Perspectives* (2012):

'This can be partially explained by realizing that the types of attributions we make are influenced by how much information we have about the actor.'- (Keen, Gale, R. 2012)

This was true of Damon Salvatore, as despite his numerous acts of evil, the viewers have seen his vulnerable side. We cannot truly write him off as 'evil', instead we root for him and excuse the behaviour.

I find Keen's quote to be relevant to these types of character traits because it shows these people relishing the chaos they cause instead of being ashamed; there's a certain show of pride in how evil they can be, and despite all this, it simply takes past 'attributions we make' to change the opinion of the audience, because we have been 'influenced' by them.

This all becomes relevant to Fear because he too is someone I wanted my readership to root for despite his evil. He isn't an anti-hero in any respect, but he is

someone who initially comes across in appearance as beaten and worn, bringing to question why. Why is he like this?

Fear was to be a character who pushes the moral boundaries of both Imogen and my readers. He is evil and the antagonist of the piece. There is no redemption for Fear. He is not looking to redeem or better himself, and yet what I hoped to achieve with him is to create a character who has a confidence in his evil-doings, in his manipulation; he takes pride in what he does. I wanted to create this being who readers would know was bad, but would root for him regardless, and perhaps question why they were rooting for him. I also wanted to provide a conflict for Imogen, in knowing that he must later be defeated, but questioning whether she wants to. After all, Fear teaches her to be strong, saves her mother, and helps her realise she can rise above her grief, so would a part of her want to find a way to keep him in her life?

Similarly, for readers, I wanted the question to arise as to whether they would want to see the downfall of this character in the end, or would they want him to stay and would they almost look forward to the destruction he causes? This means that within the YA fiction he must have a certain allure to fuel this kind of want. Fear is not attractive, he is withered and skeletal in appearance, so physical allure is not what readers will (or should) be feeling. The allure would ideally be to his darkness and personality.

Why I Chose Fear

What Is Fear?

'It is the quintessential human emotion. Some people live lives devoid of joy, happiness, and pleasure but no one escapes the experience of fear and fear's companion, pain.' - (Dozier, Jr. W. Rush, 1998, p.3)

Dozier poses an interesting statement 'no one escapes the experience of fear' – which brings into question, can fear ever really be overcome? Because if no one can escape it, or avoid it, then surely it means that fear is forever ongoing? This is not to say that a certain fear cannot be overcome or controlled, but my interpretation is that fear as a whole cannot be beaten. There is always another to take its place. However, in regards to this novel, Imogen does defeat Fear the avatar, but is never truly free from fear as an emotion.

Fear is a strong emotion and has both positive and negative aspects. It exists for a reason, to warn of danger, which is positive, but it can be unpleasant and debilitating, which is negative. The negative aspect is specifically focused on throughout my narrative to show the negative results of the emotion. I was most interested in looking into what fear can do and to what degree it could push my protagonist, and how I could use the negative effects of fear to create an impact on the reader.

In order to create my antagonist however, it was first important to look into the physiological and psychological aspects of fear. What is fear and why do we feel it? Our

primal reason to feel fear is not actually negative. Psychologically, it is to act as a warning towards threat and danger. John Perritano's views on fear in *Science of Emotions* (2011) helped me to understand the purpose of it in more depth, as he states:

'When we're facing a fearful situation, we can do two things: face and fight the danger, or flee. Either way, the fight-or-flight response is our bodies way of dealing with fear.' – (Perritano. J, 2011, p.13)

If we look at the words: 'the fight-or-flight response is our bodies way of dealing with fear' I would argue that it is a fundamental emotion and without it, we would not know how to avoid, or protect ourselves from, the things we fear, and would leave ourselves prone to danger.

We react in the way we do towards fear instinctively, as a way of self-preservation - the need to protect oneself. Perritano also explains the physiological reactions experienced in a state of fear:

'Fear causes our bodies to go through many biochemical and physical reactions. We start perspiring. Our muscles may tighten and our heart rate might increase. Some of this is part of a fight-or-flight reaction.' – (Perritano. J, 2011, p.13)

This quote was especially important to keep in mind when writing Imogen's experiences of fear as she undergoes the physiological symptoms that come with it. I force her to assess whether she should flee or stay and face the danger. 'Perspiring', 'muscles may tighten' and 'heart rate might increase' are clichéd literary descriptions,

however, they are still accurate to what people feel in reality. This can be shown in an example from my own work.

‘Cold sweat clung to my skin, the bedsheet damp beneath me, duvet coiled around my legs. I could feel my heart racing, hear the rapid pounding of it in my ears. Shadows flickered across my vision and for a minute the dream was here with me, the room as cold and as dark as that cemetery had been.’ - (Ali, T, 2017, p.28)

With regards to my reading into the emotion of fear, I realised that whilst we may experience physical effects, such as cold sweats, heart racing, and irrational thoughts (all negative feelings), as a *result* of fear, they are a result and an extension of the emotion as opposed an actual *reason* for feeling it. The function of fear - warning towards threat and danger, is a reaction and our behaviour is impacted by this. It leads towards the various different ways in which to cope.

So, if fear is an emotion which warns us of danger, and prepares us to deal with it, what drove me to portray it negatively when its purpose is positive? This was a question I had to consider throughout the project. Originally, I had thought about and even attempted exploring the positive effects of the emotion, but given the genres I was working with, YA and Dark Fantasy, following through with a positive based narrative didn't seem approachable. As well as this, I felt that the negative effects of fear would

be an interesting concept to play with, keeping the fight-or-flight response in mind, to see how characters could be written to behave when and if those responses fail.

I wanted readers to question how they'd feel if their own fears were manipulated. What if they chose to succumb to or embrace the emotion? And what would their behaviour be like if fear were to blur the lines between rational and irrational thoughts?

A lot of YA fiction, from what I have read, hasn't looked at fear as a physical embodiment; rather it is something which characters experience both emotionally and physiologically. The most accurate depictions I came across were King's *Pennywise* (1986) and Burge's *Barbas* (1998 – 2006). Neither of which are YA. I felt that it was something that could and should be explored farther in Young Adult literature: why limit it to just an emotion?

Whilst I kept this component of emotion in mind, representing fear through my character's feelings, I aimed to bring Fear to life, through writing and using evocative language and atmospheric scenes. I felt that it would be interesting to explore, as fears aren't often things people like to think about, they push it to the back of their minds. So to construct a character who can not only see into that part we hide, but bring it to the forefront for his own enjoyment, was the most intriguing aspect for me. I want readers to question how they would feel if such a character existed in reality, one who could prey on their worst fears, much like King's *Pennywise* in *IT* (1986).

Representational Choices & Influences for Fear

‘So why must it consume us, dominate our entire existence, cause us to live half a life, ruin any potential joy, force us to live in a small, damp, dark cellar when there is the wide open expanse of sky just outside? Why?’ - (Daish, D, 2004, p.1)

I find that Daish’s quote surmises that fear is felt and shown as a trigger to something unpleasant and of dislike. It is an experience which can cause great discomfort, and can ‘dominate our entire existence’ if we are so crippled by it that we cannot function beyond the fear we are feeling. Fear has often been represented as a human emotion in literature, particularly within Dark Fantasy, YA and Horror fiction. It determines character behaviour and response to frightening situations, affecting both plot and narrative. Most importantly, however in regards to character formulation was looking into *what* fear itself is, what causes that state, and how individuals react to it.

Whilst I wanted to bring across a supernatural element and embodiment of the emotion, I also wanted to remain true to the realistic fears many people may have, not just those relating to the supernatural. My piece explores grief and the fear of further loss, and I felt that looking into extreme states of that fear was also important because the character of ‘Fear’ can push the emotion to that extent.

For example, I’m personally afraid of spiders, and if I see one in any room, I refuse to enter (or if I am already in the room, I leave) until it has been removed. I

associate them with poison, and the notion of their hairy, spindly legs touching me. The possibility of them being poisonous and biting me, is what causes that fear.

Due to the way I wanted to approach the project, as a novel as opposed to a short narrative piece, the full extent of Fear himself isn't explored in this submission. This was a decision I struggled with but chose to stick to as I didn't wish to rush the piece or bring across his evil too soon.

Intrusive fantasy can also describe the way in which Fear has been created as he is a being from another world entering into Imogen's 'normal' one. Mendlesohn in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) states:

'The trajectory of the intrusion fantasy is straightforward: the world is ruptured by the intrusion and it has to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled.' – (Mendlesohn, F. 2008, p.115)

Fear is both an intrusion to Imogen's world *and* her life. Her life is, as Mendlesohn has stated, 'ruptured by the intrusion.' Although Imogen does not initially perceive Fear to be an intrusion, she does so as the narrative progresses and therefore must find a way to defeat him. His foothold into her universe would mean that he is intruding into a world which isn't his own; this is opposed to a portal fantasy which would be the case if Imogen were to leave the confines of her world, locate a barrier between the two and enter into Fear's. A definition of Intrusion Fantasy has been devised by Mendlesohn in her *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008):

‘Like the portal-quest fantasy, the intrusion fantasy demands belief, but whereas the portal-quest fantasy demands belief in the surface of the world, the intrusion fantasy requires faith in the *sub*-surface, the sense that there is always something lurking.’ – (Mendlesohn. F, 2008, p.116)

I find the ‘belief’ aspect of the quote most intriguing as in the case of Fear, Imogen must have belief in him initially in order to continue seeing him; he is the intrusion and therefore ‘demands belief’. I also interpreted the quote to mean that something is always lurking in order to push through to what is perceived as the normal world. So, with Fear, he is indeed lurking, stuck in his prison until he meets Imogen.

Texts such as King’s *IT* (1986), and Shan’s *Cirque du Freak* (2000) both portray characters which evoke fear and characters who must deal with it. King’s *IT* uses Pennywise, a dark entity often taking the form of a clown, or specifically what the characters are afraid of, which would aid in luring and manipulating his targets. An example of this is shown in the opening chapter of the novel, where one of the first characters we come across is killed by Pennywise. George, when meeting the clown in a stormdrain after a boat his brother had crafted is pulled there by the water current, notices Pennywise’s eyes first. Initially this startles him as the eyes are associated with his fear of what he thinks lurks in the basement of his home, of what hides in the dark he is so afraid of.

'There were yellow eyes in there: the sort of eyes he had always imagined but never actually seen down in the basement.' (King, S, 2011, p.14)

The quote demonstrates how Pennywise initially takes form in some way from his victim's fear. Even though he not long after talks to George in a pleasant manner, offering him his boat back alongside a balloon, luring the child into a false sense of security, it is clearly a ploy to get George to trust him, or to simply toy with the boy before reverting back to what George feared and dragging him into the stormdrain and killing him.

What's interesting about the character of Pennywise is that King explores the way a child's innocence can be manipulated and destroyed through his narrative, as well as portraying the difficulties the protagonists (The Loser's Club) experience not only in going up against their fears, but in defeating this creature. IT also appears as a bird, a leper, a werewolf, a bat, a leech, and as a fish-like creature from the black lagoon, as well as others. He is able to manifest into whatever a child is afraid of, which was intriguing because this antagonist was one who targeted children, predominantly.

Whilst, (*IT*) is a work of horror, and not the genre I wanted my project to be based in, I still found the character of Pennywise an important one to look into for two reasons. The first being that, as previously stated, YA fiction did not appear to have a lot to offer in regards to a figure who embodies fear as an avatar. The second reason being

that Pennywise is a character who corrupts the innocence of children, and Fear was the kind of character I wanted to tamper with Imogen's innocence.

In contrast to King's *IT*, Shan's *Cirque du Freak* focuses on the fear experienced by the characters Darren and Steve as they become involved with a vampire circus performer Mr Crepsley. The fear is represented through Darren when he learns his friend Steve wants to become a vampire's assistant and is rejected due to his 'bad blood', as can be seen in the following conversation between Steve and Mr Crepsley:

"What's wrong?" Steve asked, rubbing his arm where he had fallen.

"You have bad blood!" Mr Crepsley screamed.

"What do mean?" Steve asked. His voice was trembling.

"You are evil!" Mr Crepsley shouted. "I can taste the menace in your blood. You are savage." - (Shan, D, 2000, p.82)

Darren witnesses this exchange from a hiding place and is both scared and disgusted by his friend's desire to become a vampire. The exchange between the characters is particularly interesting as the choice of words the character Mr Crepsley (and indeed Darren Shan, when writing the dialogue) uses, such as 'menace in your blood' shows not only Mr Crepsley's fear of what he has tasted but also delivers a crushing blow to Steve's dream. Without spelling it all out for the reader, Shan has managed to resonate both characters fears in different lights within the text.

Both texts use characters in different ways to bring across the emotion of fear and how it is dealt with. Whereas King implements graphic imagery and causes the reader to feel a sense of dread and disgust towards Pennywise, Shan takes a less gritty approach with his Dark Fantasy piece, and has readers viewing Darren's fear via his apprehension towards Steve's choice. This is due to the different readerships and age groups the texts are aimed towards, the horror text at an Adult audience, and the dark fantasy at a YA audience. However, while both writers represent their sources of fear differently, their protagonist(s) have the same function in that they have to find a way to conquer the fear.

What was interesting to observe was the common factor in both texts – the creation of children as protagonists and characters pivotal to the narratives. Both King and Shan have child characters who the antagonists of the narratives focus on. However, Pennywise follows the children, The Loser's Club, into their adolescence, and adulthood, King develops protagonists farther. Darren, however, remains a child, ageing very slowly, throughout his journey with Larten Crepsley. I found that the children in the texts were depicted initially as afraid and apprehensive of the antagonists, but throughout the piece(s) found a solution to deal with their issues. Darren and Steve accomplish this by relying on Larten – the adult figure. The Loser's Club rely on themselves and their past experience and encounters with IT in order to find a way to defeat the creature.

It was useful to read through the progressive character developments, as it showed the difference in how children and adults cope when faced with difficulties. This influence played a significant part in the relationship of both adult figures of Fear and Imogen's mother. This is because of how Imogen chooses to deal with the adult figures in her life alongside her issues. This works alongside the common trope in YA fiction, the parental figure being absent and or a force to rebel against. Fear becomes almost a replacement father figure in her life. Keeping within convention with Young Adult literature, I have found that it is common for teens and child characters to try and find a solution to their problems, to learn to become adults throughout the course of the narrative.

Representing fear through writing and characterisation can allow a writer and therefore the reader to explore how situations and decisions are handled in such a state, how debilitating it can be for the character, and how they are forced to deal with the circumstances they are placed in.

If this is done well, we, as readers, experience the ferocity of a character's terror as they do, as I found with Shan's and King's works when the protagonists were forced to confront their fears. We feel the gripping force of the situation, the panic, and the confusion; they are all factors which should be illustrated through the creation of tension and emotive language, as was done with both *IT* and *Cirque Du Freak*. Examples of each text's use of language can be seen in the following quotes:

'I saw Steve's back shaking and I thought he was going to fall over but somehow he managed to stay upright. I can't even begin to tell you how frightened I was, watching this. I wanted to leap to my feet and cry out, "No, Steve, stop!"

But I was too scared to move, terrified that, if Mr Crepsley knew I was here, there would be nothing to stop him from killing and eating both me and Steve.

All of a sudden, the vampire began coughing. He pushed Steve away from him and stumbled to his feet. To my horror, I saw his mouth was red, covered in blood, which he quickly spat out.' - (Shan, D, 2000, p.82)

Shan's use of emotive language and word choice in the phrase 'to my horror' in the above shows the emphasis of Darren's fear upon witnessing his friend being fed on. The reader should be able to feel Darren's fear and confliction to save his friend but to also keep them both protected. I feel that Shan's word choices create tension over the situation, phrases such as 'I can't even begin to tell you how frightened I was' and 'But I was too scared to move' for instance clearly paint an image of this child who, despite his desire to save his friend, is somewhat paralysed by his own fear. The language Shan uses may not be very complex, stating concepts very directly, but I found that it works; the simple descriptions for his imagery ensure that it is concise.

The latter paragraph in particular struck a chord as it paints the image very boldly of this person who has blood covering their mouth, which created a sense of disgust in myself, and presumably other readers. It could be argued, that because of the

character Shan has created, and the fact that he is a child, the language used to describe what he is wouldn't be complex. Some children of ten to twelve years of age may not have a very extensive vocabulary, and so in creating a child character, Shan may have ensured he stayed true to his representation of a child in what Darren describes and how he feels.

King's use of language is vastly different in comparison to Shan's. As I read, his words created a very graphic image in my mind:

'And yet some rationality remained, even until the end: as the Creature hooked its claws into the soft meat of his neck, as his carotid artery let go in a warm and painless gout that splashed the thing's reptilian plating, Eddie's hands groped at the Creature's back, feeling for a zipper. They fell away only when the Creature tore his head from his shoulders with a low satisfied grunt.' – (King, S, 2011, p.317)

King's character of Eddie Corcoran, a minor character in the novel, is murdered when Pennywise appears as The Gillman, (from the film 'The Creature from the Black Lagoon' (1954)). Eddie is a child who suspects his stepfather as being the one who murdered his brother. Eddie is walking along a canal and staring into it as he imagines pushing his stepfather in as revenge for killing his brother. At first IT appears to Eddie as his brother Dorsey, but once he flees from it, the creature changes form into the Gillman, proceeding to kill him.

Despite my lack of immediate connection with the character, the language used to present the emotion of fear via gore, and the way King describes the Gillman being the source of Eddie's fear, still resonated with me. Phrases such as 'soft meat of his neck' and 'warm and painless gout that splashed the thing's reptilian plating' were images of gore I saw in my mind very clearly; it was far more gruesome and induced a sense of fear and disbelief at what this creature was capable of, murdering a child without any hesitation. King portrays the language of his child character differently to Shan's. King's uses words such as 'gout' 'splashed' and 'reptilian' which come across as more specific and horrific key differences between the two writer's choices. Shan may have aimed to unsettle, but King aims to cause a deeper feeling of repulsion through his word choices, which he succeeds in doing.

King in *Danse Macabre* (1981) discusses how horror can be approached on three levels, the terror, horror and gross-out. Below we can see his definition of the gross-out stage.

'On top is the 'gross-out' level – when Regan vomits in the priest's face or masturbates with a crucifix in *The Exorcist*, or when the raw-looking, terribly inside-out monster in John Frankenheimer's *Prophecy* crunches off the helicopter pilot's head like a Tootsie-Pop. The gross-out can be done with varying degrees of artistic finesse, but it's always there.' (King, S, 1982, p.17 – p.18)

From the quote above, I find that the gross out level within the horror genre is prevalent in King's work, especially in regards to *IT* (1986). As I stated previously, King causes a deeper feeling of repulsion with the scene of Eddie's death, which employs the gross-out level of horror. Phrases such as 'soft meat of his neck' and 'the Creature tore his head from his shoulders with a low satisfied grunt.' certainly achieves what King has talked about. The gross-out level of horror itself is illustrated through graphic imagery – it is very visceral and is written intentionally, to paint an image in order to evoke a feeling of horror. This would bring us to King's second level which talks about horror as an emotion:

'The horror comics of the fifties still sum up for me the epitome of horror, that emotion of fear that underlies terror, an emotion which is slightly less fine, because it is not entirely of the mind.' (King, S, 1982, p.18)

This quote focuses on the concept of horror on an emotional level. It is not simply about what the mind perceives - the words on the page provoking an image – but about the emotional reaction as a result of that provocation. In King's *IT* upon reading the scene of Eddie's death, the imagery was about more than just repulsion and visceral disgust, it was about the experience of horror when visualising the scene. There is a sense of not wanting to see it, but being compelled to nonetheless, and King achieves this emotional reaction throughout his narrative. Right from the very beginning with

George's death, the images of horror are something readers cannot help but visualise and are immersed in, even if they do not wish to be.

Given the genres of both texts, and of Dark Fantasy and Horror in general, fear is a theme often highlighted for dramatic effect. When a character is scared it will be shown in their behaviour vividly as well as focusing heavily on the source of that fear, as shown in the aforementioned examples. Here, we look at King's final level of horror, the 'terror' aspect, which looks at the more physical and psychological components of what the genre can do.

'The finest emotion is terror. It's what the mind sees that makes these stories such quintessential tales of terror.' (King, S, 1982, p.18)

What King may be referring to here in contrast to the emotional aspect of horror, is the mind's perception of terrifying tales and the events within them leading to the emotion and physical reaction – terror. An example of this can be given when one is alone in the dark, the psychological tricks the mind plays – imagining something waiting in the shadows, feeling a breeze on your neck and questioning what that could be - leads to the physical reaction: being frozen by the fear of the unknown, and fearing what that unknown could do.

King regards the horror genre as an art form looking at 'phobic pressure points.' (*Danse Macabre* (1981) p.18). King in *Danse Macabre* (1981) talks about the concept of in horror in the various media, stating that:

'The horror genre has often been able to find national phobic pressure points, and those books and films which have been the most successful almost always seem to play upon and express fears which exist across a wide spectrum of people.' – (King, S, 1982, p.18 – p.19)

King's explanation is that fear is clearly a popular theme to explore in the genre of horror, be it through atmospheric tension, through character emotion, or through the subject of the horror. In his essay for *Writers Digest*, King's *The Horror Market Writer and the Ten Bears* (1973), he talks about how 'general phobias have to be focused on concrete plot ideas before you can hope to scare the reader' which he follows up with a list of his top ten fears, each of which he has explored throughout his works –

1. Fear of the dark
2. Fear of squishy things
3. Fear of deformity
4. Fear of snake
5. Fear of rats
6. Fear of closed-in places
7. Fear of insects (especially spiders, flies, beetles)
8. Fear of death

9. Fear of others (paranoia)

10. Fear for someone else.' – (King, S, 1973, The Horror Market Writer and the Ten Bears)

This surmises that without knowing what general (and our own) phobias are, they cannot be exploited to create horror writing which scares the reader. In the case of the list above, King has exploited his own fears in his writing.

Fear is a constant in the genre and it would fail to function without it. Whilst my work isn't in the genre of horror, it was vital to research fear used in the genre to know how to implement it in my work. And as Dark Fantasy is a sub-genre of both horror and fantasy, there will of course be elements of horror in the Dark Fantasy genre. Most importantly, King's view that fears are played upon across a 'wide spectrum' can be applied to this thesis and what I am trying to accomplish quite accurately – the varying degrees of how fear can affect someone.

There is no limit as to how many fears exist in the world, and in various people. It is indeed a wide spectrum which can be looked into, almost endless. And so it does end up leading back to whether or not fear can ever really be destroyed, because of how infinite it seems.

Ultimately, fear has been key to explore in Horror and Dark Fantasy because it adds specifically to atmosphere. Additionally, character emotions and the plot of narratives can benefit from fear being used. Fear and how it is conquered can add to

both character and plot development. Without fear being highlighted, or if it were omitted altogether, there would be a lack of character, atmospheric and emotional tension, which are key elements of the genres.

When researching other avatar-based interpretations, the two I found most useful were as mentioned previously, King's Pennywise (1986) and Constance M. Burge's representation of fear in the television series *Charmed* (1998 – 2006).

Constance M. Burge's television series *Charmed* (1998 – 2006) and the representation of fear was the most accurate to what I was attempting to do. The character, much like my own, can bring to life an individual's fear. However, unlike Fear, Barbas does not need the emotion of fear to be felt in order to tamper with it, he can play with the feeling at will.

Barbas is a demon, he originally is trapped in purgatory and could not enter the human world at will, instead appearing every thirteen hundred years to get his fill of fears. He can appear both physically and as an apparition, sensing a person's fear even if they are not feeling it. He can coerce someone into making a decision because of what they fear. Examples of how he uses his abilities can be seen in the links below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=784jInRCill> – Here, (Diego Alonzo Salar Terrazas, 2007) shows us how Barbas can delve into the mind of one of the show's protagonists (Prue), and bring her fear of drowning to life. Whilst Prue was not feeling fear at the time, it was not essential in order for Barbas to make her feel as though she

were drowning, water in the shower slowly building up to consume her. In addition to this, Barbas makes her feel as though she cannot escape, whispering that she is trapped, thus making her feel as though she is.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuCBH-la-Zg> – In this clip, (charmedontv, 2011) illustrates how Barbas can be seen as an apparition, playing on the protagonist, Phoebe's, doubts and fears about her ex. He is trying to use this fear to his advantage, turning Phoebe against Cole so that he feels isolated.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3orrJEbwSX0> – And finally, (mistique1988, 2008) shows in this example that Barbas is able to use a memory to play on the protagonist, Piper's, fear over her own happiness. Again, he appears as an apparition, but this time tampers with a personal memory to emphasise an existing fear.

What is important to note was how Barbas uses his powers in different ways for the same purpose. Memory manipulation, thought manipulation and literally forcing his victim's to live out their fears. I found that this showed his dedication to what he wanted, doing whatever it took to achieve it.

The common factors between both mine and Burge's representations are the fact that they are both supernatural beings, and both antagonists with the ability to manipulate fear. *Charmed's* (1998 – 2006) Barbas was a key character for me to look into even though he is not literary representation. This is because of what I was trying to explore, specifically fear as an avatar. As mentioned in the introduction, there was very

little reading material available which fit the audience of both Dark Fantasy and YA, and whilst *Charmed* isn't a YA series, it is very much rooted in the supernatural and Dark Fantasy parameters and provided the most accurate representation of an avatar that I could get insight from.

Through watching scenes with only Barbas in, I was able to decide how I wanted my character to behave, for him to be driven towards a goal of being free from his prison and to manipulate a human apprentice to gain strength from. It was also beneficial as being able to see the various fears explored throughout the show helped me to choose how Fear would guide Imogen. Watching scenes where he used his powers made me feel uncomfortable, and as a result helped me to shape how I would like my antagonist to induce a similar level of discomfort in readers.

Equally important to Fear's development was the way in which I wanted that character to present himself - showing authority and eventual power over Imogen. This was not necessarily to be done in a demanding way, but in a way which would fill the lacking authority in Imogen's life.

Let's look at what how authority can work in YA literature, in order to explain my application of it to Fear.

'Adolescent characters themselves often create repressive parental figures to dominate them. The adolescents, in turn, rebel against this perceived domination in order to engage their own power.' – (Trites, S. R, 2000, p.54)

My understanding of the above quote is that Trites implies an authority character, and one who shows or asserts dominance over an adolescent character, is necessary in YA Literature. This is likely due to the adolescent needing that guidance and/or needing an authoritarian to rebel against, and as a result finding themselves in the process. Fear, as the dominating/authority figure, would assert himself in this role through how he behaves and speaks to Imogen, initially evoking a sense of trust from her.

Because of the desire to present Fear as articulate, meticulous in what he says and with his word choices, influences such as Shan's *Birth of a Killer* (2011) and Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2007) were key to creating this. Both Death and Larten Crepsley are written, I feel, to present themselves in an articulate manner.

In the case of Death, it is perhaps due to how long he has existed. Similarly, Larten, being a vampire turned in 1807, has lived for an extended length of time, and because of the time period he is from, his language and speech reflects this. And although the eloquence of the character is not apparent initially in Shan's piece, it is very much established towards the end. This is because of the influence of his mentor, who speaks eloquently and after he has served as a vampire for a certain length of time.

The dynamic between the two made me consider the way an authority figure's language can affect a younger person's or a person who does not speak in the same way. Perhaps Larten adapted his way of speaking to mirror his mentor's out of influence

and respect, the presumption being that those of a higher standing, authority and eloquence are regarded with a certain level of awe and respect.

“It is many things to many people,” Larten said softly, taking Wester’s good arm and leading him away. “For you, temporarily, it can be a sanctuary.” - (Shan, D, 2011, p.152).

The above quote displays the articulate way Larten talks towards an injured friend; the manner does not come across as offhand or insincere. I do think his language, more accurately. Shan’s use of language for the character affects the intonation. Most people in today’s time period would likely say the aforementioned quote in this way – “It’s different depending on the person, but you might feel safer there for a little while.” Already there is a difference; they both imply the same intention, to offer a friend a safe place to stay. However, one comes across as more casual in my opinion, whereas how Larten phrases it does not read as casual. The word choices of ‘temporarily’ and ‘sanctuary’, although not explicitly eloquent words, aren’t necessarily words people today would use in daily conversation.

In regards to Zusak’s *The Book Thief* (2007), the influence drew from Death’s inner monologue. The character, presumably, has existed for a very long time, and therefore has witnessed many different time periods when coming for the souls of his victims. His thought processes not only come across as eloquently presented, but also very reflective, considerate of his victims, their deaths, and of his own part in the grand

scheme of life and death. Zusak moves from addressing the reader directly from Death's point of view, which to me as a reader at moments felt intimate due to the sense of feeling like I was being spoken to, to analysing his current situation at hand, to reflecting on the past. Throughout each instance, his inner monologue and the way he reflects remains consistent.

'I am in all truthfulness attempting to be cheerful about this whole topic, though most people find themselves hindered in believing me, no matter my protestations.' - (Zusak, M, 2007, p.13)

Much like with Shan's Larten Crepsley, the above quote uses particular word choices to represent Death in a well-spoken manner. The tone is serious and direct, and again does not give any implication to off-handedness. Words such as 'attempting' 'hindered' and 'protestations' aren't typically used in today's speech between people, particularly in casual context. I found with both these works, language has played a crucial part in character representation, as without the particular choice in words, both Larten and Death would not come across as effectively as they did. I, as a reader, found myself drawn to them because of their eloquence, it set them apart as different because they were, in fact, different – one a figure of life's end, and one a long-surviving supernatural being. In that same vein, because Fear wasn't a human being, or from the twenty-first century, I wanted to give him a voice and manner that set him apart from people of this time period, but in a way which still drew the reader in.

Death and Larten, despite being depicted as characters from a different time period, do move along in their respective works with the time, Death following Liesel into her adult and then elderly years, and Larten later featuring in *Shan's Cirque Du Freak* (2000) set much later on in his life, and closer to the twenty-first century when he comes across both Darren and Steve. I also took into account from reading these works that regardless of their time shift, neither Larten nor Death's language is affected. They both remain as well-spoken and of their time throughout the narrative(s). This consistency is what I aimed for with Fear. He understands the world around him has altered and moved forward but does not necessarily feel the need to adapt himself to it.

With all of the above character draws in mind, it was interesting to see what was already available and what had been done in both fiction and television. It helped shape my character. Fear's language was essential to keep in mind, and the dark undertone of what he would say, implicated through the use of emotive writing and his actions. This would portray the darkness and evil of the character, even though the *emotion* of fear is not an evil or bad one as such.

It was important to consider the use of language throughout the narrative not only in regards to Fear's speech, but in regards to the piece itself, in that a great deal of description and imagery needed to be created through both emotive and atmospheric language. Both aspects are vital to writing in order to help solidify imagery that a writer is putting across. Without any form of imagery, the reader might find it difficult to

visualise what is happening. There is a lack of emphasis, and this is especially true to horror and dark fantasy works I find, as the genres rely heavily on creating imagery in reader's mind, with the creatures and or gore based concepts they deal with.

I found that reading ghost stories was useful and influential in aiding the creation of atmosphere. Works such as Adam Nevill's *Banquet for the Damned* (2008) was particularly insightful into atmospheric writing as Nevill uses language in a way that when reading, I found myself afraid to fall asleep, and this was only whilst reading the first chapter.

'A vague dream where something appeared in his room close to the bed. His recall is hazy, but the experience seems familiar. At first the figure would just watch him. Then it would whisper something he could never understand. Finally, it would reach out and paw, more than touch, the lump of his body under the bedclothes.' – (Nevill, A, 2008, p.3)

The above does not explicitly state what is bothering the character, Walter, but his discomfort is apparent, his confusion and distress is clear to read through the language used. The word 'it' already establishes in both Walter and the reader's mind that the matter at hand is alien and unknown, therefore frightening because we do not *know* what 'it' is. Other word choices such as 'thing', 'paw' and 'lump' highlight even farther that this is not a person, or a normal entity we are dealing with. They also emphasise Walter's discomfort. As I read the quote, I too felt uncertain and a little

worried at the unknown, and I think this was effective writing orchestrated by Nevill as he induced fear in his reader.

Atmosphere is a vital aspect not only in ghost oriented narratives, but in the general genres of horror and dark fantasy. Ghost stories are a sub-genre of both horror and dark fantasy. Using atmospheric language can and does lend itself to creating effective scenes which then cause an emotional response from the reader. With my own narrative I took influence from Nevill's dream description, creating my own, focusing on the darkness of a graveyard, the effect of life being sucked out of the grass and headstones, dark skies and downpour intended to add to an overall chilling atmosphere. There is meant to be a sense of unease, and the use of darkness and what may lurk in it is frequent factor throughout the piece in order to play on fear.

However, it was not simply a matter of stating how dark the room or graveyard was, but how it made Imogen feel, what the darkness felt like, whether it was suffocating and all around, or whether there was any kind of reprieve from it. These were all emphasised through the use of language, through the use of her emotions. Hopefully, much like with Nevill's work, it induces a feeling of discomfort and fear in the reader. It is important that the character feels so strongly, whether it be distress or grief, so that the reader can also experience the feeling. To me that shows a level of effective writing as it involves the reader heavily. An example of this can be illustrated below from my own work:

'Again, my legs thrust me towards it and I could feel a warm layer of nervous sweat building along my brow despite the icy touch of rain water. Something didn't seem right about the headstone.' – (Ali, T, 2017, p.26)

My own word choices such as 'nervous sweat' and 'icy touch' should invoke a feeling of trepidation and concern within my readers, they are not pleasant sounding phrases. Alongside Imogen, readers should experience the emotions she is experiencing. It should also bring to question as why she is feeling this way, what is it about the headstone which has elicited the emotion of nervousness? And should the readers also be worried as to what awaits her?

Without the use of the aforementioned words, the sentence and the scene I created would not have the same emphasis or weight of eeriness to it. It would not describe what type of sweat Imogen is feeling, failing to show she is nervous and how nervous she is. Without the atmospheric description of the rain, I could not show how chilled to the bone Imogen is in more ways than one. It was important to consider language consistently throughout my project, especially where atmosphere and emotion were concerned as without the correct phrasing, it would not carry the meaning I wanted it to.

Fear, the Antagonist in Regards to Young Adult Literature

Initially I had wanted to write fear as a force of good, to look into the positive influences of the emotion. I wanted to induce sympathy within my readers. Fear as an emotion has

such bad connotations and the positives of it are almost forgotten: the fact that fear can at times prevent us from doing things we should and shouldn't, such as crossing a road in busy traffic or lighting a match in an open field; the fear of what can happen in these situations acts as a preventative for some, they (presumably) avoid doing so. It was these causes and preventatives that I wanted to write about, and to show why fear shouldn't be perceived as just a negative emotion. It has the capability to be a source of good.

But I found that alongside a leading teen protagonist, it wouldn't work to have two forces of 'good'. Deborah Halverson, in *Writing Young Adult Fiction for Dummies* (2011) expresses:

'An empowered teen protagonist is nothing without someone to struggle against, and that someone is called the *antagonist*. An antagonist may be a rival or evil nemesis, or a faceless institution, or even a friend or family member who talks your main character out of doing something or in some way acts against your character for his own reasons.' - (Halverson, D. 2011, p.94)

Having read widely in the YA genre, I have found that as Halverson has said, one of the most common themes of YA literature is that of 'good' against 'evil', the 'good' being the protagonist and the 'evil' coming in the form of a situation they are struggling through or the antagonist they are fighting against, in most cases it is both. The opposing sides build conflict and tension throughout most YA fiction, and as readers, we

feel the push and pull factors at play - the push for the protagonist to overcome the 'evil' but being hampered by it.

This meant that my initial idea would probably lack tension and a driving force: if both protagonists were 'good', then what were they striving to overcome? 'Imogen' and 'Fear' needed to be on opposing sides and the convention needed to be adhered to as it worked best for the plot to be driven in the route of 'good' overcoming the 'bad'. However, despite Fear being intended as an overall force of 'bad' and being the antagonist of the piece, I also wanted to show the way in which he would enlighten her. Whether intentionally or not, through her fear of loss, she would be urged to look at and deal with her issues, overcoming her grief and repairing her relationship with her mother. This then, to a certain degree encompasses my original idea of creating Fear as a positive figure, as despite his intentions, he does end up helping Imogen regardless of her fear of loss. She evolves as a character and learns more about herself and life through the conflicts she faces.

The 'bad' also comes in the form of Imogen dealing with her grief. And I found that working with both concepts of fear and grief, the use of emotive language was important. It emphasised the feelings and was intended to induce sympathy and conflict within the reader. I wanted to see how strongly grief and suffering could influence fear and vice versa: to what end do we let our grief cripple us, and how do we choose to deal with it? In Imogen's case it was to feel in control through evoking fear. It also becomes a

driving force, the pain driving the fear and the fear then causing a need for stability. Again, this can route back to the 'negative' being a 'positive' as it forces her to enforce control for herself, even if misguided at first.

This ties in with the Dark Fantasy element to the narrative, and why the antagonist was chosen to be a supernatural element.

Dark Fantasy often deals with its evil by means of magic, or a quest to defeat it, and whilst Horror literature can also take this approach, oftentimes the evil is defeated through a death of gory nature, or banishing an entity after many casualties have died at its hands. And I find that this is the key difference between Horror and Dark Fantasy regardless of their similar approaches – Horror heavily focuses on deaths, murder and punishment, most portrayed in gory manner, whereas Dark Fantasy, although not unfamiliar to deaths and casualties, does not show it in such a graphic way.

Fear is a supernatural figure and so the reaction intended for Imogen and readers will be of apprehension and terror (initially for Imogen, but for readers there will be a worry for the protagonist). He is more an integral cog in her own journey to overcome his influence and find herself, merging both the Quest component in Fantasy and Dark Fantasy and the 'self-discovery' component of YA fiction. Through my own writing I wanted to incorporate both YA and Dark Fantasy in order to push myself and see what factors worked well together.

Clare's *The Mortal Instrument* series (2007 – 2014) is also an example of both Dark Fantasy and YA writing. It was one of many I'd read to help get a better understanding of how to establish both genres. The character of 'Clary' as the protagonist was particularly useful, as the series follows her self-discovery through the process of searching for her mother, dealing with that loss, and aiding 'Shadowhunters' in keeping the world safe from dark creatures. The way in which Clare portrays her characters, their emotions and conflict is what lent itself most heavily to my piece. I wanted to explore the inner turmoil within my characters, and put across their emotions in a way that would make the reader feel sympathetic. I felt this was important, especially in YA: if a reader doesn't feel something when reading a piece of narrative, and are completely devoid of emotion, the piece itself hasn't done well. There is no emotional investment in the situation or the characters, nothing to grip the reader.

Imogen & Protagonist Characterisation in Young Adult Literature

Imogen, as explained previously, was intended to be the typical Young Adult protagonist. The YA genre always focuses on a young protagonist who is at odds with themselves, at a point where their sense of purpose and identity is in question. Who am I? What am I doing? What is right for me vs what is wrong for me? And, What is wrong with me? Often, if not always, young adult protagonists evolve throughout a narrative piece from a place where they are fragile or unsure of themselves to a place where they are self-sufficient. These questions and aspects of identity are usually explored through the following: family, friends, lovers, conflict, school and home life. They all contribute to the protagonist's inner turmoil, and aid their battle for something better.

The journey to self-discovery is the key component to the genre, how they overcome their obstacles and push onto a new found sense of self. Whether that be in the form of acceptance in situation and self, or change in behaviour and outlook on life, there is a resolution. This is presented as both an external quest and an internal quest, the external dealing with the antagonist, leading and working alongside the internal in the discovery of a new self: the journey from childhood to adulthood.

Choosing to stick to this convention wasn't a difficult choice to make as this is a staple in YA literature. It is what ultimately makes the genre and without it, this piece couldn't be categorised as YA. Readers of that genre may often consciously go into it

hoping to relate and root for that character to resolve any problematic issues that were present initially. They root for the loss of self to become a re-discovery.

Works such as Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2007), Clare's *The Mortal Instrument* series (2007 – 2014)) and Green's *Looking For Alaska* (2006) are all YA books and feature the lost young character archetype, their road to self-discovery and resolving any conflicts they may face along the way. Having a character with no difficulties to face, who is complacent and at peace with life, to me, and for many others, does not make for a very riveting read or protagonist to follow, which is true to all types of fiction, conflict is rooted in all genres and not just in YA.

'So fantasy tends to deal with people, usually young, in conflict with enormously powerful beings who play a kind of parental or elder role.' – (Earnshaw, S, 2014, p. 136.)

Examining the above quote, it can be argued that when faced with conflict, or 'beings who play a kind of parental or elder role' as Earnshaw states, the protagonist can discover much about themselves. In the process of dealing with the conflict presented, a character can and should learn their own coping mechanisms, a solution to the issues presented and how to complete both their external and internal quest. It all aids them in their journey.

With Imogen, the loss of self is rooted in her physical loss of her father, and her journey of defeating Fear will lead her to cope with her grief. The Book Thief's Liesel was

useful to my own work as I was able to read another character coping with grief, and how they embarked on their journey to re-discover who they are.

This is the reason why myself and perhaps other readers are drawn to these conventional characters: we want to see how their story plays out, we invest in the drama and the tension. And so it felt necessary to ensure Imogen was moulded to that stereotypical lost character.

In regards to Imogen's and Fear's relationship, the following helps to sum up why an antagonist is important in YA fiction:

'Every novel has a protagonist – which means 'one who plays the first part, chief actor'. They are the main role in the novel and typically they experience conflict because of the antagonist.' – (Mushens, J, 2015, p. 60)

Fear not only provides conflict, but adds to the issues Imogen is already facing, and as a result becomes a reason for the protagonist to eliminate the conflict by whatever means necessary. This is again a key factor in the genre, because a reader would not invest themselves and their time in a character who doesn't follow their journey through; likewise I would have found it unrealistic to create a protagonist who does not look to overcome their problems, it provides nothing and no-one to truly root for. For example, Clare's *The Mortal Instrument* series (2007 – 2014) deals with Clary who persists in finding her mother, overcoming the obstacles of dealing with grief and physically dealing with supernatural creatures. Her new self comes in the form of a

strong young woman following her path of being a 'Shadowhunter' and battling these creatures daily. I rooted for her because she was overcoming the obstacles in her life.

I would call Clary, Liesel, and my character Imogen the lost young character, a term I personally use to refer to these kinds of characters when reading young adult works. That is how I view the character to be – lost. It was essential to observe the factors which resulted in the character becoming that way, or starting off in that direction. A few examples of loss are depicted in the books I chose to reread for the project.

The loss of self in *The Book Thief* (2007) is demonstrated through Liesel, who is an illiterate young girl sent off to live with a new adoptive family as her mother's communist views pose a threat to the family. Her loss of self stems from her grief at not only losing her mother, but from the death of her younger brother, her struggle to find her place in this new home. The conflict around her is as follows: World War 2 happening, being away from her mother, and being unable to read. Through her fascination in stealing books, Liesel begins to discover who she is, despite being unable to read initially. Her adoptive father teaches her how to read, which also leads to a growth and discovery in a close father figure which she previously lacked. The journey follows her from being an uncertain timid child without a family to a well-read young girl with a very strong family unit, it also establishes her compassion towards a Jewish hideaway and prompts her own discovery about her opinions in regards to the war

around her. And there is of course the aforementioned *The Mortal Instrument* series (2007 – 2014).

Not all YA novels portray their characters as experiencing loss. However, as this was the direction I wanted my protagonist to go in, it was best I chose reading materials which dealt with that type of YA character. The various ways each of the above novels approached loss helped to contribute towards my creation of Imogen, especially as characters Clary and Liesel both go through grief similarly to Imogen. I wanted to consider emotional versus thought based reactions with Imogen as she does consistently contemplate her situations, and is self-reflective.

Grief, loss, conflict, were all contributing factors in one way or another to each of these aforementioned characters, things which they grew and/or learnt from throughout their respective narratives.

Maria Nikolajeva in her article, *Memory of the Present: Empathy and Identity in Young Adult Fiction* (2014) states that:

‘And yet, YA fiction attempts to convey exactly an adolescent’s inability to understand the world and other people; the confusion and anxiety of being young; the discomfort about the profound changes in mind and body.’

The quote itself illustrates that YA fiction deals with characters who are at odds with themselves and that there is always uncertainty. It contributes to my earlier statement that characters in the YA novels I had read were experiencing the discomfort

about the profound changes in their life – grief, loss and conflict being the changes they have experienced. These types of changes affect and shape the characters.

YA protagonists often dealt with negative emotions, and circumstances, adding to their identity loss. This is because there is a drive for us to root for a character to battle through their issues which cannot be done if they are happy. We root for them to reach that point of happiness, or at least a resolve. But they cannot reach that stage if they start off there already, we have to follow through with a journey leading there.

These were all things I took into consideration with Imogen, knowing that she was to represent the conventional archetype throughout the piece. I knew that I did not wish to incorporate all the aspects I'd read into, feeling that it would create a far too broken character, so much so that it would prove difficult for me to try and find a way for her to work through every single aspect of her loss in herself. It would overcomplicate the piece in trying to juggle what to resolve at which point.

Although the YA genre does cover a range of resolution based-aspects, for this narrative I wanted to focus on grief and conflict, and Imogen's loss of self because of them. They are emotions which interlink with one another and it was vital to show how deeply grief can affect someone, to the point where maybe they are not sure of who they are any more. Whilst not all YA fiction deals with grief, most of the characters represented within the YA novels in my readings dealt with some form of grief, deep rooted to the protagonist's situation. It is a very common emotional convention to

explore because it can affect behaviour and state of mind, so lends itself to observing how it is a character learns to cope.

Parental/Authority Figure, Relationship & Tension

Antero Garcia, in *Critical Foundations in Young Adult Literature: Challenging Genres* (2013) states:

‘Because even though parents are largely absent from the main stories that are sold and shared with kids, they are usually perceived as a powerful presence in YA.’ – (Garcia, A. 2013, p.66)

This statement is valid. If we look at the YA novel, Connolly’s *The Book of Lost Things* (2006), it deals with the ‘absent parent’ in the form of death, and the character(s) struggle to deal with that loss. And it is evident throughout the narrative. The deceased mother is still very much involved in the child’s life, which is where I would say Garcia’s term ‘perceived as a powerful presence’ is accurate. The involvement is natural, I would argue, as the child would not be able to forget the presence and the role it had and still has in his life.

Connolly’s character David clings onto his love of books after his mother’s death, finding small comfort in the fairytales his mother enjoyed and which he had read to her during her illness. David’s grief over the loss of his mother and his struggle to adjust to his father’s new family is what pushes him into a world where fairytales are real, following what he hears as his mother’s voice to this new world. This work, like my own, reflects upon the protagonist’s grief and how an absentee parent is still crucial to the narrative, playing a vital part in the growth of the character.

Imogen's mother becomes withdrawn after the death of her husband, and so Imogen almost loses two parents in this sense. One is never going to come back, and the other is so absorbed by her own grief she is absent from her daughter's life. This dynamic leads to a strained relationship between the two, Imogen needing her mother and fearful of losing her too whilst simultaneously trying to cope with her own loss. Even though Fear is ultimately the antagonist of the piece, there was an intentional choice for me to present him as a replacement father figure for Imogen. He was to represent authority and stability in her life, much of which is lacking due to the passing of her own father. This mother-daughter relationship, and its fractured nature was what led the way for Fear to become the authority figure Imogen lacked.

The problematic relationship can be further examined through Trites' statement in *Disturbing The Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (2000):

'Parents of teenagers constitute a more problematic presence in the adolescent novel because parent-figures in YA novels usually serve more as sources of conflict than as sources of support.' – (Trites, S. R. 2000, p.56)

Trites' statement supports my reason for creating the mother-daughter relationship in a strained capacity because it shows that a young adult work of literature will almost always feature this dynamic between child and parent, and I find it can be interpreted to imply that young adult pieces need this conflict based relationship. It provides the child figure with a catalyst to pursue their own power, their own sense of

autonomy, a belief in self and one's own strength. It also becomes part of the adolescent journey from child to adult. Imogen's mother and father were the authority figures, but now her father is dead, and her mother's depressive spiral has caused a conflict in their relationship, leaving Imogen with feelings of abandonment and neglect, as she tries to help her mother through grief and to fill the void her father has left. It is through Fear, that Imogen finds her own sense of power and a figure who she can lean on.

Ultimately, Imogen's mother is, as Trites says, a source of conflict rather than a source of support. She is not there when her child needs her, too absorbed in her own grief, and therefore giving Imogen a reason to rebel against her mother, as she is the only authority figure left. There is a rebellion against the idea of being abandoned. The relationship had to be representative of both the conflict between parental/authority figure and child, and the rebellion it initiates within the child. Because it is such a pivotal characteristic in Young Adult literature, I needed to ensure that the relationship and conflict came across well, in order to later validate Imogen's reasons for trusting and relying on Fear.

'The discursive mother is often static if not flat, as authors enact a sort of pedagogy or wish for both adult and child readers regarding how an ideal mother should or should not act, revealing through plot and character arcs the consequences of her brand of nurturance. Often she is relegated to background

noise as the focus understandably shifts to the development of the child character, but her influence remains significant and worthy of close consideration.’ – (Fraustino, R, L. and Coats, K. 2016, p.3)

Fraustino’s and Coat’s statement in *Mothers in Children’s and Young Adult Literature From the Eighteenth Century to Postfeminism* (2016) about mother figures in Young Adult literature supports the way I depicted Imogen and her mother’s relationship, in that the unhealthy dynamic they have was intended to stir a thought in readers of whether it is how an ‘ideal mother’ should behave and how their circumstances have affected both of them. Society expects an ‘ideal’ mother to be nurturing and there for the child, to be selfless and strong. As can be seen from very early on, Imogen’s mother isn’t as a result of grief, which isn’t a fault, everyone experiences grief differently. But, to Imogen this is a fault and she deems her mother selfish.

My narrative focuses on the fact that Imogen’s mother is not a parental figure of guidance because it felt relevant as a way for the absent/background parental figure trope to be adhered to. It was also essential in regards to ensuring that both Imogen and my readers question what can be done to help her mother through this difficult process. She wants her mother back and will not give up.

The view that ‘her influence remains significant and worthy of close consideration’ is relevant regardless of whether the child/young adult character is

opposing the parental figure or not, that the influence of the parent does impact a child. From Imogen's perspective her mother's grief is causing her to neglect her own. This influences Imogen, triggering her rebellion to 'fix' her mother. Even though her intentions are good, she behaves the way she does to 'save' her mother, and this is due to the influence of her mother's state.

It was vital to know how to represent her mother's depression as I wanted to be able to show how the loss of a loved one can have a negative impact which affects someone so deeply they become consumed by it. I wanted the mother to be someone readers simultaneously sympathised with, but also wanted her to actually be a mother to Imogen. And, Jennifer Kent's (*The Babadook* 2014) was an ideal source to look into.

The Babadook is a film primarily centered around the lives of a depressed widower, Amelia Vanek and her young son, Samuel whom she has raised on her own since the death of her husband. The relationship between the two is strained as Amelia struggles to raise him alone whilst simultaneously suffering from depression following her husband's death. Samuel's behaviour is often erratic and whilst he never met his father, he is aware of the absence in his life. Things begin to worsen after they find and read the book *Mister Babadook*, the character coming to life after its discovery. It torments both mother and son, wanting to kill them, even appearing as Amelia's husband in an attempt to sway her into killing Samuel. The creature unwittingly brings

the two closer together, helping build a healthier relationship upon its being captured and detained.

Whilst the film is more a visual representation of Horror with elements of Dark Fantasy rather than Young Adult, it was relevant to my research as it accurately depicted the strained relationship between a widowed mother and her child. It helped to see how damaging the death of a parent was, and how that loss affects a person's behaviour. By watching the film, I could see the visual affects of depression and loss which aided my writing process. I was able to use the relationship I had already seen in order to write the scenes between Imogen and her mother, to show their behaviour as damaged, to convey how their loss had affected each of them differently and fractured their own relationship.

Parental figures in YA are absent or play a minimal part in the genre because the narrative isn't about them, or their journey. The absence provides a catalyst for the protagonist, as Maria Nikolajeva says in *Aesthetic Approaches to Children's Literature: An Introduction* (2005):

'In a young adult novel, at least one parental figure has to be reintroduced, to allow a parental revolt, which is an indispensable step in maturation.' –

(Nikolajeva, M. 2005, p.57)

The reader isn't looking to follow the adult figure, but wanting to see how the young adult or teen protagonist embarks on a journey which helps them grow as a

person. This is not to say that parents are unimportant in YA fiction, they simply play a lesser role than that of the protagonist, unless they are providing conflict for the protagonist, as is the case with Imogen and her mother. If parental figures are seen as an antagonist or even as an obstacle in the way of the protagonist's journey, then they play a more significant role in the narrative as opposed to being static or background characters.

In regards to Imogen, her mother's state acts as a push towards her journey. She isn't the authority figure preventing it. The mother isn't causing Imogen to rebel against her wishes. Instead, Imogen is rebelling against her mother's grief, in a bid to save her. I wanted to build a relationship between mother and daughter which would always be important to Imogen's life, and one that readers cared about. I didn't want the only parental figure she has to be so minor that she is almost insignificant as a character, only mentioned to reiterate that there is a parent in the piece. I wanted the relationship to have meaning, which is why it is the focal point of the first chapter, setting up their relationship and building on how important she is to Imogen.

Conclusion

Young Adult literature will hopefully always be what I have an interest in writing within. The MA degree has not only given me a chance to focus my attention on a project for a long period of time, but has also helped me to evaluate *why* I wanted to write this story.

These characters, from Imogen, to her mother, to Fear, each represented an aspect I wanted to give life to within these two chapters and to continue after my studies. Loss, grief, anger, are all relevant to my characters, to show how they are almost trapped by these emotions and their steps to overcoming them. By looking into why these characters were important to me, and what I was trying to represent – fear in loss and overcoming grief, I hope that I am able to put forth the kind of story I have always enjoyed reading in the YA genre. A narrative going through the steps of shedding a part of yourself to grow into another.

Fear, the emotion and how far it can go, is what started my drive for this project, what it means to be afraid and how to conquer it, are things I wish to consider for the future of this novel. Janet Alsup, in her *Young Adult Literature and Adolescent Identity across Cultures and Classrooms: Contexts for the Literary lives of Teens* (2010) states what I believe to be the crux of a YA piece of fiction:

'Young Adult literature specializes in the "coming of age" theme – going through a right of passage or on a journey, with the characters (and often the readers) growing in the process.' – (Alsup, J, 2010, p.127)

To best write in the genre it is vital to know its most important convention – self-discovery. Without it, no young adult piece of fiction can be what it is, and indeed my own piece would fall short of being placed in the genre. By understanding the journey Imogen is to go through, I needed to consider how she would be relatable to readers. Hopefully this will allow them to feel her grief from the very beginning, so that they would want to follow her through to her resolution.

I have learned how to better my own writing, to allow descriptive language to show my reader events and emotions rather than simply tell. In addition, I have a better understanding of how to pace my character's journey so that it is not resolved in a matter of pages, but is a gradual portrayal of events. This is useful as in previous writing, I had a habit of resolving my character's issues too soon, not fully exploring who or what they are and how they should change. But the project allowed a closer inspection into the lives of my characters and pinpointed the things I should focus on.

Although Fear was not an easy topic or character to explore, especially while ensuring a steady pacing of his introduction, I am satisfied with how the piece has progressed thus far. And keeping in mind how and why we feel fear, why it is important will be constant considerations as I continue writing the novel.

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