POWER, RESISTANCE, AND TRANSFORMATION: A LEADERSHIP STUDIES ANALYSIS OF DYSTOPIAN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

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Through an analysis of the depiction of female protagonists in young adult dystopian and speculative works of fiction, this thesis establishes leadership studies as a theoretical framework for literary study. Leadership studies is a relatively young branch of academic inquiry, using interdisciplinary approaches to investigate the phenomenon of leadership. From psychology, sociology, and philosophy, to education, business, and history, leadership studies has both drawn from and provided insight into a variety of disciplines; however, these theories have not yet found their way into conversations about literature. My thesis pulls leadership studies away from its corporate connotations to establish it as a valid and valuable addition to our literary analysis repertoire through a demonstration of its potential to further conversations about texts.

This analysis is positioned within the contexts of children's literature, feminist theory, and practices of reading for ideology, anchoring leadership studies in already-established modes of inquiry while demonstrating how this field offers valuable insight into them. My focus on dystopian and speculative young adult novels reflects the recent surge in dystopic/postapocalyptic texts that feature strong female protagonists, presenting potential leadership strategies for young girl readers during an important stage of development. Thus, this thesis uses leadership studies to further our analysis of how agency, power, and gender are represented within children's literature.

Megan Musgrave, PhD, Chair

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Through an analysis of dystopian young adult speculative fiction, this thesis focuses on the depiction of female protagonists and establishes leadership studies as a theoretical framework for literary study. Only becoming a discrete discipline within the academy in the mid-twentieth century, leadership studies is a relatively young discipline that makes use of interdisciplinary approaches to investigate the phenomenon of leadership, both drawing from and providing insight into fields ranging from psychology, sociology, and philosophy, to education, business, and history. However, this collection of theories has not yet found its way into conversations about literature. This thesis in part seeks to pull leadership studies away from its often-corporate context, returning to its more academic roots, to suggest that the discipline could serve as a valid and valuable framework for literary analysis; I accomplish this through a critical demonstration of its potential to further conversations about young adult texts.

First, I position my discussion within the contexts of scholarship on children's literature and feminist theory. This anchors leadership studies in already-established modes of literary inquiry while demonstrating how these theories offer new insights into both branches of study. I also present how this thesis' focus on dystopian and fantasy YA novels reflects the recent surge in dystopic and postapocalyptic texts that feature strong female protagonists, depicting potential leadership strategies for young girl readers during an important stage of development. Next, I critique the Hunger Games trilogy (2008-2010) by Suzanne Collins through an examination of the protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, in light of several theories within leadership studies; as this series has already sparked prolific critical response, it presents an ideal starting point for introducing how

leadership studies can work as a framework for literary analysis, while contributing to a larger discussion about the depiction of female role models in young adult fiction.

I focus my discussion on a selection of theories underneath the umbrella discipline of leadership studies that lend interesting perspectives on how characters and structures operate in these texts. Older leadership theories have renewed usefulness within literary criticism because they provide us with the opportunity to expose modern texts that still ascribe to these highly problematic, inflexible, and inaccurate beliefs about leadership. Theories on symbolic leadership shed light on instances of perceived empowerment that actually reflect underlying manipulation and the influence of public perception to strip an individual of their agency and identity. Power-based and transformational leadership theories offer greater nuance in conversations about power structures, empowerment, and rebellion. Together, these theories form a detailed framework for analyzing texts, in conjunction with feminist theories, based on their portrayal of characters in leadership positions, especially when those characters are children or young adults.

Literature Review

Children's literature provides an ideal field in which to plant leadership studies as a new framework for literary interpretation. According to Rachel Falconer, "One of the distinctive aspects of children's literature as a field of academic research is that it is genuinely interdisciplinary, and brings together readers from many different backgrounds, with widely differing areas of expertise" (9). Just as the study of children's literature draws from countless other areas of academic inquiry, so too does leadership studies come to us from across the academy: James MacGregor Burns notes that "the

pivotal role of leadership research [is] as an interdisciplinary endeavor that invigorates related disciplines." Although leadership studies has yet to be applied within the context of literary analysis, "if leadership [studies] draws heavily from established disciplines, it can also vitalize those disciplines" ("Leadership" 11). The same is true of literature. As of yet, there have been no clear uses of leadership studies as a theoretical framework for literary analysis apart from my own research; this paper serves as a continuation of that work as I narrow my focus to applying these theories specifically to speculative works of YA literature.

One of the reasons why children's literature is particularly well suited to an examination of this kind is because of the key time in social development that these texts seek to locate and speak to individual readers. In these stories, we find protagonists who exemplify characteristics and ways of being that invite imitation; in the words of Wayne C. Booth,

> [E]veryone who reads knows that whether or not we should imitate narrative heroes and heroines, we in fact do. Indeed, our imitations of narrative "imitations of life" are so spontaneous and plentiful that we cannot draw a clear line between what we are, in some conception of a "natural," unstoried self, and what we have become as we have first enjoyed, then imitated, and then, perhaps, criticized both the stories and our responses to them. (228-229)

This claim is part of his argument on the inherent didacticism of all texts due to the fact that how what we read informs our actions and our deeper character development throughout our lives, especially in terms of the fiction we read at an early age. As young people read about these kinds of characters holding leadership roles within their respective texts, authors invite this kind of imitation perhaps even more so than with protagonists who do not hold explicit leadership roles within their narratives. This means

that authors writing about characters in positions of leadership have a responsibility to write about progressive leadership practices, thus providing young readers with examples for imitation that will help them mature into ethical leaders in their own communities. This also demonstrates the harm that comes with depicting characters in terms of outdated theories of leadership like trait theory, which only serves to reinforce the neoliberal ideologies of individual exceptionalism that Sean P. Connors and Roberta Seelinger Trites argue are especially harmful between the pages of young adult texts (which I discuss further in Chapter Three).

Claudia Mills comments that "Booth's arguments may strike a particularly responsive chord with critics of children's literature, for we are more willing than many other critics to concede that one aim of a children's book is to shape the evolving character of its readers" (181). This relationship has been confirmed in studies of the relationship between children and the literature they read, such as Ruth B. Moynihan's examination of a collection of children's texts and their relationship with the culture into which they were written; she observes, "Both adults and students were acting out the values they had absorbed at an early age. And those values were taught by their own parents and in their own books. An analysis of the most popular children's literature indeed provides a magnifying glass for its society" (171). Julia L. Mickenberg and Philip Nel add that "individuals and groups interested in influencing the future recognize the need to influence children" (446). As such, it is important to give closer scrutiny to these kinds of texts, particularly when the characters are framed as leaders in their communities and role models for others to imitate, both for peers between the pages and for readers in

the real world. Of course, critiques of didacticism are not without merit. C.S. Lewis cautions that

> the worst attitude of all [when writing for young readers] would be the professional attitude which regards children in the lump as a sort of raw material which we have to handle. We must of course try to do them no harm: we may, under the Omnipotence, sometimes dare to hope that we may do them good. But only such good as involves treating them with respect. (42)

The respect Lewis emphasizes is paramount to seeing children as subjects, rather than as objects. Clementine Beauvais notes, "Texts of children's literature criticism are spangled with attempts to pin down the constructed children of the texts as either *subjects* or *objects.* This effort implies a correlation between being a *subject* and being powerful (active, decisive, constructive) and being an *object* and being powerless (passive, reified, constructed)" (95, original emphasis). Leadership studies has the potential to respect the child protagonist and reader by acknowledging their agency, a theme that has been gaining importance in discussions of children's literature in the past several decades.

The relationship between agency and leadership is complex and merits attention, especially due to the former's increased prevalence in children's and young adult literary study. Richard Flynn asks, "What are we talking about when we talk about children's agency? In my view, we are talking about paying attention to children's competence and capability as social actors and about challenging what [Allison] James calls 'the more traditional, developmental discourse of children's incompetence'" (262). Along with upending such traditional understandings of a child's competence, conceptualizing children as having agency (or at least the potential thereof) draws attention to the way that the process of maturation includes a negotiation wherein children and young adults (re)claim their agency, discover the limits of their influence, and become self-actualized.

These issues are of increased importance in young adult literature as these texts address the very time in childhood when such explorations are paramount to identity formation.

Although agency is not a prerequisite for leadership in a general sense, I argue that it is an important component in assessing the productivity of a model of leadership for young readers within the context of YA literature. A person does not need to be empowered or have agency to be a leader because this label can be bestowed almost entirely based on public perception. However, this symbolic style of leadership is not particularly empowering for young readers, and it presents potentially problematic dynamics in which a character, in these cases often a young female, has their image coopted and used by those with more power than themselves. Instead of questioning whether or not these characters can be considered leaders, then, I focus my analysis on whether these models are productive or empowering to young readers based on whether the characters have agency, circumvent neoliberal ideas about individuality, connect with collective movements for change, and engage with more progressive models of leadership, such as referent (relationship-based) power and transformative leadership. Leadership studies offers the opportunity to further complicate and challenge understandings of children's agency and competence by viewing both the child protagonists of these works and the children reading about them as potential leaders in their own right, possessing power and influence that extend beyond their immediate spheres, and looks at their roles in communities and societies at large. It also allows us to critique texts for their depictions leadership dynamics, questioning assumptions that a character in a leadership position automatically has (re)claimed their agency or been empowered, and vice versa. If a text's underlying ideology promotes problematic or

outdated leadership practices, these messages have the potential to even diminish young readers' agency. However, such a sociological, reader-response-based analysis of the effect that this kind of literature has on young people is beyond the purview of this project. It is important, though, to understand the potential stakes involved to illustrate the importance of looking at how texts engage with theories on leadership, even if subconsciously. For the purposes of this thesis, I narrow my analysis to the ideologies on leadership, power, agency, and ethics that these series promote or with which they engage, with the understanding that their potential impact on young readers is significant enough to merit such critique.

I have narrowed my archive to dystopian and fantasy trilogies because of these works' popularity, and therefore influence, with young readers, as well as the opportunity that trilogies present to look at characters and ideologies as they develop over a more extended period of time. The heightened emotional and social circumstances in these books additionally throw into stronger relief the leadership concepts I will be examining here. These texts are also ideal for this analysis because of the way that they focus on protagonists who transcend their apparently limited positions within their societies to affect large-scale changes, as explored in several recent collections of criticism on dystopian YA literature. Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry describe how readers of such texts learn along with the young protagonists

> about the need for leadership, the stresses of decision making, and the dynamics of group cooperation against a common enemy. They learn how to use limited resources to overcome incredible odds, and become more powerful and capable than they ever could have imagined. (10-11)

Hintz and Ostry point to how protagonists of dystopian novels take on leadership roles, work for real and lasting changes in their communities, and learn from these experiences.

They refer to these young protagonists as "[a]gents of hope," reminiscent of the contemporary leadership studies focus on "change agents" who not only promote a common goal with their followers, but also transcend this limited sphere to transform their larger communities. Over a decade after Hintz and Ostry's collection was published, Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green-Barteet, and Amy L. Montz add that dystopian and fantasy stories allow for "the explicit exploration of the rebellious girl protagonist, a figure who directly contradicts the common perception that girls are too young or too powerless to question the limits placed upon them, much less to rebel and, in turn, fuel larger rebellions" (4). Leadership studies may not have thus far paid much attention to child change agents specifically, but Hintz and Ostry's understanding of the agent of hope, coupled with Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz's focus on the rebellious girl protagonist, reveal one potential application of leadership studies, along with the value of considering this connection within the context of YA literature.

These messages to young readers are part of what classify dystopian YA novels as what Mickenberg and Nel call "radical children's literature," which they define as literature that "raises questions about those in power; in doing so, it often calls into question accepted understandings of childhood in terms of how much a child can know, and how much power a child gets to have" (447). As we will see, the heroines in the texts under analysis in this thesis push the boundaries of how much and what kind of power a child can have, which can further empower adolescent readers, especially young girls. Angela E. Hubler emphasizes that "[t]o be effective, then, feminist practice must consist not only of individual subjective change but of the collective transformation of social institutions" (62). This is the kind of change and growth we see in dystopian novels—not

individual change but collective transformation, through the leadership of young female change agents. As they look to the future of radical children's literature, Mickenberg and Nel express their hope that, "In imagining other worlds, children might raise questions about this one" (466), a goal that is especially important when considering the intersections between leadership studies and feminist theory in these texts. It has already been established that there is a close relationship between children's literature and feminist literary criticism; this thesis adds leadership studies into this conversation to further analyses of how agency, power, and gender are represented in literature.

Building on the work of previous scholars including Shauna Pomerantz, Deborah Thacker, Hubler, and Trites, who have established significant connections between children's literature and feminist theory, leadership studies bears important connections to both fields of study. This is a significant connection not in the least because of the way that literature has been used historically to socialize young girls into patriarchal systems that seek to oppress them from an early age, minimizing their agency and limiting their capacity to affect change. According to Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair,

> fiction creates as well as reflects codes of behavior. Storytellers have long been agents of socialization, playing a significant role in transmitting cultural values. Predictably, then, fiction has served to teach girls their "place," portraying them as focused on relationships with family or friends, involved with romantic or school affairs rather than pursuing adventures or ambitions. (2)

Critiquing this practice, feminist theorists have analyzed texts written for children in terms of their presentation of gender and called for more texts that do so in progressive, empowering ways. Similarly, theorists and researchers alike have explored the discipline of leadership studies in terms of gender studies and feminist concerns. Some have sought to answer the question of whether or not women in leadership roles lead differently or if

they wield different kinds of power in different ways,[1] while others have looked at the unique intersectional challenges faced by women who are also members of other marginalized groups.[2] Some leadership theorists have even touched on childhood and developmental psychology in terms of how early experiences can shape one's perception of gender and leadership,[3] although very few have considered children or young adults as a leaders in and of themselves.

One of the clearest connections between feminist theory, children's literature, and leadership studies is in the attention that all three pay to the issues of power, empowerment, and agency. Looking at texts written for children historically, Brown and St. Clair discuss how "[i]n the stories of young women, empowerment often occurs only after some overt act of rejection or rebellion against the status quo" (28). Such revolutionary protagonists fit into the "rebel" trope, as Jessica Kokesh and Miglena Sternadori observe how "[a]lmost all of the heroines . . . discover that establishing their agency requires rebellion" (149), and in many cases their rebel status serves to define their character both within the text and in popular culture. Through such a rejection, the female protagonist—almost always implicitly, sometimes also explicitly—throws off some of the ideologies that she may have internalized from the patriarchy. It is only after such a rebellion that she is able to self-actualize and achieve empowerment. This rings especially true when looking at dystopian and fantasy texts. Speculative fiction provides an avenue for "re-visioning traditional power relations and binary constructions of masculine/feminine, reason/emotion, civilization/wilderness, order/chaos, etc." (Kennon

[1] I.e., Bass; Rosener; Schein; Jean B. Miller; Komives, Lucas, and McMahon.
[2] I.e., Bass; Morrison and Von Glinow.
[3] I.e., Bass; Komives, Lucas, and McMahon.

54). For example, Katniss of Collins' Hunger Games trilogy calls into question the masculine-versus-feminine binary by going against gendered expectations, although this revision is not without its own set of limitations (which I will discuss further in Chapter Two).

The organization of this thesis progresses as follows. Chapter Two responds to current debates about whether Katniss is a feminist icon by critiquing the series' implicit endorsement of archaic leadership theories and participation in models of symbolic leadership. Chapter Three turns focuses on Marie Lu's Legend trilogy (2011-2013), in which I use a combination of leadership studies and feminist theory to read for ideology and explore the series' position as ideologically conflicted, both participating in neoliberalism and critiquing it through the evolution of characters' understanding of their community, their positions within it, and their roles in affecting revolutionary change. Chapter Four, the culmination of this thesis, analyzes Kristin Cashore's Graceling Realm trilogy (2008-2012) through a feminist- and leadership studies-based framework, revealing its progressive messages about leadership, power, and responsibility. Finally, Chapter Five provides a conclusion to this thesis and suggests areas for future study.

CHAPTER TWO:

"UNWITTINGLY THE FACE OF THE HOPED-FOR REBELLION": SYMBOLIC LEADERSHIP AND THE HUNGER GAMES TRILOGY

Since their publication and subsequent film adaptations, Collins' Hunger Games trilogy has generated a wealth of scholarship, and it now provides an ideal starting point for illustrating the advantages that come with incorporating leadership studies into conversations about YA literature. Because of her role in the revolution and her overall "tough girl" affect within the pages of the books and on screen in the film adaptations of the series, popular opinion has held that Katniss is a feminist icon for modern young women and girls. An article from *The Guardian* promises to prove "Why *The Hunger Games*' Killer Katniss is a Great Female Role Model," and a similar *Tor* essay explains "Why Katniss is a Feminist Character (And It's Not Because She Wields a Bow and Beats Boys Up)." Currently, several scholars in feminist and YA literary criticism have reached a veritable stalemate over the question of whether or not Katniss serves as a feminist icon in contemporary adolescent literature. On one side, scholars praise Collins for introducing a strong, independent female protagonist who inspires a rebellion that brings about radical change to her society;[4] on the other, critics scrutinize her actual *lack* of agency and her submission to a traditional triangular romance plot within the context of heteronormative patriarchal systems of imperial power.[5] One aspect of Katniss' clearly fraught position within the series that has yet been absent from these critical conversations is the way that she functions as a leader and whether this particular aspect of her character provides a productive model for young girls. Although it would be

[4] See Lem and Hassel; Manter and Francis; Fritz; Green-Barteet.
[5] See Bewley; Firestone.

impossible to definitively answer the debate outlined above, theories within leadership studies provide a valuable perspective that can serve as a useful way of interpreting and analyzing Katniss' capacity to succeed or fail as a progressive model of leadership for young female readers.

Implicit Ideological Adherence to Archaic Theories

In order to critique a series like the Hunger Games in terms of its portrayal of leadership, I first turn my attention to its relationship with the antecedents of leadership studies as this serves to illustrates one of the problematic aspects of this series' implicit ideology. Leadership studies as a discipline historically begins with "great man" and trait theories, both of which signify a past fraught with problematic and inaccurate ideas about leadership, which have subsequently been definitively refuted.[6] However, as with the ideas of Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis, the great man and trait theories remain a subtext for Western cultural discourses about leadership, long after the theory has been debunked by contemporary leadership theorists.

The oldest documented theory on leadership was the great man theory, which was the belief that leaders were biologically determined—that leadership was as hereditary as height or eye color. This theory relied on social Darwinistic patterns of thinking and was also, as the name suggests, based on patriarchal systems of power and thus tended to ignore female leaders entirely. As Susan R. Komives, Nance Lucas, and Timothy R. McMahon point out, "Great women such as Joan of Arc and Catherine the Great were ignored as examples of leaders who were born with innate or natural gifts" due to their gender (57). However, even if the theory were more gender inclusive, as James M.

[6] See Bass; Komives, Lucas, and McMahon; Cronin; and Kouzes and Posner.

Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner put it, “The ‘great person’—woman or man—theory of leadership is just plain wrong” (20). This theory nevertheless dominated conversations about leadership from as early as the eighteenth century up until the 1920s when it was replaced by the trait theory of leadership. This theory posited that leadership was not necessarily hereditary, but that leaders were still born instead of made, meaning that not everyone was capable of succeeding in leadership roles; it also proposed that leaders were consistent in all contexts, regardless of the circumstances in which they led, or the other people involved.

Trait theory even becomes problematic for those who claim to privilege those characteristics traditionally thought of as feminine in evaluating leadership models because they are ultimately endorsing an inherently flawed but nevertheless pervasive way of thinking. Virginia Schein discusses how androgynous leadership styles have been touted as the perfect combination of traditionally masculine and feminine characteristics, explaining how this kind of leader “blends the characteristics of dominance, assertiveness, and competitiveness with those of concern for relationships, cooperativeness, and humanitarian values” (161). This represented a new (at the time of publishing, 1989) priority given to the stereotypically feminine traits of leadership, but Schein argues that this signifies a continued belief in trait theory, which, as she so colorfully put it, “went out with the buggy whip” (163). This adherence is dangerous due to the fact that “[i]t will not promote equality . . . because it perpetuates sex role stereotypical thinking that has no basis in reality” (Schein 162). *Any* endorsement of trait theory, then, regardless of which side of the gender binary is being privileged, becomes

problematic from a feminist perspective, as well as from that of modern leadership studies scholars and theorists.

In addition to their sexist under/overtones, the assumptions that come out of trait theory contain clear flaws when comparing these ideas with the lived experiences of people in leadership roles. Unsurprisingly, research later failed to link leadership or leader effectiveness to any definite list of traits (Komives, Lucas, and McManon 62; Cronin 29-30). Most notable of these studies was Ralph P. Stogdill's comprehensive reviews of all recorded research on trait theory in which he concluded that a "person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits" (Stogdill 130). In his second review, Stogdill looked at another 163 trait-based studies of leadership published between 1948 and 1970 and "sounded the seeming death-knell of a pure traits approach to the study of leadership" (Bass 78). After this point, the field of leadership studies collectively rejected the view that leaders were born instead of made. Even though a leader's personality is still recognized as an important part of the leadership equation, trait theory itself is no longer part of the modern leadership studies lexicon, making room for more productive, progressive theories like transformational leadership theory (which will be explored further in the third and fourth chapters of this thesis). While within the sphere of leadership studies as an area of sociological research, many agree that any "payoff in pursuing the trait theory is clearly limited" (Schein 163), I argue that this is not entirely the case when applying leadership studies to literature as a framework for analysis. Identifying these kinds of flawed ideologies within a text's depiction of leadership can provide an avenue for critique that is important to explore because of the potential effect such implicit endorsement could have on the young

readers looking to these characters as role models or examples of how to be a leader in their own lives.

On an explicit level, the Hunger Games trilogy contains very few examples of either the great man or trait theories, but these flawed ideologies nevertheless lie ominously beneath the surface. Katniss at one point does recalls her mother's assertion that "healers are born, not made" (*Hunger* 216), and she notes that acts of resistance are "not hard for [her friend] Gale. He was born a rebel" (*Catching* 156). But, these examples are sparse and could simply be hyperbolic or figurative instead of overt indicators of any deeply-held beliefs about leadership/ability and heredity. The real connection between the Hunger Games series and these theories instead lies in the ways that it on the surface appears to subvert the gendered nature of trait-based approaches to leadership, while simultaneously reinforcing binaries and feeding into a trait-based (mis)understanding of leadership. In other words, simply giving Katniss traditionally masculine qualities[7] reinforces the gender binary, implies that women can only affect change on a societal level if they forgo their femininity, and plays into the flawed trait theory idea that leadership requires masculine traits, or is based solely on traits in the first place. As such, critics who laud Katniss as a feminist role model or an example of female empowerment are potentially exhibiting the same subconscious adherence to trait theory ideologies that permeate Western culture. The inversion of gender roles may seem to supplant great man theories, but a simple inversion like the one readers find in the Hunger Games trilogy are not enough to produce a true model of an empowered female leader.

[7] For more on the debate surrounding Katniss' gender expression, see Manter and Francis, Jessica Miller, Gilbert-Hickey, Pulliam, Bewley, Lem and Hassel, Firestone, and DeaVault.

As many scholars have noted, Katniss embodies several characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity. She takes on a paternal role in her family after her father dies in a mining accident and her mother becomes catatonic from traumatic bereavement; Katniss hunts, kills, cleans, and sells game illegally to support and feed her family; she acts as her younger sister's protector by volunteering to participate in a violent competition in her stead; she disassociates from her female peers and their interests in boys and clothes; and she remains hopelessly clueless regarding emotions, both those of others and her own, throughout the trilogy. Jessica Miller compares Katniss directly to two male figures in Greek mythology, Theseus and Spartacus. Even when interpreting her gender presentation as more ambiguous than overtly masculine, Alison L. Bewley criticizes how "[h]er androgyny and gender fluidity in the context of survival are potentially empowering to readers as well as to future female heroines—but only if those readers do not look too deeply. . . . Her idolization as a 'strong' female character is based on superficial traits" (383). These superficial traits that Bewley criticizes are what set her up for her apparent leadership roles throughout the series, which calls into question her potential to function as a feminist icon as other scholars have argued.

In addition to the series' relationship with great man and trait theories, the ideology of the Hunger Games trilogy has roots in another set of outdated understandings of leadership: situational and adaptive leadership theories. These theories give way to symbolic leadership, which is of particular usefulness when critiquing works of literature. As the field of leadership studies shifted away from a focus on traits, researchers began to look instead at the impact of the situation:

> In direct opposition to trait theorists, situational theorists suggested that leadership is all a matter of situational demands, that is, situational factors

> determine who will emerge as leader . . . [because] [t]here was a preponderance of evidence from a wide variety of studies (19 in all) that indicated that patterns of leadership traits differed with the situation. (Bass 38, 73)

While this type of theory was more useful than great man or trait theories due to its understanding that context matters and that everything is not entirely contingent on the leader's inborn characteristics, situational theories of leadership overcorrected for its predecessors by ignoring the leader entirely.[8] Looking at how this theory has evolved, though, one valuable facet is the way that situational leadership has shifted into a consideration for adaptive or symbolic forms of leadership. This is the area of adaptive leadership theory I find useful within the context of literary analysis, especially when it is identified within the same series that engages with other less progressive models of leadership like great man or trait theories, as I argue is true of the Hunger Games trilogy.

Leadership theorists Horace E. Johns and H. Ronald Moser note that while situational leadership is still somewhat relevant in contemporary leadership studies, a major shift in emphasis has occurred that focuses on cultural and symbolic forms of leadership as adaptive: "In short, the leader *'picks up' on the essence* o[f] the organization and becomes its symbolic spokesperson for that essence. Thus, the leader becomes a *pattern match* (i.e., he or she is suited to the organization that he or she leads or symbolizes)" (120, emphasis added). So, while the previous iterations of situational leadership mistakenly ignored the leader's individual characteristics and actions, today when we speak of adaptive leadership, it includes the individual and how they

[8] Despite these flaws, situational leadership theory was a valuable step in the evolution of leadership studies because some of its foundational ideas have proven accurate in other studies: another way that leadership scholars discussed this kind of approach was as adaptive, which focuses on the participants at all levels in a given situation specifically and calls on them "to leverage their strengths and talents to effect change or address complex problems" (Komives, Lucas, and McManon 75).

symbolically and culturally relate to their community. This idea of a leader adapting to become a "pattern match" who serves as a symbol is valuable in part because of the way that it can go awry. Adaptive leadership can be beneficial when the leaders themselves *choose* to adapt to their situation in this symbolic way, when they "pick up on the essence of the organization" of their own volition with clear plans for how to use this position. But often in YA literature, when this kind of leadership model occurs, it happens because an adult dictates that it should, stripping the "leader" of their agency and rendering them more a figurehead than anything else—a symbolic leader more than an adaptive one. Thus, the power that the young adult "leader" seems to wield is actually in the hands of the adults or organization who craft their symbolic leadership, not the adolescent protagonist themselves.[9]

Before looking at how Katniss functions in this capacity, it is useful to briefly turn our attention to another collection of YA texts, J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series (1997-2007). Rowling's depiction of Harry's response to pressure to become a symbolic leader in the sixth book in the series both serves as further articulation of this theory and as a foil to the choices Katniss makes when she and Harry face similar situations in terms of symbolic leadership. Following this momentary detour, I return to the Hunger Games to argue that Katniss' lack of agency in the series, and her ultimate failure as a progressive model for young adult leadership, comes down to her submission to serve as a symbolic leader for the rebellion and adults co-opting her image for their own purposes.

[9] Interestingly, in the *Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership*, Bass includes the following definition of "symbol" as a cultural form: "Any object, act, event, quality, or relation that serves as a vehicle for conveying meaning, usually by representing another thing" (587). This definition is significant in terms of considering symbolic forms of leadership because of the way that it avoids assigning any agency or power to the symbol itself; instead, those active elements go to the implicit body *driving* that "vehicle for conveying meaning." In this case, the driver of symbolic vehicle, Katniss, would be President Coin and the other leaders of the rebellion movement.

The Harry Potter series presents a failed attempt at an adult fabricating this kind of submissive symbolic relationship between the titular protagonist and the Minister of Magic at the time, Rufus Scrimgeour, during the sixth book, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. In an attempt to regain the public's trust, Scrimgeour wants to take advantage of how the people now believe in Harry much more than the government by convincing him to adapt his leadership to match their agenda: "[Y]ou are a symbol of hope for many, Harry. . . . I can't help but feel that, once you realize this, you might consider it, well, almost a duty, to stand alongside the Ministry, and give everyone a boost" (345). But Harry sees through his rhetoric and retorts that they want him to be their "mascot" (346), a term that clearly evokes a symbolic model of leadership. Harry recognizes that he would have to "pick up" the Ministry's "essence" and lead the public to at least subconsciously believe that the faith they have in Harry should likewise be in the organization he would represent. This illustrates how the theory of adaptive leadership and the concept of the symbolic leader can shed light on what is happening between the lines on these pages: more than just asking Harry to become their "mascot," the Minister of Magic is attempting to harness and subsequently take advantage of Harry's position as a leader to the Magical world, turning him into a different kind of leader that would take away his agency and transfer his voice to the government.

However, instead of allowing this adaptation to take place, Harry asserts his own power by refusing to acquiesce to the Minister's demands:

> "No, I don't think that'll work," Harry said pleasantly. "You see, *I don't like some of the things the Ministry is doing*. . . . You never get it right, you people, do you? Either we've got [previous Minister of Magic Cornelius] Fudge, pretending everything's lovely while people get murdered right under his nose, or we've got you, chucking the wrong

> people into jail and *trying to pretend you've got 'the Chosen One' working for you!*" (Rowling 446-347, emphasis added)

Here, readers see Harry's understanding of the implications of adaptive leadership and what it would mean to become this kind of symbolic leader on behalf of an organization against which he has sharp criticisms. Harry also has an awareness of his potential to influence the public's opinions and expresses his distaste for the idea of using his fame to manipulate potential followers. He would have to implicitly align himself with the Ministry's ideology, which he is not willing to do. This moment when Harry refuses a leadership role demonstrates that he understands the responsibility that comes with the trust people place in him, thus making him a much more impactful leader in the long run. As such, Harry overtly resists an adult's efforts to take away his agency and use him as a symbolic leader. While Harry exhibits a plethora of other models of leadership, many of which are productive and empowering to those around him,[10] this is one kind of leader that Harry refuses to be.

With this example in mind, I argue that the Hunger Games series constructs a symbolic leader through Katniss' role in the rebellion, even more problematic than Harry's would have been if he had taken Scrimgeour up on his offer because of how culturally she has been interpreted as a model of female empowerment to readers of the books and fans of their film adaptations. Although she becomes the face of the revolution and there is no doubt that the populace *sees* her as a leader, Katniss actually has very little

[10] Much of my discussion of this example stems from my previous project, "Neville Longbottom and a Different Kind of Magic: A Leadership Theory Analysis of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series." In my prior research, I examine the relationship between Harry and one of the series' most popular deuteragonists, Neville Longbottom, in terms of a leadership studies framework to parse through Neville's character development from a submissive follower in the first book to an empowered, self-actualized leader in the final installment. In part, this evolution occurs thanks to Harry's empowering and transformational leadership style, a model that will be discussed further in Chapters Three and Four of this thesis.

agency in this situation and even (unsuccessfully) resists this leadership role when it is first thrust upon her.

While Katniss is simply trying to get Peeta (and hopefully also herself) out of their second Hunger Games arena alive, she becomes the face of a rebellion she never explicitly decided to join, much less lead. When one of the other competitors tells her that she and others are on her "side," Katniss questions to herself: "I have people on my side? *What side?* Am I *unwittingly* the face of the hoped-for rebellion? Has the mockingjay on my pin become a *symbol* of resistance?" (*Catching* 193, emphasis added). This is one of the first explicit indications in the series that Katniss may be becoming a leader, but this is something that is happening *to* her, not something she is actively choosing herself. Here, she questions what "her side" would even be; she acknowledges that her position is "unwitting." Then, she further defers away from herself by locating the symbol of the rebellion in her pin instead of in herself.

Even after she physically joins the rebellion by staying at their compound in District 13 after the decimation of her home district, Katniss is still not mentally engaged with the resistance movement, much less acting in a truly empowered leadership role. Although the mock suicide attempt with the berries in the arena was her idea, she still sees this action and the effect it has had on the public as outside of herself: at the beginning of *Mockingjay*, she thinks of this sequence of events in passive terms, that she "had already set something in motion that [she] had no ability to control" (6). Even with the knowledge that the public has perceived her action as one of rebellion, she takes no ownership or responsibility for the impact that interpretation has had on the people of Panem. Throughout the first half of the third book, she actively resists taking a more

active role in the revolution. Katniss describes how what the leaders want "is for me to truly take on the *role they designated for me*. The symbol of the revolution. The Mockingjay. It isn't enough, what I've done in the past, defying the Capitol in the Games, providing a rallying point. I must now become the actual leader, the face, the voice, the embodiment of the revolution" (*Mockingjay* 10, emphasis added). Because the Mockingjay image has been constructed for her, Katniss does not see a way for her to become anything more than a symbolic leader for the revolution, taking on their ideals in an embodied way that usurps her identity and turns her into a face, a voice, and a symbol, instead of a full person with agency and the ability to determine her own role in this fight.

As she continues to resist their efforts to shape her into a symbolic leader, Katniss comes to further realizations about the way she is being used which further illustrate the problematic nature of the dynamic between her and the forces that wish to control her image against her wishes. Montz observes, "While she seems quite capable and willing to *participate* in the rebellion, at no point is she eager to *lead* it. Nor, it seems, is Katniss willing to be its poster child" (144, original emphasis). The way that Montz refers to Katniss as the revolution's "poster child" is representative of the fact that analyses of the series have broadly understood that Katniss is more than anything else a *symbolic* leader.[11] Montz notes how the leadership of the revolution "strips [Katniss'] agency and usurps her place within the rebellion. She remains its symbol rather than its leader" (145). However, the critics rarely compare this model to any other type of leadership other than to point out her lack of agency and how she differs from the manipulative adults around her. She groups the rebels and Coin together with the Gamemakers and Snow, resenting

[11] See Olthouse, Tan, Pavlik, Rauwerda, DeaVault, and Guanio-Uluru, in addition to Montz.

how they use her as a piece in their games, and then says that Coin "has been the quickest to determine that I have an agenda of my own and am therefore not to be trusted. She has been the first to publicly brand me as a threat" (*Mockingjay* 59). Katniss' agenda is to save Peeta, not to be the Mockingjay, and she only acquiesces to the latter as the only way she can see to achieve the former. Katniss is certainly admirable for her loyalty to and care for others, but this does not make her a model of empowered leadership.

Currently, the critical debate about Katniss' feminist potential often comes to a halt when considering whether or not her ability to inspire so many people into revolutionary action exhibits personal power. Sarah Outterson Murphy ascribes the influence that Katniss has on the population of Panem to Katniss herself: "Furthermore, the later books in Collins's series explore *Katniss's own increasing power as a symbol* of the rebellion against the Capitol—power gained through the violence inflicted on her. . . . [H]er pain is used by District 13 for propaganda purposes in the war" (201, emphasis added). Similarly, Sonya Sawyer Fritz claims that "by the final installment of the trilogy, Katniss is able to embrace her own rebelliousness as empowering and effective rather than simply dangerous. As Katniss takes the nation's spotlight as the Mockingjay, the *symbol and mouthpiece* of the rebellion, she begins to evolve from a girl who is merely defiant into a powerful agent of political change" (21, emphasis added). However, based on a leadership studies reading of Katniss and understanding of symbolic leadership, it becomes clear that the power that a figurehead, mascot, or poster child—a symbolic leader—wields is actually not coming from the individual in the symbolic role at all; it originates in the person or group that made this person into a symbol.

In Katniss' case, she is merely being used as a tool for the revolution's leadership, something she realizes right away after escaping from her second Hunger Games arena: "It's an awful lot to take in, this elaborate plan in which I was a piece, just as I was meant to be a piece in the Hunger Games. Used without consent, without knowledge. At least in the Hunger Games, I knew I was being played with" (*Catching* 489). At first, Katniss attempts to resist the rebels' efforts to use her in this way, but she inevitably agrees to participate in their propaganda campaign and be their Mockingjay. While Green-Barteet ascribes this recalcitrance to the fact "that, in spite of everything she has been through, she is still a teenager" (48), I argue that it is more because she, like Harry, recognizes that to acquiesce would be incompatible with retaining her agency, individual power, and potential for a more genuine form of leadership; however, unlike Harry, she inevitably allows her agency to be stripped away and becomes the kind of symbolic leader neither she nor Harry wanted to be.

One of Katniss' most moving moments in *Mockingjay*, the post-bombing speech, is the moment where she comes the closest to reclaiming her image and agency. Though the leadership does not want her to go to the conflict-ridden ruins of District 8, Katniss decides for herself that she should go, even if she might be killed in the process. Upon encountering the camp of survivors, Katiss begins to more fully understand why she is so valuable to the rebellion: "My ongoing struggle against the Capitol, which has so often felt like a solitary journey, has not been undertaken alone. I have had thousands upon thousands of people from the districts on my side. I was their Mockingjay long before I accepted the role" (*Mockingjay* 90). In this moment, she recognizes her role in a larger collective movement for change and acknowledges that the symbolic nature of her

leadership has nevertheless made a difference in the lives of countless of people she has never met. She can see that this gives her "a kind of power [she] never knew [she] possessed" (*Mockingjay* 91), and she uses that power in the iconic speech that follows yet another bombing on the survivors. However, Coin and the rebel leaders still maintain power over Katniss and show little regard for her agency as they use her as a symbol for their revolution in whatever way serves them best. As the rebellion draws to a close, Katniss realizes Coin sees her as more valuable dead than alive because of the potential sway she would have with the post-war public, and the most effective way to capitalize on her symbolic role while neutralizing a threat is to turn her into a martyr (*Mockingjay* 261-266). This is not the first time Katniss' death has been discussed as valuable to the revolution, and it is troubling that the body and image of a young girl have been instrumentalized to the point where her death is more valuable than her life.

Although Katniss ultimately survives to the end of the series, her assumed death at one point still becomes a point of propaganda for both sides of the war. Snow presents her as a "poor, unstable girl with a small talent with a bow and arrow. Not a great thinker, not the mastermind of the rebellion, merely a face plucked from the rabble because [she] had caught the nation's attention with [her] antics in the games," while Coin states that "[d]ead or alive, Katniss Everdeen will remain the face of this rebellion," which Katniss acknowledges is because her "face is all they need now" (*Mockingjay* 294*).* Although these assessments are callous and diminish the individuality and importance of Katniss as a person, they also present troubling truths about the kind of leadership model readers find in Katniss in this series. She rarely has had the opportunity to determine her own role in this fight, and she has felt used by all sides the entire time. Her symbolic significance

to the people of Panem cannot be denied, and she is a strong symbolic leader, but this is almost entirely based on the decisions of others, with little room for her to achieve self-actualization or empowerment. Despite the ways that she may have begun to (re)claim her agency earlier in the book, the adults around her who wield power over her image still reduce her down to a symbol at every chance they get.

Jill Olthouse makes an important claim that relates to Katniss' symbolic leadership role when she states, "The power of perception is hermeneutical. And as with any act of interpretation, the audience's perceptions can influence the real outcomes" (47). In terms of a leadership studies approach to textual analysis, Olthouse's observation is particularly relevant with symbolic leadership because, in large part, this model cannot exist without the interpretive power of an audience, and their perception of the individual in question is the basis for that person becoming a symbolic leader in the first place. If the people had not first formed their perception of Katniss as sympathetic because of her volunteering to take her sister's place or Peeta's profession of love for her, they never would have paid such close attention to her throughout the Games or felt any more empathy for her than for any of the other children forced into the arena (*Hunger* 164). If the public in oppressed districts had not perceived Katniss' "little trick with the berries" (*Catching* 32) as an act of rebellion instead of a gamble for her and Peeta's survival, her mockingjay pin never would have become a symbol of the underground resistance movement (*Catching* 179); if this sequence of events had not occurred or the pubic had not responded so strongly to her story, Coin would have had no use for Katniss within the rebellion's leadership structure or propaganda videos.

Katniss' public identity construction as a leader has been largely out of her control and informed by the way that she has been perceived by the public. Olthouse argues that by the end of the series she accepts and internalizes her role as a symbolic leader of a revolution. As Olthouse specifically looks at the use of metaphor in the trilogy, she contends that Katniss' metaphor, being the Mockingjay, is not entirely her own because of its hermeneutical nature, but that Katniss finds a way to reclaim her meaning and identity through her final acts of rebellion. While I agree that the final moments in the revolution do exhibit some signs of Katniss reclaiming her identity, the actions she takes—the most extreme of which being her assassination of revolutionary leader President Coin—are still reactionary in nature: Katniss is responding to the senseless death of her sister and the overt signs that the new government is turning out to be no better than the one they had just overthrown. She makes a split-second decision to aim her arrow at Coin instead of Snow, and then while in captivity she resolves to complete suicide in order to escape a future as a symbol or weapon to be used against others: "What if they have more plans for me? A new way to remake, train, and use me? I won't do it. . . . [T]hey will never again brainwash me into the necessity of using [weapons]. I no longer feel any allegiance to these monsters called human beings, despite being one myself" (*Mockingjay* 377). Katniss' fractured, traumatized reflection on the past two years she has spent being used by the Gamemakers, Snow, the rebels, and Coin has left her feeling betrayed, disempowered, disillusioned, and brainwashed. The epilogue to *Mockingjay* shows that Katniss eventually heals and finds peace with her trauma, but the fear and resolve she exhibits in this moment reveal the negative effects that being used as a symbolic leader has had on her psyche.

Conclusion

Considering Katniss in terms of theories about trait theory and symbolic leadership sheds light on debates about her position as a potential feminist role model for children and young adults that presupposes her status as a leader within the series. Katniss' position as a feminist leader becomes tenuous when we look at how her leadership position is not only founded on flawed, outdated ideologies, but it is also inherently symbolic in nature. Her lack of agency or true (em)power(ment) becomes evident when comparing her to other young adults in positions of leadership, such as June and Day in Lu's Legend trilogy (see Chapter Three), Katsa and Bitterblue from Cashore's Graceling Realm trilogy (see Chapter Four), or the eponymous character from Rowling's Harry Potter series. Granted, it would be inequitable to judge Katniss' passive decisions about becoming the Mockingjay against Harry's refusal to be the Ministry's mascot because of their differing degrees of privilege within patriarchal societies and the unique traumas each of them had faced at this stage in their lives. Katniss is also coping with the additional pressure of having a loved one, Peeta, being held as a prisoner of war at the time she has to make this decision, and those in power frame acquiescence as a way of fighting for his freedom. As a young woman from a lower socioeconomic class, Katniss faces more structural oppression than Harry does as a young man with family wealth, and these could be contributing factors in their different responses to the pressure they receive from people in positions of authority within their communities. While Katniss would thus have been in less advantaged a position to resist the patriarchal system at large, though, she still had the opportunity to push back against a female revolutionary leader, Coin, in ways comparable to Harry's resistance against a male political leader, Scrimgeour, which

is evident in how long she held out on becoming the Mockingjay or appearing in propaganda films.

Despite the many caveats, this comparison is nevertheless valuable as it shows two young people facing similar wartime circumstances who make very different decisions about how to use their potential for leadership within the context of public perception and interpretation. They are both presented with similar circumstances in which their participation as a symbolic leader is seemingly for the good of the people at large, although doing so would require them to give up their agency and become submissive to leaders who have ulterior motives for this exchange. Katniss does reclaim some degree of her agency by the end of the series when she decides to assassinate Coin rather than allow her to perpetuate the same oppressive governmental structures they had just fought to overthrow. But, this decision is more reactionary than anything else due to the traumatic loss of her sister (most likely at Coin's command), and she never truly becomes the self-actualized, empowered, feminist leader so many readers want to believe she is. Katniss remains a symbolic leader whose power is an illusion carefully crafted by people with more structural power than she has, based on a public perception of herself that she never sought to cultivate in the first place.

CHAPTER THREE:

"THE PEOPLE AND THE REPUBLIC . . . WORKING TOGETHER": THEORIES OF POWER AND LEADERSHIP IN THE LEGEND TRILOGY

Similar to the texts Trites analyzes in *Disturbing the Universe*, Lu's Legend trilogy "depict(s) adolescents disturbing and being disturbed by the institutions that construct their universe" (xiv). In a future dystopian North America, what was once the United States has split into two warring factions: the military dictatorship, the Republic of America, to the west and the capitalist Colonies of America to the east.[12] Two protagonists alternate narrating each chapter in this series: June Iparis, an upper-class young girl in the military whose skills and intellect make her a force to be reckoned with, and Daniel Atlan Wing (known only by his nickname "Day"), a young boy criminal from the slums who stumbles his way into becoming a national icon during a time of political upheaval. These two young adults seem like they could not be any more different from each other: while Day is infamous as a notorious criminal, June is famous: she's "[t]he Republic's favorite little prodigy" (*Legend* 11), on her way to a future in the ranks of the Republic's military. When tragedy strikes and their worlds collide, June soon realizes that the Republic in which she has trusted implicitly all her life has been hiding its darker side. She and Day join forces to resist the forces that seek to oppress them and their fellow citizens, while undergoing a journey of self-discovery along the way.

Connors and Trites use the first book in the series "to illustrate how reading for neoliberalism makes available to teenagers complex ideological readings that subsequently enable them to understand how young adult novels can both reinforce and

[12] For a map of this trilogy's world, see pp. iv-v in *Prodigy*.

subvert neoliberalist ideologies" (32). The way that they define neoliberalism and subsequently critique it within *Legend* dovetails with my leadership studies-based reading: this ideology is "an economic philosophy that, among other things, privileges free-market capitalism as the economic engine of the world and emphasizes individual entrepreneurship over the social welfare of the larger collective," and Connors and Trites highlight neoliberalism's tendency to focus on individual exceptionalism and one's "ability to rise above (and overthrow) oppressive social systems" on their own (31). In response to their readings of the first book, I focus my analysis on the complete trilogy to highlight the way that the series constructs certain ideologies in *Legend*, including neoliberalism and trait theory, so that it can then break them down in *Prodigy* and *Champion*. By making these neoliberal ideas about economic systems, individualism, and leadership explicit instead of leaving them implicit (as in the world of the Hunger Games trilogy), then refuting them throughout the series, Lu first acknowledges the prevalence of these ideas in readers' own worlds and then destabilizes them in a way that brings to light the truth about these concepts, instead presenting a more progressive model of collective change and community empowerment.

Trait Theory and Neoliberal Ideologies

Lu presents readers with a world in which trait theory is the prevailing understanding of a person's leadership abilities. One of the primary ways that this is conveyed is through the military dictatorship-style governmental structure in the Republic, which is ruled by an official called the Elector Primo. In this society, Elector Stavropoulos is publicly revered almost as a deity, and each home has an "obligatory portrait of the Elector hanging on the wall, surrounded by a handful of our own photos, as

if he were a member of the family" (*Legend* 116), evocative of many real-world fascist and communist regimes. In reality, the Elector is a dictator governing via martial law whose rigged elections have allowed him to rule the Republic as a police state for decades, while maintaining an illusion of democracy. After his father's death, Anden Stavropoulos is the assumed next-in-line for this position. Such systems of hereditary rule without checks and balances evoke outdated assumptions that the ability to lead was in one's bloodline, a folklore that "is based on brothers of reigning kings who were ascribed to have abilities of power and influence" (Komives, Lucas, and McMahon 57) and props up the "Divine Right of Kings" ideology. This rudimentary understanding of leadership is inherently Darwinistic, in accordance with the kind of thinking that dominated cultural understandings both of leadership and society dating back to the eighteenth century.

The people running the resistance movement in the Republic see Anden's rise to power as a perpetuation of the same structures that result in systemic oppression, and after the former Elector dies, "the people just see a boy king who has the chance to rise up and become another version of his father" (*Prodigy* 42). When June encounters the new Elector Anden in person, the feelings of loyalty that have been indoctrinated into her through schools and propaganda start to "press heavily against [her] chest" as she thinks, "This man was *born* to rule" (*Prodigy* 135, emphasis added). Language like this overtly points to a belief in genetic predetermination where leaders are born, not made. This ideology is reinforced later when Anden offers June a position in the government: that of the Princeps, who is the leader of the Republic's Senate and "[t]he Elector's shadow" (*Prodigy* 44). He says she would be perfect for this role, despite her young age and lack of political experience, because he sees her as smart, strong, trustworthy, and possessing

a “finger on the pulse of the people, someone extraordinarily talented at everything she does”; he tells her, “You were *born* to shake the Republic. June, there is no one better” (*Prodigy* 352, 353, emphasis added). Upon hearing Anden’s over-the-top assessment of her potential, she only wonders if he is “offering this promotion purely based on what he *thinks* of my capabilities—or [if he is] letting his emotions influence him” (*Prodigy* 352, emphasis added). This response shows that June might not fully believe him, but she does not protest such praise aloud or suggest that genetic predetermination may be a flawed ideology on which to base governmental appointments.

June’s understanding of how she would function in a leadership position shifts in the series when Elector Anden asks her to take on a governmental position. She thinks about the “practical reasons” for why she would be able to do well: “I hope I *am* someone who can help transform the Republic. All of my military training, everything [my late older brother] Metias ever told me—I *know* I’m a good fit for the Republic’s government” (*Prodigy* 365, original emphasis). Here, her focus is not on her genes or her reputation as a prodigy, but on her training. While Connors and Trites critique June’s insistence “that her intellectual and physical attributes are innate” and ignorance of “the role that social systems play in supporting them” (37), I argue that this only holds true for the first book in the series, but her evolution of attitudes away from these neoliberal and trait theory-based attitudes is an important way that the series conveys its actual ideology by the end of the trilogy.

The way that June uses this language and does not question when the same verbiage is applied to her indicates that June has incorporated these beliefs into her own worldview, which is evident from the beginning of the first book by the way that she

describes herself: "I don't just *think* I'm smart. I'm the only person in the entire Republic with a perfect 1500 score on her Trial. . . . I skipped my sophomore year. I've earned perfect grades at Drake [University] for three years. I *am* smart. I have what the Republic considers *good* genes" (*Legend* 13, original emphasis), which is reinforced later in the book when Metias is also described as a "[n]atural leader" (*Legend* 63). Many young readers may already be critical of June's equation of intelligence with a perfect score on a standardized test because this kind of thinking is insidious in real-world education systems. Although there is little debate over the fact that standardized tests do not accurately measure intelligence, it remains the case that a score on a standardized exam can have a disproportionate effect on a young adult's academic future. However, while adolescents may be aware of the disconnect between actual intelligence, potential for learning, test scores, and educational opportunities, they will inevitably be familiar with the kind of student June evokes in this moment: the person who comes to believe in their own status as a "superspecial"[13] student thanks to a combination of privilege, testing skills, the kinds of intelligence that get assessed in these exams, public and familial affirmation, and sheer dumb luck.

Although June is mistaken about being the only person to have achieved a perfect score, her assessment of the Republic's strict hierarchy of a person's worth(iness) reflects an internalized social value system based on the Trial's bracketed scoring system that props up a socioeconomically stratified society. Those who fail the Trial are almost always children who grow up in the slum sectors, in part because of the corrupt nature of

[13] Connors and Trites borrow this term from Pomerantz and Raby's 2015 article, "Reading Smart Girls: Post-Nerds in Post-Feminist Popular Culture," and I in turn utilize it for my response to their critique of the Legend trilogy.

the Trial officials and also due to their lack of access to resources that would help them prepare for the exams. In keeping with the Republic's eugenics-based ideology, these children are considered to have "bad genes" and are of "no use to the country" except to be experimented on and "examined for imperfections" in a laboratory until an experiment results in death and their bodies are discarded (*Legend* 8). These beliefs about genetic superiority are in part indoctrinated into June and those like her through the education system. After the passage above where June describes herself as having good genes, she follows up by reciting: "and better genes make for better soldiers make for better chances of victory against the Colonies, my professors always say" (*Legend* 13). Instead of serving as a space in which young people learn to think critically about the world around them, these schools instead only teach June and her peers "to accept ideologies to which those in positions of power expose her without ever questioning them" (Connors and Trites 36). This is especially problematic because of the role that Trites argues schools play in YA literature more broadly: "School settings exist in adolescent literature to socialize teenagers into accepting the inevitable power social institutions have over individuals in every aspect of their lives" (*Disturbing* 33). While the role that schools play in the world of the Legend trilogy is troubling in its neoliberal distrust of all institutions (Connors and Trites 36), the Trial is eerily evocative of trends in American education that privilege quantifiable results over actual learning. According to Connors and Trites, "It is evident in mandates that charge schools with preparing students to be 'college and career ready,' a direct reference to the emphasis that neoliberalism places on human capital, as though the sole purpose of education is to prepare cogs for the global economy" (40). As a test that immediately determines ten-year-old children's

professional and educational fate with lethal consequences for failure, the Trial simply takes this real-world process a step further.

Similar to neoliberalism's emphasis on the "superspecial" individual, trait theories of leadership also tout an individual person's exceptional qualities that make them better suited for leadership positions; Cheryl Mabey condemns trait theory in part because "this approach creates unrealistic expectations for potential leaders as superhumans nearing perfection" (311), which connects to the neoliberal concept of the exceptional individual that Connors and Trites identify as problematic within YA literature. Although their article is founded on a critique of neoliberalism and not leadership theory, the neoliberal ideology about individual exceptionalism on which they spend a significant portion of the article stems out of historical concepts about the individual that likewise produced the trait theory of leadership; the fact that they identify this as such a pervasive and harmful element of neoliberalism demonstrates how trait theory is still part of the cultural hegemony, making it similarly important to critique alongside neoliberalism.

The prevalence of neoliberal ideologies in contemporary culture that Connors and Trites discuss confirms the importance of critiquing novels that also rely on trait theories of leadership that further prop up neoliberal agendas, to the detriment of young readers of these texts. Indeed, the neoliberal concepts that they identify in *Legend* have potentially harmful ramifications since they "read it as demonstrating how a focus on individual exceptionalism can unwittingly result in a genocidal political logic" (34). Connors and Trites cite June and Day's prodigy status as a sign of the text's endorsement of a belief in individual exceptionalism, reading the two young adults as

> superspecial individuals . . . who, as a result of their intellectual and physical exceptionalism, manage to rise above other people in their

> society and break free from the chains of conformity. . . . Day and June both refuse to comply with their society's conformist expectations, and the text positions readers to respect them as a result. (36)

The book titles—*Legend*, *Prodigy*, and *Champion*—even reinforce this reading because they describe June and Day in terms of their "superspecial" status and participation in the "Chosen One" trope because they are both legends, prodigies, and champions. As such, the entire series is framed around this "superspecial" aspect of their identities, and their individualism is celebrated on the cover of every installment. This emphasis goes so far as to invade the material formatting of the books themselves in that the identity-linked title appears in the top left-hand corner of every single page, coupled with the narrator's name (Day or June, depending on the chapter) on the top right, constantly reinforcing the importance of these labels to the characters and the texts overall.

While I agree with Connors and Trites' reading of the first book as ripe with problematic ideologies, their article specifically takes the only first book in the trilogy into account in order to use the text as an example of how their framework can inform a reading of a YA text. Their exclusion of *Prodigy* and *Champion* is thus understandable and necessary for their argument, but my reading positions the latter two as the most important for understanding the trilogy's ideology, as opposed to those endemic to the society in which the characters live that Lu actually critiques as the series progresses. Because Lu herself has stated in interviews that *Legend* was never supposed to be a stand-alone novel (qtd. in *Time for Kids*), it is important to take the entire trilogy into account when distinguishing between its overarching ideology and that which it critiques.

The presence of neoliberalism in the first book and of trait theory within this universe is not necessarily an indication that it is part of the trilogy's overarching

ideology because of the way that these ideas are critiqued and superseded by other theories. This is significant because the series mimics the reality of the societal beliefs of many readers: contemporary American culture has subconsciously ascribed to these ideas, causing trait theory to be hegemonic in Western society while simultaneously being outdated and inaccurate. Lu makes these troubling assumptions explicit through language and institutions in the trilogy. She has stated in interviews that she "drew from real-life dystopias that have already happened and are still happening now. . . . So if you're living in a dystopian world, like in North Korea—or even in the US right now, some people might see it as a dystopia and we don't even realize it" (qtd. in Schick). In this quote, Lu controversially compares the United States' regime to that of North Korea, implying a level of criticism against contemporary power structures on opposing ends of various governmental spectrums. Lu suggests that regardless of how different these societies may look on the outside, their subjugation of the individual and insidious ideologies can render them equally oppressive and dystopic. Such a large-scale, comprehensive, borderline scathing critique comes through in the trilogy via her equally critical depictions of the Republic's military dictatorship on the one hand, and the capitalist Colonies on the other. The world of *Legend* thus draws from real-world governments and cultures, which likewise leave their imprint on its endemic ideologies. This foundation explains the prevalence of problematic beliefs about individual exceptionalism and trait theory within the pages of the books, since these ideas are just as present in the real world as they are in the dystopian one Lu constructs.

The Legend Trilogy, Childhood, and Power Theories of Leadership

One primary way that people understand leadership is as a kind of power or influence over others, "a particular type of power relationship characterized by a group member's perception that another group member has the right to prescribe behavior patterns for the former regarding his activity as a member of a particular group" (Janda, qtd. in Bass 15). This can lead to assumptions that children cannot be leaders because of their ostensible lack of power. The very concept of childhood is fraught with a complex history of layered definition (legal, biological, sociological, psychological, educational, sexual, political, etc.) that in effect renders children powerless *by definition*, especially when overlapped with intersectional oppressed identities, such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender.[14] "[M]ost adults perceive children as being in a state of lack" (Beauvais 3), and that is especially true when it comes to power. This applies to both the children between the pages of a book and those children reading about them. In response to reader-response theorists who view "children's experience of fiction [a]s absent from the conception of those who see narrative only in terms of adult experience," Deborah Thacker notes how "[t]he blindness in theory has a political dimension. The absence of children's literature from an understanding of the degree to which power is played out in the 'transactional' interactions with language devalues and silences children as readers" (5). While it is beyond the scope of this project to study the effects that reading a series like the Legend trilogy may have on young people, I apply theories of leadership and power to these texts to shed more light on the importance of such portrayals, especially

[14] See Nodelman, Pomerantz, Booth, Flynn, Mickenberg and Nel, Ventura, and Trites for more explicit discussions of this issue within children's literature and childhood studies.

when the female protagonists of these works have the potential to serve as feminist role models to young readers.

One of the prevailing methods of conceptualizing power within leadership studies comes from social psychologists John R.P. French and Bertram Raven who "define leadership in terms of differential power relationships among members of a group. For the latter, interpersonal power . . . is conceived 'as a resultant of the maximum force which A can induce on B minus the maximum resisting force which B can mobilize in the opposite direction'" (Bass 15). According to French and Raven, there are five primary bases of power:[15] 1) referent: that which derives from relationships between people; 2) legitimate: that which comes from a leader's official, or legitimate, position; 3) expert: that which is due to a leader's experience or perceived expertise in a certain situation or subject; 4) coercive: that which primarily achieves influence thanks to one's ability to administer punishment; and 5) reward: that which arises from one's capacity to deliver incentives. While this model for understanding how power works in leader/follower dynamics is not perfect, it has been useful for scholars and practitioners of leadership studies since French and Raven originally proposed this schema in 1959. It also has value within literary analysis because of its wide reach and applicability within a variety of different situations that characters encounter, as well as how it complements a feminist or Marxist theory-based approach to literary analysis. Since feminist and Marxist

[15] This model was later modified to include a sixth base of power in 1965, informational, which French and Raven assert is distinct from expert power because it has more to do with having access to information that the followers determine has value, as opposed to being an expert in a given subject or task. Although this base is important within broader conversations about power theory, I exclude it from my analysis of the bases of power in terms of literary analysis because it is rarely included within leadership studies literature in general, in part because the kind of influence that someone with the informational base of power wields is nearly indiscernible from expert power in practice. This degree of overlap can also lead to redundancies, so for the sake of simplicity, I constrain my discussion and application of French and Raven's power theory to their 1959 study and its original five bases of power.

frameworks already have an interest in power dynamics, the addition of French and Raven's bases of power can further such conversations by adding another lens through which to view and critique power relationships in works of literature.

The final book in the Legend series addresses how adults may respond to a child with a handle on expert power. At the beginning of *Champion*, June explains, "After Anden tapped me to train for the Princeps position, Congress urged him to select several others. After all, you cannot have only one person preparing to become the leader of the Senate, especially when that person is a sixteen-year-old girl without a shred of political experience" (22). The way that Lu groups June in with two much more qualified candidates for this position further complicates her "innate exceptionalism" because through her interactions with the other Princeps-Elect candidates and members of the Senate, it becomes clear that June is not necessarily as exceptional as the first book may have implied. The text establishes a pattern wherein a female Princeps often ends up marrying the Elector (see *Prodigy* 44), making Anden's offer to June a bit loaded in terms of the love triangle between the two of them and Day, but this is also significant in terms of the text's construction of a society in which trait theory is a basis for hegemonic power. One aspect of thinking that leadership is hereditary is that such ideology strongly suggests that genetically advantageous marriages were just as important to leaders as politically or financially beneficial ones: according to Komives, Lucas, and McMahon, "It was believed that the intermarriage of the fittest would produce an aristocratic class superior to the lower class" (57). As the relationship develops between June and Anden, it appears that the text might be moving in the direction of such an advantageous union between a "genetically superior" pair: an upper-class prodigy with "good genes" and an

Elector descendent from a line of previous Elector-Primos, leaving out the biophysically exceptional but lower-class criminal.

This connects to Connors and Trites' criticism of the first book's implicit endorsement of Darwinistic thinking (40) and how this could hold implications against the practice of romantically uniting the two "superspecial" protagonists together by the end of the first book. Although the final installment's epilogue does imply Day and June's continued relationship, they have both at this point faded into the background when it comes to high-profile leadership positions and physiological exceptionalism: in a reversal of gendered expectations within a patriarchal system, June has pursued her professional ambitions and now works in the military, while Day primarily serves as the guardian for his younger brother, Eden. Their union does implicitly suggest that two "superspecial individuals" end up together because they are "meant to be," but not in the same way that a union between June and Anden would have. If the series were fully buying into the Darwinistic thinking characteristic of trait theory and neoliberalism, either June would have married Anden, or she would have married Day at the height of their "superspecial-ness," after Day achieves a degree of social mobility and is no longer living in the slums; instead, Lu only allows the two protagonists to pair off once Day has faded into living a family-focused life of relative obscurity abroad and June has settled into a moderate position of leadership within the military. Their reunion at the end of the series is anticlimactic as Day only vaguely remembers their connection due to memory loss, reintroducing himself and expressing his wish to get to know her again (*Champion* 368-369), instead of a rushed, instant retrieval of their entire history together. Their union is hardly a Darwinistic triumph of genetics, in which the two biophysically superior

protagonists unite with the promise of eventually producing even more exceptional offspring; rather, Lu presents readers with a humble new beginning for two damaged people, no longer legends, prodigies, or champions, but individuals with traumatic histories and hopeful futures.

Returning to Anden's offer of June becoming Princeps-Elect, she never seems to make the connection between her own presumed "good genes" and Anden's hereditary position as Elector at this point midway through the series, and she does not even seem to think about her nomination or potential relationship with Anden in terms of genetics or eugenics. Instead, she is merely uncomfortable with the romantic connotations of such a nomination and acknowledges that she would be one of many in training, and probably the least qualified of the candidates (*Prodigy* 45). Whereas her mindset within the first book reveals how thoroughly she has internalized the genetic exceptionalism ideology of her culture, this subtle shift away from such thought patterns in the second installment reveals one of the ways in which the series is likewise evolving ideologically throughout the three books. While it is true that a character's attitude changes do not necessarily reflect those of the author, the way that the series positions readers to align with June positions her evolving perspective as one that readers might likewise understand and perhaps endorse.

Just as she expects when her name and the title of Princeps first appear in the same sentence, the other people vying for the position of Princeps do not "appreciate [June's] youth and inexperience" (*Champion* 22), and even though the Senators put on an appearance of respect for her, "underneath their jolly expressions lies the lingering resentment they have against me, this *child* who has been tapped by the Elector to

potentially become their leader one day" *(Champion* 40, original emphasis). Their treatment of her affects her ability to function within these spheres because "[f]ew events leave [her] feeling more like a *child* than Senate meetings" (*Champion* 253, emphasis added). At 16 years old now, June is still technically an adolescent, but here she uses the qualifier "child" as an indication of the condescending attitudes the adults around her have toward her because of her age. Throughout the series in moments like this, Lu's treatment of age and power contributes to the trilogy's nuanced depiction of young people in positions of leadership.

The ideological progression throughout the series can be thought of as unconsciously mirroring the way that understandings of how leadership works have evolved over time. The field of academic inquiry began with a simplistic approach that focused on a leader individually, divorced from context, and progressed to the study of their behaviors, followed by a more nuanced examination of the various components of a leadership situation, including followers, culture, systems of power, and formative institutions such as education.[16] While the first book "reifies, even if unwittingly, the neoliberal assumption that exceptional individuals, rather than institutions or the collective, are best positioned to combat oppression and injustice" (Connors and Trites 40), the trilogy as a whole moves toward a climactic scene in which the collective (the citizenry of the Republic) and institutions (the transformed Republic government under Anden's leadership and the rebel group known as the Patriots) are mutually empowered and presented as necessary to affect social change to a degree that was not possible for

[16] See Wren and Swatez.

Day and June on their own, regardless of their prodigy status or innate abilities that helped them ace a standardized test when they were ten years old.

Class Structures and Revolution

As early as book one, people of the proletariat start to rally around Day as a symbol of their desire for change in the Republic. Ever since escaping from his gruesome fate in the experimental labs, Day has sought to wreak havoc for the Republic at every chance he has, and his reputation has spread throughout the country such that while he is infamous in the eyes of the upper-class and government/military officials, he has made a name for himself throughout the poor sectors as a fighter for the people. This reputation gains him the quiet support of other oppressed people in the Republic, like a man who helps Day escape from a trap the military has set for him: Day realizes in an instant "that he knows exactly who I am. He won't say it out loud, though. Like other people in our sector who have realized who I am and helped me in the past, he doesn't exactly *disapprove* of the trouble I cause for the Republic" (*Legend* 57, original emphasis). When a soldier announces Day's arrest later on in the book, not everyone celebrates as the government mandates and many are subsequently taken into custody for their silence, while others go so far as to dye a streak of red in their hair (to match the bloodstain in Day's hair in images of his capture) a pattern that continues throughout the series, almost all of whom are from the poor sectors: he develops a reputation as "the people's champion" (*Prodigy* 29). But while Day starts out as more of a symbolic leader not unlike Katniss in the Hunger Games trilogy, he does not remain in this passive position because he evolves into a transformational leader.

One of the most comprehensive and progressive theories on leadership is transformational leadership theory; this kind "is closer to the prototype of leadership that people have in mind when they describe their ideal leader and is more likely to provide a role model with which subordinates want to identify" (Bass 54). Transformational leaders are those who go further than simply recognizing the need for followers (as in the transactional model); rather, they seek "to satisfy higher needs, in terms of Maslow's (1954) need hierarchy, to engage the full person of the follower. Transforming leadership results in mutual satisfaction" (Bass 23). According to Bass, the four factors of transformational leadership that have emerged in the research[17] are charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. While the final factor in this list may not at first seem to apply to Day because of his more collective approach to leading the people of the Republic, the definition of this aspect has more to do with giving attention to those members of a group who may feel neglected otherwise (Bass 218); on a population level, few groups fit this definition more than the proletariat, especially in the highly stratified society of the Republic in which the lower class sectors of the city are used as experimental grounds for biological weapons. Day's consistent consideration for and address to this population shows that he employs individualized consideration within his leadership style, to the benefit of the entire society of the Republic. Katniss, too, serves as a symbol for the proletariat of Panem, but this is because of the image that the resistance movement in District 13 has constructed for her and the hermeneutical nature of her relationship with the public, not because of her own conscious consideration for or mutual connection with this population.

[17] Another way that transformational leadership has been broken down comes from Kouzes and Posner's Practices of Exemplary Leadership.

Following the events of the first book, *Prodigy* quickly reveals that Day's reputation of resistance against the oppressive government has grown to the point where he has become a symbolic leader, his name a rallying point for the people. When describing the effect Day has had on the citizens of the Republic, Razor (a leader of the Patriots resistance movement) tells him, "I've never seen the public rally behind *anyone* the way they have for you. . . . Right now, you probably have just as much influence as the Elector. Maybe more" (*Prodigy* 47, original emphasis). The Patriots want to capitalize on his status as a celebrity (44) and essentially turn him into the same kind of symbolic leader that Coin turns Katniss into in the Hunger Games trilogy or that Scrimgeour tried to manipulate Harry into becoming in the Harry Potter series (as discussed in Chapter Two). They also want to take advantage of the fact that the new Elector "Anden is interested in [Day], and that means he can be influenced by what [he] tell[s] him" (45). Although Day resisted the Patriots' efforts to recruit him throughout the first book, he tentatively decides to work with them in *Prodigy*, one of the first major steps he takes away from the lone exceptional youth revolutionary archetype that Connors and Trites critique and toward more collective modes of empowerment.[18] However, he aligns himself with the Patriots only for a brief period, never fully becoming a "pattern match" or mascot for this organization. Day makes sure to retain his agency and individual identity throughout the process, which becomes clear when he decides to go against their plans to assassinate the young new Elector Anden the moment June signals to him that they may have picked the wrong side.

[18] See Abbie Ventura's advocacy for this model in her article, "Predicting a Better Situation? Three Young Adult Speculative Fiction Texts and the Possibilities for Social Change."

Although Lu includes the voices of a member of the proletariat and a member of the bourgeoisie as her narrators, Day ostensibly exhibits social mobility later in the series that raises his and his brother's class status. However, Day retains his loyalty to the lower class, and when he finds out that upper-class families are getting preferential treatment in terms of protection against the exploding conflict in the Republic as the Colonies invade, Day insists to Anden that

> [t]he upper class should risk their necks out in the open as much as the lower class. . . . If you don't make a bigger effort to protect the poor *right now*, I can practically guarantee that you'll have a full-on riot on your hands. Do you *really* want that while the Colonies are attacking. Like you said, you're the Elector. But you won't be if the rest of the country's poor hears about how you're handling this, and even I might not be able to stop them from starting a revolution. (*Champion* 110-111, original emphasis)

Day's insistence that Anden take his responsibility as a leader over the poor and rich alike seriously during this crisis is an example of holding those in leadership accountable for the welfare of all of their people, regardless of social status. Many Marxist scholars[19] have argued for the necessity of the bourgeoisie class in order for a revolution to be successful, so Day's role as one with social mobility, with access to resources that his former neighbors lack, is important when considering his capacity to lead this population. Day still retains his empathy and loyalty toward the proletariat, but at this point, Day no longer has to focus all of his energy solely on providing sustenance for himself and his family; he has the intellectual, emotional, financial, and social resources available now to devote to revolutionary ideation, which is necessary for its execution to the degree of success that occurs later in *Champion*.

[19] See Thomas R. Bates' discussion in "Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony."

The issue of loyalty comes up again in a way that further elucidates the series' ideologies about leadership, responsibility, power, and collectivity. When Anden takes power after his father's death, one of his first moves is "trying to cement the military's loyalty to him" (*Prodigy* 143). As their legitimate authority figure, the military implicitly obeys him, but they do not necessarily have the loyalty that comes with having a relationship beyond that which comes from utilizing reward and coercive power the way that the former Elector had; Anden seeks *true* loyalty, which can only come from the people genuinely believing in him, not just in the Republic as an abstract ideal. Anden acknowledges the tension between the public's perception of him as simply being a younger version of his father, "an empty figurehead, a puppet who simply inherited a throne," but he asserts that he does not want to be that kind of symbolic, ineffectual leader—he wants to affect real, lasting change. However, he understands the limitations of his own ability to change the Republic, despite being the highest legitimate authority in the land: "[I]f I stay alone... if I remain the only one left, then I can't change anything. If I stay alone, I *am* the same as my father," whereas Anden wants to form an alliance with June and Day because he says, "If I can form an alliance with you both, I can win the people. Then instead of quelling rebellions and trying to keep things from falling apart, I can concentrate on implementing the changes this country needs" (*Prodigy* 148, 181, original emphasis). Instead of trying to usurp the power that these two younger people have, Anden wants to take advantage of their position in the public's eye as an opportunity to gain the people's trust through transparency and alliances. He knows that part of that process is earning the trust of Day and June themselves, which sets him apart from leaders like Scrimgeour and Coin who want to skip that step with Harry and

Katniss, respectively, and completely usurp the young adult icon's power for their own purposes without consideration for the relationships involved. Although Anden sees this process as merely a way of circumventing a current obstacle to affecting change, what he does not realize is that achieving this kind of trust with the people *is* the change that will make all the difference in the country moving forward.

Anden's potential as "the young revolutionary spitfire" earns him the animosity of others in his government who do not want to see any form of real change in the Republic, and the convoluted assassination attempt that drives the plot of *Prodigy* suggests the difference between a true revolution and merely one that perpetuates a cycle of class struggle. Razor, the supposed leader of the Patriots, conspires to get Day and June on his side such that "he comes off like the people's hero or something. The public would think that the Patriots took over the government, when it's really only the Republic all over again" (*Prodigy* 309). Day recognizes the cyclical nature of this particular brand of oppressive leadership, in which one flawed ruling class only gets replaced with a new one, in lieu of any real change that would benefit the people. In *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx explicates the cyclical nature of bourgeoisie revolutions in which the revolutionary class achieves incremental change, but not true revolution, and becomes the new bourgeois: "Every new class, therefore, achieves its hegemony only on a broader basis than that of the class ruling previously, whereas the opposition of the non-ruling class against the new ruling class develops all the more sharply and profoundly" (20). Razor's plan for revolution fits this definition and therefore would not result in material improvement to the lives of the proletariat in the Republic, unlike the revolution Day instigates later in the series which, although it does not achieve the Marxist ideal of a true

socialist revolution that would have dismantled the social structure that results in class struggle, does actively involve the working class and empowers more than just one disenfranchised group to stand up for their rights.

Later, after discovering that Anden is nothing like his father, Day helps the new Elector gain the trust of the people by using his referent power to transfer power to Anden. The proletariat public is ready and willing to follow Day—he's the only well-known figure in their society whom they collectively trust because of his history of defiance against the government, often on their behalf—and when he endorses Anden, they become willing to follow him, too. Day chooses to give "power back to Anden and Anden [in turn] won over the country" (*Prodigy* 347). In addition to the history of atrocities committed against the poor in the Republic, the people see Anden as a wealthy leader so far removed from their suffering that they require someone who truly understands their circumstances—someone like Day—to reassure them that they can trust this new Elector to keep their best interests in mind, and later to keep him in check in case his priorities shift toward the bourgeoisie. The fact that Anden's power transitively comes from Day means that the young rebel retains some influence over the Elector in the following book, such that when there is the possibility of the government perpetuating further harm on what family he has left, Day states that in retaliation he would not hesitate to "turn the people against Anden so fast that a revolution will be on him before he can blink" (*Champion* 54). Day's ability to transfer power to Anden comes from his referent power-based relationship with the people, and Day does not take that relationship for granted. He would rather plunge the entire country back into political instability and risk retribution from Anden than betray that trust. Day may have endorsed Anden's

leadership, but Day has not become a token-like symbol for the new government's relationship with the poor; he is not a symbolic leader, and he purposefully keeps his relationship with the government tenuous and his agency intact.

As he observes that an increasing number of people are taking to the streets sporting the scarlet hair streak that denotes his followers and carrying handmade signs, Day struggles to reconcile their physical display with what he knows to be the truth about the leader–follower dynamic in transformational leadership: "They really think I'm making a difference. . . . They don't understand that I'm *just a boy*—I'd never meant to get involved so deeply in any of this. Without the Patriots, June, or Anden, I couldn't have done anything. *I'm useless on my own*" (*Champion* 188, emphasis added). While his rather pessimistic outlook on his own agency and ability to affect change may be a bit hyperbolic—it is evident that he is anything but "useless"—it is significant that Day has developed an understanding of the importance of collective action to affecting large-scale, lasting change. He also recognizes that he is not, in fact, the kind of "superspecial" individual Connors and Trites identify as one of the problematic ideological ramifications of the first book: seeing people with the symbolic red streak in their hair holding up signs that say "SAVE US," Day looks away uneasily and internally protests, "But I'm not some invincible super-soldier—I'm a dying boy who's about to be stuck, helpless, in the hospital while an enemy takes over our country" (*Champion* 185). Here and in the previous quote where he ruminates on his own "uselessness," Day emphasizes his position as "just a boy," which is significant not only because it reveals his understanding that he is still a young adult facing the societal limitations that adolescents inevitably do, but also because of how this plays into the previously discussed issues surrounding

power(lessness) in children's literature at large. The physical limitations of his body brought about by a degenerative illness, a lingering reminder of the tortures he endured at the hands of the government's biological experimenters as a child, may have prompted some of this self-doubt. But the text overall is conveying an ideology that directly refutes the neoliberal concepts with which the first book was so fraught, and this is one instance where Day makes his own ordinariness explicit. This takes on further significance within the plot development because even with this recognition of his own limitations, Day is still able to effectively play a part in the revolution that is to come.

The Chancellor of the Colonies expresses similarly individualistic ideologies to those presented in the first book when he attempts to win Day over with talk of his exceptional position within the Republic. He uses manipulative rhetoric in an attempt to align himself with Day as two leaders on equal footing when he expresses that

> both you and I know who really runs your country. And that's *you*. The people love you, Day. When my troops first went into Denver, do you know what they told me? "The civilians have plastered posters of Day on the walls. They want him back" . . . And do you realize, my boy, how incredible your position is at your age, how you have your finger on the pulse of this nation? How much power you hold[?] (*Champion* 189-190, original emphasis).

Just like Day himself, the Chancellor is hyperaware of Day's position as a young boy, but instead of focusing on his interdependence on other people or his *lack* of superspecial-ness, the Chancellor implicitly fetishizes neoliberal individual exceptionalism. He tries to divest Day of his community support network and present a constructed image of the boy in front of him, attempting to distort Day's understanding of his own identity. Lu writes the Chancellor's efforts to twist assumptions about individualism in a way that invites readers to critique this warped reflection alongside Day.

In this way, the idea that leaders like Anden, Day, and June are somehow in an elite group above the rest comes back in the third book, but in an almost overtly critical light. The Chancellor, positioned as one of the antagonists of the text, simultaneously cajoles and threatens Day in an attempt to get him to endorse a Colonial take-over of the Republic because he recognizes the position Day holds in the hearts and minds of the people. According to the Chancellor, if Day acquiesces to his plan, he "won't have to worry for the Republic's people [who] don't know any better; the common folk never know what's good for them. But you and I do, don't we? You know they're better off without the Republic's rule. Sometimes they just don't understand their choices—they need their decisions made for them" (*Champion* 192). Here, the Chancellor explicitly evokes the rhetoric of "leaders know best," belittling the agency of the "common" people while raising Day up to an elite position alongside himself. However, Day does not buy into this rhetoric, and the way that the text positions the Chancellor and this conversation reveals that the text is advocating *against* this kind of elitist, individual exceptionalism-based mentality about leaders, instead advocating for a more collective ideology.

The implicit critique of this scene later becomes explicit. The Chancellor asks Day if he thinks "the masses have the right to make decisions for an entire nation," to which he responds, "The laws that affect an entire nation will also affect that nation's individuals . . . [s]o of course the people have a right to contribute to those decisions" (*Champion* 308). The Chancellor responds with what readers can understand is a thinly-veiled critique of failed socialist experiments throughout history and then says,

> People by nature are unjust, unfair, and conniving. You have to be careful with them—you have to find a way to make them *think* that you are catering to their every whim. The masses can't function on their own. They need help. They don't know what's good for them. . . . Do you really

> believe that people can make all of their own decisions? What a frightening world. People don't always know what they really want. (*Champion* 308-309, original emphasis)

Although Day does not verbally respond to the Chancellor and put their plans for revolt at risk, he internally wrestles between the Chancellor's insidious ideology and what he knows to be true based on his own experiences amongst the people. The Chancellor's elitist monologue, ripe with condescending language toward the "common" people of the proletariat, evokes traditional, regressive leadership dynamics in which the followers are entirely dependent on the leader for guidance, support, planning, and even the social mores that govern civil interactions. His pessimistic attitude toward human nature, though, implicates the leaders, too, as people who are "unjust, unfair, and conniving" like everyone else, qualities that ring true in terms of what we know about the Chancellor's own character. Day knows that what the Chancellor says about "the people" is simply not true, and he has come to recognize the flaws with this kind of thinking, which makes his decision clear both to himself and to the reader.

At the culmination of the final book, Day gives a speech from the Chancellor of the Colonies' airship which is supposed to convince the people of the Republic to surrender to the Colonies' invading army and accept Colonial rule. At the beginning of the speech, he speaks of the relationship he has with the people in a way that illustrates his referent power: "You and I will probably never get a chance to meet. But I know you. You have taught me about all the good things in my life, and why I've fought for my family for all these years." He at first appears to be following the Chancellor's orders when he says that the Colonies have much to offer the people and their children in terms of resources since the Colonies do reap the material benefits of capitalism, but before

ending his speech, he has one final message: "The Republic is weak and broken. . . . But it is still *your* country. Fight for it. *This is your home, not theirs*" (*Champion* 311, original emphasis). Risking his own life yet again for the people of the Republic, Day double-crosses the Chancellor and uses his public platform to empower the people, calling them to arms and asking them to take ownership over their own fates.

Unbeknownst to the Chancellor, prior to this speech and in almost a direct response to the earlier "SAVE US" signs—the book even using the same typography to link the messages—Day had used spray paint to spread a message back to the people throughout the Republic, only his asks them to "LISTEN FOR ME," paired with a crude graffiti tag evoking the image of a face with a red streak for hair (*Champion* 269). During the planning of the revolt, Day had proposed that he mark all of the sectors in the Republic with a message that would subtly call them to arms without drawing suspicion from Colonial forces on the ground (*Champion* 251), and these scattered graffiti messages were what he meant. These seeds Day plants throughout the streets come to fruition when, upon hearing his call to arms, the Republic army and civilians together rise up against the Colonies; June marvels at how people from all walks of life are now "wielding whatever weapons they can find and joining in to push the Colonies back" (*Champion* 318) in a scene of collective action that continues earlier trends of collaboration sparked by Day's transformative leadership and perpetuated by the people's desire for change: earlier in the book, Day observes how "[t]he people and the Republic... are working together" (*Champion* 184). The two messages—"SAVE US" versus "LISTEN FOR ME"— are significant when placed in conversation with each other in how Day implicitly tells the people that while he is unable to save them, they have the

power to save themselves. Day empowers them through his speech and mobilizes an entire population to collectively fight for their independence and for a better future.

Conclusion

Although the first book in the series presents a foundation based on flawed, even harmful, ideologies like neoliberalism, endorsement of the "superspecial" individual, trait theory, and problematic attitudes toward power structures and social institutions, it does so in order for the following two installments to meticulously interrogate and dismantle them. Overall, the mixed messages that the series sends about individual exceptionalism, trait-based understandings of leadership, and neoliberal ideas make it ideologically conflicted. Both of the narrators, with whom readers are invited to identify, are indeed the kinds of exceptional people that populate so much of young adult literature, to the detriment of its young readers, as Connors and Trites suggest in their article (40), and readers never get to see the world of the trilogy through the eyes of any characters less exceptional. However, to ignore the series' ideological progression and ultimate rejection of the neoliberalism and trait theory is to ignore the progressive ideologies that Lu does endorse by the trilogy's culmination.

By the series' end, its true ideology is revealed to be founded on the much more progressive models of collective empowerment, community-based revolution, referent power, transformational leadership, and other productive conceptualizations of leadership, power, resistance, and change. June's character development exhibits this maturation of ideology on an individual level as she comes to deconstruct the preconceived notions she had internalized about her "superspecial-ness" and the apparent meritocracy in which she inhabits one of the most privileged positions. Day comes to

understand that while he may have more power than he ever would have thought initially, the best use of that influence is to help empower his community to engage in collective revolutionary action, the kind that can affect much more real and lasting change than any led by an individual, regardless of how "superspecial" they may be. It remains problematic that the series' ideology is conflicted at times, especially with the realistic understanding that not all young readers will follow through and read all three books; indeed, for these readers, all of Connors and Trites' concerns about neoliberalism between the pages of *Legend* ring ominously true. However, when considering the series as a whole, it becomes clear that the trilogy has much to offer in terms of productive models of leadership for young adults.

CHAPTER FOUR:

"THAT A QUEEN SHOULD TRANSFER POWER TO HER SUBJECT BY MISTREATING HIM": LEADERSHIP IN THE GRACELING REALM

Although issues of gender, age, leadership, and power permeate the whole of Cashore's Graceling Realm trilogy, no installment is more apropos for an analysis within the framework I have been establishing in this thesis than the final book, *Bitterblue*. The titular character initially appears in the first book, *Graceling*, as a little girl cowering inside a fallen tree trunk, distrustful and armed with a knife longer than her forearm; she is a princess whose father is the kingdom of Monsea's manipulative, charismatic King Leck. Bitterblue's upbringing under his tyranny informs both her individual character development throughout the series and her primary struggle in the third book: Bitterblue finds herself an eighteen-year-old queen saddled with the responsibility of restoring justice for Leck's wrongs, bringing about peace to her kingdom, and helping her subjects to heal from decades of abuse.

In *Bitterblue*, Cashore tells a story of self-actualization ripe with philosophical questions about leadership, ethics, and trauma, many of which she explicitly raises through Bitterblue's own inner monologues and conversations with other characters. According to Patricia Kennon, one of the few scholars to analyze the series in depth since the first book's publication, the primary conflict of this novel's plot revolves around "Bitterblue's efforts to combine her identities as queen, survivor-daughter, and symbolic mother in order to guide and heal her maimed kingdom after the psychic and physical wounds left by Leck's reign" (58-59). The novel further sheds light on the issues of gender, ideology, age, and economic systems within the context of leadership, bringing it

into the company of the other texts I have been analyzing in this thesis. Contrasting such series as the Hunger Games and Legend, though, the Graceling Realm books do so in a way that is much more productive and progressive, without the problematic or conflicted ideologies that infect the other two trilogies; the models of leadership Cashore presents to her readers are remarkably nuanced, and she conveys these ideas without indulging the problematic ideas that prevent such a straightforward endorsement as with the other two.

Beyond its potential within a leadership studies framework, Cashore's trilogy speaks to several issues that are central concerns within young adult literature at this time, especially in terms of gender. Kennon observes how the series

> examines [the] nexus of identity, agency, and the teenage female body and interrogates the capacity of young-adult fantasy to interrogate and reformulate traditionally gendered systems of power, norms, violence, shame, and prejudice. . . . The trilogy is especially concerned with investigating and questioning concepts of what constitutes normal and aberrant female embodiment and power. (54, 61)

The Graceling books received overwhelmingly positive reviews upon publication, which can in part be attributed to the way they speak to these issues through strong, dynamic female protagonists. This trilogy plays into a larger trend within young adult literature that Trites identifies, the "need to recognize one's own agency" (*Disturbing* 129). It contributes to that conversation by addressing, both implicitly and explicitly, numerous themes connected to the concepts of feminism and leadership. Cashore has described the setting as "some sort of vaguely medieval, pre-feminism world" (qtd. in Corbett 24); the three novels' respective protagonists—Katsa, Fire, and Bitterblue—are distinctly proto-feminists in their society, and it is through them that, as Kokesh and Sternadori note in their review of the trilogy, Cashore "shows little respect for traditional femininity norms but pays homage to the typical social limitations on female agency" (150). Although her

characters are distinctly modern in the way that they so fully take on the roles of feminist protagonists, despite their medieval surroundings, Cashore does depict a cultural context that at first may seem far less progressive than that of contemporary America. However, the obstacles that these young women face, especially in terms of their relationships with leadership positions, reveal the series' critique of modern patriarchal power structures that seek to diminish young girls' capacity to affect change in their communities through more democratic, feminist models.

Katsa and Bitterblue are empowered young women with the potential to empower young readers of the series. Brown and St. Clair define empowered girls not in terms of rejecting stereotypically feminine behavior, but instead through embracing them:

> [E]mpowered girls in young adult fiction may find strength by valuing positive feminine characteristics instead of striving to be as competitive, assertive, and powerful as boys, even though societal norms tend to endorse those latter qualities. The definition, therefore, should include girls whose empowerment has more to do with gaining confidence in themselves than gaining power over others. When they do gain power, ideally they should share it, using their sense of authority to empower others. (27)

Instead of presenting readers with female protagonists who simply cast off traditional femininity in favor of masculine characteristics (as many argue is the case with Katniss; see Chapter Two), Cashore's Graceling trilogy exhibits this model of empowered girls in a way that, in turn, can positively impact readers and their conceptualization of their own potential to affect change in their communities. Through analyzing the two primary female protagonists, Katsa and Bitterblue, I arrive at the series' overarching ideology in terms of power and leadership: that those who possess the power over others that comes with leadership have a responsibility to those they lead, and abusing this responsibility not only reduces the validity of that power, but it also invites followers to rebel.

Katsa's Development as a Transformative, Empowering Mentor

The series takes place in a realm that includes six kingdoms in addition to Monsea (Wester, Nander, Estill, Sunder, the Middluns, and the island of Lienid) and a mysterious region beyond the mountains comprised of the Dells and Pikkia.[20] The first book, *Graceling*, focuses on the seven kingdoms, their "seven thoroughly unpredictable kings" (17), and a young Graceling woman named Katsa: a "Graceling" is a person with a specific ability that goes beyond the limits of a non-Graced human being (*Fire* 6), identifiable by their possessing eyes of two different colors. At the age of eight, Katsa's Grace made itself known when she inadvertently killed a fully-grown man who attempted to touch her inappropriately (*Graceling* 9); from that point forward, everyone believes that her particular talent is for killing, including her uncle, King Randa, who uses her as an enforcer to intimidate the populace and punish those who step out of line.

In terms of subverting gendered expectations, Katsa's body is a site where the patriarchal power structures of the medieval setting come into conflict because her "deceptively young, apparently vulnerable and 'innocent' body juxtaposes traditionally masculine and feminine qualities in a disconcerting but irresistible display of monstrous power which both unsettles and attracts all around her" (Kennon 55). Readers may be further unsettled because we know *why* Katsa first caused another person's death—it was not out of bloodlust, but out of self-defense against an older male predator. This juxtaposition speaks to the systemic nature of patriarchy since, as Kimberly Reynolds points out,

> [I]t is not the fact of being male that provokes masculine behavior, but the condition of power. It is hard to separate the two since our social institutions, including language, were conceived and shaped through

[20] For a map of this trilogy's world, see pp. 558-9 in *Bitterblue*.

> centuries of patriarchal rule, causing the vocabularies and semiotics of power to reflect traditionally masculine attributes and values. (100)

Katsa possesses a degree of physical power over others that renders her apparently "masculine," but the reason for that association has more to do with the "semiotics of power" that Reynolds describes instead of any natural gendered distinction.

The patriarchal structures of the seven kingdoms and Katsa's unique position within these power dynamics negatively impact her initial ability to define herself within the Middluns society as King Randa wields her as a weapon against his political enemies or those citizens who dare defy him, sending her on "strong-arm mission[s]" where she would have "to hurt some poor petty criminal, some fool who deserved to keep his fingers even if he was dishonorable. He would send her, and she must go, for the power sat with him" (*Graceling* 119). The power of which Katsa speaks here is a combination of Randa's legitimate (positional) power as king and coercive power to deal out punishments, but the latter is more complicated than the former because the coercive power he possesses over Katsa is, in some ways, Katsa herself. Randa does not use Katsa as a weapon against herself in the literal sense—something he would most likely not have the gall to do in the first place since the text implies he is even at least a bit scared of his girl-assassin. Instead, the king twists her perceived identity (both how others see her and how she sees herself) in a way that makes Katsa scared of her own power and disgusted by her own actions. By forcing her to fulfill this role, Randa has effectively stripped Katsa of her agency and rendered her an extension of his throne that he can wield to coerce others into bending to his will; she has had to detach herself from her power in order to distance herself from the acts of violence he has coerced her into performing. This dynamic is evocative of the coercion Coin and Snow alike wield against Katniss in

the Hunger Games trilogy as they instrumentalize her reputation with the people, each for their own purposes without regard for Katniss' right to autonomy. Because Randa uses Katsa in this way to incite fear in his enemies, though, the people at large fear her by extension, instead of seeing her as a symbol of rebellion; as her companion Giddon points out, Katsa "do[es] nothing to dispel [her] ogreish reputation" (*Graceling* 46), which further reveals both how the public sees her and how Katsa has disengaged from that perception-based identity to the point where she does not make any overt attempt to influence her own reputation. At this point in the narrative, the kingdom at large would not see her as a leader, and would probably think of her as the worst kind of follower because of the way that she executes Randa's orders, despite their cruelty.

However, this public perception does not tell her whole story: Katsa copes with the way her uncle instrumentalizes her to harm others by secretly forming and leading the Council. The idea for such an organization comes to Katsa when, at the start of her process of self-actualization, she begins to question "[w]hat might she be capable of—if she acted of her own volition and outside Randa's domain" (*Graceling* 30). As with many grassroots organizations, the process of forming this Council begins with one motivated individual recruiting the first followers; in this case, Katsa first enlists her cousin Prince Raffin (Randa's son), then Oll, the king's spymaster, followed by the nobleman Giddon; in a short amount of time, the Council grows to include members and supporters throughout the seven kingdoms, and their mission likewise expands over the course of the series such that they operate on behalf of all people in the realm who suffer mistreatment at the hands of their rulers, leading the same uprisings against oppressors in

other kingdoms that serve as a distant but pressing politically instable backdrop to the events of *Bitterblue*.

Such efforts to recruit followers were not Katsa's initial plan: "[W]hen she'd started the Council . . . [s]he'd imagined herself, alone, sneaking through passageways and around corners, an invisible force working against the mindlessness of the kings . . . never even imagin[ing] it spreading beyond [herself]" (*Graceling* 27). Katsa's original plan is demonstrative of her lifetime of isolation up until that point that made it difficult for her to imagine that she would be able to forge a community or support network, much less so for such a risky endeavor. Nevertheless, the way that the Council grows under her leadership exhibits one of the key aspects of true transformational leadership: that the movement started by the leader becomes independent of her and takes on a life of its own, thanks to the conversion of followers into leaders themselves. Toward the end of *Graceling*, Katsa asks about the status of the Council during her absence, and Raffin informs her that it has been "moving along swimmingly" (465), with the implication that her absence has not negatively affected its ability to function. This aligns with Burns' description of how this kind of leadership dynamic "results in mutual stimulation and elevation 'that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents'" (qtd. in Bass 23), and as such it reveals one productive aspect of the series' ideology that it seems to share with the Legend trilogy: that community-based movements for change are more capable of affecting that change and making it last, both on the individual level and for societies at large.

Less progressive models of leadership (those that would align with the kind of neoliberal "superspecial" individualism discussed in the previous chapter) incorrectly

declared the leader's irreplaceable, essential role in the organization, where follower dependence would be the metric for a leader's strength. However, the fact that Katsa's impact on the Council continues on during her absence in this way is a sign that she has become a transformational leader, a much more impactful form than any that necessitates the leader's continued presence long after an organization has been established. Katsa may have been the one to start the Council, but she has recruited like-minded people who share her drive to resist tyranny, and she fosters an environment conducive to the group members transforming from followers to leaders themselves, capable of spreading the movement to more kingdoms in the realm. Essentially, this conversation with Raffin does not indicate that Katsa has somehow diminished in value to the Council as its founder and leader because she is no longer essential to its ability to function;[21] instead, it means that her democratic, empowering leadership style has been so effective that the followers have grown into leaders themselves, which allows for the Council's exponential growth across the seven kingdoms that readers discover in *Bitterblue*.

Cashore makes Katsa's leadership explicit through a conversation with Po in which he reminds Katsa that not only did she form the Council from the ground up, but for the majority of its existence she has also been the one who decides and plans each of its missions (*Graceling* 182). Po empowers Katsa by reminding her that because of her Grace, it would be practically impossible for anyone to force her to do anything, asking: "Isn't it in your power to refuse? . . . [Y]ou do have choice. [The king]'s not the one who

[21] In my previous research, I identify a similar process at work in the final book in Rowling's Harry Potter series, in which readers discover that the underground students' resistance movement that Harry starts with his friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, known as Dumbledore's Army or "the D.A.," has been functioning well in their absence thanks to Neville Longbottom's leadership. This transference works because of the empowering, transformational leadership style Harry uses during his time with the D.A., and even further back when we consider his influence on Neville since they met at the age of eleven.

makes you savage. You make yourself savage, when you bend yourself to his will. . . . Much of his power comes from you" (*Graceling* 120-123). Although Randa has an entire army at his disposal that he could use to coerce his people, he has become reliant on using Katsa's Grace to the point where what Po says here is true. Katsa has been in this position since childhood with few voices of reason to help her see what Po has revealed in this moment, and his outside perspective provides her with the distance necessary to interrogate the power dynamics that have been informing her existence her entire life. Because this is the way she was raised, Katsa has been unable to see any way out from under Randa's thumb, but now as a young adult with a network to support her, she is ready to make the decision for herself how she will use her power.

This conversation with Po proves to be empowering on Katsa's next trip away from the castle to serve as the king's enforcer when she performs her first overt act of rebellion. She tells the lord she is supposed to be coercing that "'the king doesn't do his own bullying—he looks to me for that. And I—' Katsa felt strong suddenly. She pushed away from the desk and stood tall. 'I won't do what Randa says. I won't compel you or your daughters to follow his command. My Lord, you may do what you will'" (*Graceling* 133-134). Katsa may have been sent there as an instrumentalized embodiment of Randa's coercive brand of royal power, meant to bend Lord Ellis' will to obey the king's orders, but in this moment Katsa decides to restore his agency—while (re)claiming her own—and empower Ellis to determine for himself how to respond to the way that Randa is abusing his legitimate power as the king.

Katsa also uses this moment to claim responsibility for her risk-taking in a way that demonstrates an important aspect of leadership. When Giddon and Oll try to stand

behind her, though, Katsa insists on standing alone so Randa cannot punish them for her actions; when they try to protest, "[s]he slammed her hand on the desk so hard that papers cascaded onto the floor. 'I'll kill the king,' she said. 'I'll kill the king, unless you both agree not to support me. This is my rebellion, and mine alone, and if you don't agree, I swear on my Grace I will murder the king'" (*Graceling* 137). She stands alone in this moment not out of pride or resistance to the assistance of followers—the way she recruited members of the Council earlier demonstrates that she understands the importance of working with others to affect social change, despite her loner tendencies—but out of an understanding that a rebellion has consequences, and the leader needs to be willing to shoulder whatever risks may come with that responsibility. These ideas about responsibility and leadership especially when things go wrong return, only with Giddon shouldering the burden instead of Katsa. King Randa orders an attack on Giddon's estate and all of its residents in retaliation for his actions against the crown; in a moment of blunt but compassionate honesty, Queen Bitterblue tells him, "It is your doing, in part. Your defiance of Randa made those for whom you were responsible vulnerable. But I don't think it follows that you could have prevented it, or should have anticipated it" (*Bitterblue* 359). Although Giddon is partially responsible for what happened because of his leadership role over his estate and the risks he has been taking as a part of the Council, the actions of another, in this case those of King Randa, are not his fault. This scene, coupled with Katsa's experience with Ellis years before in *Graceling*, present a nuanced approach to the responsibility of leadership that favors a more realistic picture where responsibility and risk are part of the equation, rather than in the background,

which is significant because of the message this sends to readers: leadership requires taking responsibility, and sometimes this can come at a great cost.

Because of her abilities, experiences, and connections, Katsa has a degree of privilege in her society that she realizes most other females lack (*Graceling* 207), and so she "strives for an ultimate feminist rebellion by bringing women together and teaching them self-defense" (Kokesh and Sternadori 150). Her connections to monarchs, her Council's network of supporters throughout the kingdoms, and her Grace for survival position Katsa as privileged in ways that most young girls in the seven kingdoms are not. Her personal experiences with sexual harassment, which could have easily turned into assault if not for her Grace, as a child make her acutely aware of the vulnerabilities that young girls face in this society, and she chooses to use her position of privilege to empower girls to defend themselves. Katsa realizes the joy she derives from teaching: "It pleased her to watch her students grow stronger" (*Graceling* 462). These classes and the many she teaches later offer Katsa the opportunity to utilize her expert power and her privilege to help those around her throughout the seven kingdoms in an extension of the kind of work she does with the Council.

Through teaching these skills, Katsa also empowers young girls like Bitterblue with the ability to defend themselves so that they can resist others' efforts to take away their agency by force, an important step in Katsa's journey of self-actualization and in Bitterblue's maturation as she takes on the role of child queen. This mentoring relationship between the two begins with when they first meet and Katsa offers the promise of this kind of empowerment. After she and Po gain Bitterblue's trust by telling her they know the truth about her father's Grace, Katsa coaxes her out of her hiding place

by asking, “I can see that knife, Princess Bitterblue. . . . Do you know how to use it? Even a small girl can do a lot of damage with a knife. I can teach you” (*Graceling* 282). The following weeks of the young princess’ life are filled with a blur of death and danger, but she comes out of it intact and strong, ready to take her place as the child queen of her kingdom, in no small part because of Katsa’s mentorship.

Self-defense training not only provides girls like Bitterblue with the physical ability to defend themselves, but it also implicitly teaches them that their *self* is worthy of *defense*, contributing to the series’ progressive messages about autonomy, agency, and material feminism. Kennon adds that “Cashore’s advocacy of the importance of autonomous choice during the project of adolescent self-construction is committed to the exploration and reimagining of conservative norms, biases, and hierarchies” (60-61). One brief moment in *Graceling* reinforces this emphasis on autonomous choice from the point of view of the led as well as the leader. After rescuing Bitterblue, Katsa has to get her out of the kingdom and spread the truth about Leck’s true Grace to others who can help them defeat him, but Po is injured and unable to go with them through the harsh terrain. Before she leaves with Bitterblue, Po gives Katsa his ring; although she does not understand its significance at the time, this is a profound act since Po is effectively “foresak[ing] his own identity . . . mak[ing Katsa] a princess and giv[ing] her his castle and his inheritance” (388). A Lienid ship captain makes an important distinction in terms of the leader–follower relationship and hierarchies of power when she tells Katsa, “It’s not in my power to refuse anything you ask. But this thing I’ll do willingly” (*Graceling* 395). Here, she makes explicit that even if she wanted to refuse Katsa’s request, she would be unable to because of the legitimate power she possesses at this point over her, but even

without that positional power she would still choose to follow Katsa's plan, making clear the profound difference it makes to have the consent of those one leads.

A similar conversation occurs later in the series that further conveys this kind of healthy leader–follower relationship where consent of the led is a defining factor of the dynamic. In this moment, Queen Bitterblue remarks that she knows her guard will do anything she orders them to, but that this does not mean that her orders are right or reasonable, but her servant and friend Helda tells her that "they'll do it out of loyalty . . . not obligation. They worry about you and your worries" (*Bitterblue* 315). The empathetic relationship between Bitterblue and those who serve on her guard is a foundational element of their loyalty to her. Because both Katsa and Bitterblue have developed relationships of trust with those who follow their leadership, the referent (also known as relational) power they have influences others to follow them by choice. This aptly illustrates that referent, relationship-based power is the foundation of healthier leader–follower relationships, especially compared to the coercive power that kings like Randa and Leck wield in this novel.

While these conversations occur within the context of Katsa and Bitterblue each possessing some form of legitimate power in addition to the referent they have developed with their followers, the series also depicts this kind of consensual leadership in less formal relationships. As they prepare to face King Leck and his mysterious Grace, Po and Katsa discuss the possibility that while Po's Grace would most likely protect him from the king's influence, "until they knew the truth of [Leck's] Grace, [Katsa] couldn't trust her own judgment" (*Graceling* 261); for this reason, it would be imperative that she be willing to follow Po's leadership. During this discussion, Cashore yet again directly

illustrates the importance of choosing to follow rather than being compelled to do so when Po explicitly asks for her consent to lead and sets parameters for that leadership: "Once we're in Monsea, would you consent to do what I say, and only what I say? Just until I have a sense of Leck's power? Would you ever consent to that?" (*Graceling* 261), to which Katsa readily agrees. The relationship between these two characters exhibits a degree of equality that may be incongruous with the medieval pre-feminist setting that Cashore expressed she was attempting to construct in this series, but it explicitly models the importance of consent in all forms of relationships, from the leader–follower dynamic illustrated here to their romantic relationship that develops throughout the novel.

Katsa's position as an empowering female leader comes after a process of self-discovery characteristic of young adult literature; Kennon highlights how she

> gradually learns to synthesize her 'wildness' with her leadership role in the resistance movement, and by the end of the first novel, she reaches a transformative epiphany: her true Grace is not for killing but instead for survival and 'for life'. . . . Katsa succeeds in transmuting her disturbing aptitude for killing into an empowering drive towards the forces of generation and life. (56, 60)

Beyond this progression toward self-actualization, Katsa has also (re)claimed her agency and taken on an important mentoring role in the lives of other young girls in her community, particularly in her relationship with the young Queen Bitterblue. Through Katsa, Cashore conveys the themes of consent, empowerment, agency, identity, self-actualization, and feminist models of leadership that continue to develop throughout the rest of the series.

Bitterblue's Quest for Truth Amidst Reconstruction

Bitterblue returns readers to the land of the seven kingdoms, specifically to Monsea, but Princess Bitterblue is no longer the little girl Katsa and Po rescued all those

years ago; she is now eighteen years old and has spent the years since the events of *Graceling* trying to help her kingdom wake up from the thirty-five-year spell Leck had them under, and then heal from that trauma. However, her efforts are stifled by a council of older male advisors who still see her as too young to rule and insist that it is better to bury the past and pretend like it never happened. Bitterblue is convinced, though, that the only way she can lead her people well is by understanding what happened during those times, but she soon discovers that there are some people who are willing to do anything to prevent those truths from coming to light.

Foregrounding the events of this final installment, Queen Bitterblue quickly begins to take on her leadership role as the ruler of a kingdom, mere minutes after the death of her father the king. In a moment of clarity amidst Leck's manipulation, Katsa succeeds in killing him, but those around her—most notably Po's family members—have been under Leck's control, leaving no immediate memory of his treachery, and therefore turn against her. However, before any unnecessary conflict breaks out, Bitterblue positions herself in front of Katsa, confidently proclaims her identity as Queen of Monsea, no longer princess since her father's heart had stopped beating only seconds ago. She asserts that "Katsa's punishment is my responsibility, and I say she did right, and you will not hurt her," and reveals the truth about her deceased father's deception (*Graceling* 418). Despite the fact that she is a child, Bitterblue possesses the legitimate power that comes with her newly-acquired title, and this is enough to circumvent the social limitations of childhood in this moment; she also here exhibits her awareness that part of being queen is assuming the responsibility both for punishment and for discovering, proclaiming, and defending truth, the latter of which is one of the primary

themes of the final novel. The mere fact that she is queen of her kingdom may have been enough to save Katsa in this moment, but it does not necessarily mean that the transition to her leadership will be free of obstacles, especially since the Monseans are in for a painful awakening. Over the years to come, they will be coping with the experience of slowly waking up to the reality of their nightmarish world after spending the last few decades blissfully unaware that they were being manipulated by the likes of Leck. As with any traumatized population, the people of Monsea require a leader in whom they can believe and with whom they have a referent relationship if they are going to be able to recover from this degree of trauma-induced distrust.

Traumatic Childhood and Maturation through Mentorship

In order to assist with as smooth a transition of power as they can manage under the circumstances, King Ror accompanies his niece, now Queen Bitterblue, back to Monsea because

> His sister's child, Ror had pointed out, was a child . . . [and] even if she weren't, she returned to an impossible situation . . . The child queen could not be sent off trippingly to Monsea to announce that she was now in charge, and denounce the dead king an entire kingdom adored. Bitterblue would need authority, and she would need guidance. Both of these Ror could provide. (*Graceling* 426)

Through his position as her mentor, Ror empowers Bitterblue by affording her the respect he would give any fellow monarch, regardless of age or gender: "Ror was taking the royal position of his sister's daughter very seriously . . . asking Bitterblue's opinions on this or that matter, updating her on the plans for the coronation, and inquiring after the health of the various members of her party" *(Graceling* 456). This mentorship carries over to the events of *Bitterblue* in which the queen, now a young woman, still consults King Ror on matters of state that benefit from a more experienced opinion.

Their relationship founded on mutual respect continues to evolve throughout the novel: Ror's response to a letter asking for advice leaves Bitterblue with a feeling of "great relief . . . both that she was in a position to influence Ror and that Ror was strong-minded enough to protest. It suggested the potential, someday, for an even balance of power between them—if she could ever convince him that she was grown up now, and that sometimes, she was right" (*Bitterblue* 425). Even though she recognizes that they are not currently equals due to the structural and social limitations to which their relationship is subject, Bitterblue also has hope for achieving an equal relationship with him, especially as she continues to grow and mature under his and Katsa's mentorship. Ror serves as an example to Bitterblue and the rest of the seven kingdoms as his is the

> wealthiest and most just, and at a time when kings were being deposed and kingdoms being born again on shaky legs, Ror had the potential to be a powerful example for the rest of the world. Bitterblue wanted to be a powerful example with him. She wanted to find the way to build a nation that other nations would like to imitate. (*Bitterblue* 425)

At this stage in her development as a leader, Bitterblue is still looking for examples like Ror and Katsa to determine what kind of leader she wants to be. She sees Ror as a powerful example of a monarch and his kingdom as a model of what she would like Monsea to be one day. But her individuality is already beginning to come to the forefront as she envisions herself as a "powerful example *with* him," not *like* him: in a passage that evokes the important keystone concept within feminist theory about "power with" instead of "power over" others, this language presents her future self as his peer, a powerful leader for her own people who has the potential to further improve the seven kingdoms, instead of merely continuing to follow in Ror's footsteps.

Even during her initial days as queen, Bitterblue begins to grow in the referential power that characterizes a good leader: she smiles kindly at an attendant who stumbles during part of her coronation, and this small act creates a ripple effect where "word passed through the crowd that the young queen was kindhearted, and not one to punish small mistakes" (*Graceling* 466). While this initial effect on the population may say more about her predecessor than about Bitterblue herself, she continues to build this relationship with her people later in her reign when some of her subjects whom she comes to know personally express that they are "heartened to realize that all this time, the queen has been on [their] side," and one remarks, "I always trusted you, Lady Queen . . . even before I knew who you were. You're a person of generosity and feeling. It warms my heart knowing that such a person is our queen" *(Bitterblue* 287). This quote illustrates how her initial reputation as a kindhearted child queen, born out of the interaction at her coronation and fostered throughout the years since then, has spread to the point where subjects who have not ever met her believe her to be a generous, empathetic, trustworthy leader, a sentiment that in-person interactions between Bitterblue and her subjects confirm. This contrasts sharply with the coercive powers her father had wielded so prominently as king.

Early in *Bitterblue*, it becomes obvious that regardless of their favorable first impressions of their child queen, it is this characteristic—her age—that remains her other defining quality in the eyes of her people and advisors, despite the fact that she is now eighteen years old. Similar to the challenges June faces in the Legend trilogy because of her age and gender, the adult men surrounding Bitterblue treat her with a problematic mix of condescension and obligatory, surface-level respect. Her council of advisors has made

a habit of "sending her to preside over the kingdom's silliest business, then whisking her back to her office the moment something juicy cropped up" (*Bitterblue* 12); they adopt a perceivably patronizing tone with her whenever she tries to exert any kind of agency (13); they insist that her idea of what will help the people, education, is beneath her position: "You're not a schoolteacher; you're the Queen of Monsea," says one of her advisors, Thiel. "What the people need right now is for you to behave like it, so that they can feel that they're in good hands" (14). They insist she consult them before making any declarations so they can screen out any "ridiculous" ones (15, 13), and they pressure her to get married to give the kingdom a king (17), reflecting both the patriarchal society in which they live and the infantilization the young queen has experienced since she first took on the crown. And, although Bitterblue does not necessarily disagree with their advice on many occasions, these advisors prevent her from operating in a leadership capacity by rushing her to approve of their decisions without sufficient time to think them through for herself (18).

Without any parental figures and with the responsibilities of a monarch on her shoulders, Bitterblue has had to grow up quickly, but in many ways she remains a child. Whereas many coming-of-age stories "tend to allow for adolescents to overcome the condition of adolescence by becoming adults . . . [with] relatively more social power" (Trites, *Disturbing* 19), Bitterblue has effectively the same degree of power (in the leadership studies sense of the term) as when readers last saw her in *Graceling*: She has the legitimate power of the crown and the referent power of her relationships with others, but those around her still treat her as an adolescent, which makes being queen rather difficult. Later in the novel, Bitterblue discovers that her advisors' efforts to stifle her

power run deeper than just prejudices against a young female in power; instead, it is part of a "vendetta against truthseekers" (*Bitterblue* 300), a conspiracy that seeks to silence anyone who tries to uncover the truth about what happened during Leck's reign, and to prevent the queen from finding out too much. After discovering their deception, Bitterblue expresses her frustration with this "protection": "How can I trust you if you shield me from the atrocities of my own advisors? I'm trying to be a queen here, Thiel. A queen, *not a child to be protected* from the truth!" (*Bitterblue* 302, emphasis added). This kind of "protection" is particularly problematic for Bitterblue as it has translated to a public perception that the queen wants silence about the atrocities that happened during Leck's time, when in actuality her main goal is to discover what happened so that she can learn how to best lead the people who were harmed (*Bitterblue* 209).

The circumstances of Bitterblue's throne and the conversations surrounding it present a relatively nuanced representation of a child in a leadership position. As Beth Jones Ricks observes in her analysis on female archetypes in children's literature,

> Because real-life offers little opportunity for children to rule, literature remains a primary forum for children to take on the role of the sovereign. But even in books, it is more rare [*sic*] for a child to engage the Ruler archetype than, say, the Innocent, the Orphan, or the Seeker. It takes wisdom and competence, and these qualities come with experience. (113)

Bitterblue is indeed young and relatively unexperienced at the beginning of the novel compared with her advisors, but her experiences throughout the series grant her a kind of wisdom and competence that aligns with Ricks' description of the ruler archetype. Bitterblue is, in fact, all four of these archetypes: in addition to being a ruler, she is an innocent forced to deal with the trauma her father left behind as well as coping with her own traumatic childhood, she is an orphan forced to grow up with only the memories of

her murdered mother and the legacy of her murderer father, and, perhaps more importantly than the other three, she is a truth seeker trying to achieve a degree of transparency that threatens those who would rather the past remain in the shadows.

Translation, Truth-Seeking, and Transformation

Because of the nature of Leck's Grace, the decades he spent terrorizing the people of Monsea are shrouded in a veil of confusion, guilt, and shame that necessitate Bitterblue's quest for truth about the past in order to move her kingdom forward. One of the primary ways that this manifests is in her focus on education, which is significant to understanding her as a leader because of the empowering potential that education has. Part of discovering the truth about what actually happened during Leck's reign involves the painstaking process of translating his journals, written in a language and cipher no one in the kingdom can seem to decrypt. With the help of the royal librarian, she manages to discover the real reason why her advisors always seem to be working against her: not only did the late king enjoy torturing others, but he also relished in forcing other people to go against their own moral compasses and join in the torture, engaging in a form of psychological torment that left scars no less traumatizing than the physical ones left on their victims. Decades prior to the events of *Bitterblue,* Leck forced these same advisors to perform acts so heinous that their repressed memories are enough to drive them mad, even to the point of suicide. Throughout the book, they have been colluding to thwart anyone who they perceive as a threat to keeping the past tightly under wraps, and the queen's own efforts at truth-seeking have landed her in their proverbial crosshairs.

However, after discovering their deception, Bitterblue does not choose to retaliate against them; rather, she recognizes their actions as those of desperate, damaged men and

attempts to help them heal, along with the rest of the country. This kind of nuanced approach to leading those who have wronged her is a product of the process of self-discovery that has come from her quests for truth, transparency, and ethical leadership throughout the book. As with Katsa, Bitterblue experiences what Kennon calls a "metamorphosis" (60) in language that evokes the imagery of Graceling artist Bellamew's sculptures that depict one figure caught in the middle of the process of morphing into another. One of her pieces, which features the queen when she was a small child morphing into a castle, "portrays Bitterblue as a heroic child protector, ready to defend her people" (Kennon 60), is prophetic to a scene near the novel's ending that illustrates a powerful moment of female empowerment.

It is only after most of her advisors are dead that the remaining members look to her for real guidance (*Bitterblue* 481, 498), but at this point she still lacks some degree of self-awareness and feels she is only "pretending to be the leader of Monsea" (*Bitterblue* 499). Regardless of what the public perception may be of their queen in this moment, Bitterblue does not feel that she has the ability to affect the kind of lasting change that her people need. She feels disempowered, crushed under the weight of her father's legacy and her own present circumstances. Bitterblue reveals these insecurities to Fire:[22] "I want to have the heart and mind of a queen. . . . But I'm only pretending," to which Fire

[22] Although Fire has been absent from *Graceling* entirely and *Bitterblue* up until this point, her reappearance as an older woman decades after the events of the prequel companion novel to *Graceling*, *Fire*, is worthy of discussion because of the impact she has on Bitterblue in this moment. Here, she is able to offer an outside perspective on Bitterblue's potential as a leader that helps her achieve a degree of self-actualization she has not been able to access on her own, in no small part because of her own intense trauma at such a young age which she has yet to process fully. The complex web of female relationships in this series and how each woman supports the others is an important aspect of the Graceling Realm trilogy and warrants further consideration within a feminist framework; however, an in-depth look at these relationships beyond how they directly impact each character's development as a leader surpasses the scope of this project.

responds, "*shall I share with you the feeling of your own strength?*" (*Bitterblue* 511, original emphasis). As Fire uses her mystical monster powers to create a vision of sorts for Bitterblue, the young queen sees how her own inner strength encompasses her feelings, rather than conquering them, holding them "in an embrace, and murmur[ing] kindnesses to them and comforting them," growing until she becomes the room, then the castle, and the courtyard, followed by the entire kingdom, all the while holding and comforting the individuals inside, including her younger self:

> She saw herself, tiny, fallen, crying and broken on the bridge. She could feel every person in the castle, every person in the city. She could hold every one of them in her arms; comfort every one. She was enormous, and electric with feeling, and wise. She reached down to the tiny person on the bridge and embraced that girl's broken heart. (*Bitterblue* 512-513)

The fact that an older woman, Fire, plays such a pivotal role in Bitterblue's empowering identity formation is significant within the context of a feminist model of leadership because it illustrates the importance of community over strict individualism that ignores the role that others play in one's growth.

Bitterblue's metamorphosis in part is due to her changing relationship with power and leadership, and also due to the discoveries she makes about herself, her kingdom, and those around her during her quest for truth. Throughout the novel, she comes to the realization that her original idea of what it meant to be a queen—"a person who shaped big things"—transforms to caring more about the individual people under her leadership: "*But it is just as important*, she thought, *to thaw these men who were frozen by my father, and to stand at their sides through the pain of their healing*" (*Bitterblue* 482, original emphasis). Here, Bitterblue is referencing the complex psychic pain her advisors have been enduring since Leck's death due to their increasing understanding of their

complicity in his crimes. While it is too late at this point to save them all, Bitterblue recognizes her agency and ability as a transformational leader to affect real change in her world through the individual people who have been suffering because of Leck's cruelty: "She could reshape what it meant to be queen, and reshaping what it meant to be queen would reshape the kingdom" (*Bitterblue* 428). In this case, Bitterblue has determined that what her kingdom needs is a leader who not only maintains peace as she has been doing since she took the throne, but who also fights for truth and helps the individuals within her populace process their trauma and find healing. Through her interactions with those around her, Bitterblue comes to realize that she has the power to do just that.

"Monarchy Is Tyranny": Questioning the Nature of Power

Bitterblue's ability to recognize her own power to reshape the future of her kingdom has come after painstaking reflection on the nature of power and how this relates to privilege. Bitterblue writes a letter to Giddon, saying: "*I have been thinking about power a great deal lately. Po says that one of the privileges of wealth is that you don't need to think about it. I think it's the same with power. I feel powerless more often than I feel powerful. But I am powerful, aren't I? I have the power to hurt my advisors with words and my friends with lies*" (*Bitterblue* 285, original emphasis). Beyond questioning her own relationship with power, throughout the book thus far, Bitterblue has had to negotiate what "power" means in the first place. To her father, being powerful had to do with his Grace, his ability to overpower the will of others and usurp it with his own, to coerce others into actions that would harm themselves and others, to warp the people's perception of reality to fit his own desires. Bitterblue witnesses the impact of this kind of power and its abuse on her people, and she recognizes the potential she has to similarly

use her power to hurt others, even without a Grace like Leck's. She has felt powerless so often in part because of the society in which she lives: she is a girl queen in a patriarchal society that privileges the voices of older men. But she also feels powerless because of the models of power against which she has been measuring herself. She does not have a Grace, she is not a monster, and she consciously avoids hurting others or coercing them into following her, which would indeed equate to powerlessness in the metric Leck attempts to instill in her as a child (*Bitterblue* 4-5).

Furthermore, what Bitterblue says in this letter speaks more broadly to childhood as a time of limited agency. Most young adults can understand the impact of words and lies that Bitterblue describes. Through such discussions of philosophical questions about leadership, Cashore furthers young readers' understanding of privilege within the context of power. As Trites states, "Novels about politics make manifest how ideology is a discursive construct" (*Disturbing* 23); the book reveals its political nature several times that open it up for a conversation about ideologies of power, particularly those behind monarchy as a form of leadership and governance. Through discussion of the concept that "*Monarchy Is Tyranny*" (*Bitterblue* 339, original emphasis) and Bitterblue's own ruminations about "[w]hat a strange thing a queen was," she questions whether the key to being a good queen is finding "the right people" and asks, "If she found the right people to help her, were there ways she could change that [ideology of monarchy as tyranny] too? Could a queen with a queen's power arrange her administration such that her citizens had power too, to communicate their needs?" (*Bitterblue* 426). Since she became queen, Bitterblue, Ror, and her cabinet have reestablished the government of Monsea with a system of checks and balances in which the monarch's rulings could be overruled

by her judges, in "another one of Ror's funny provisions, this one to put a check on the monarch's absolute power" (284). Her questions about power here contribute to the trilogy's overarching representations of gender, power, and agency, while asking readers to engage with the text's interrogation of systems of power.

These ideas come into stark relief through the interactions between a disguised Bitterblue and a group of her subjects, who don't know her identity and so treat her the same as everyone else. One of these individuals is a Lienid sailor and thief named Sapphire Birch (nicknamed Saf), who becomes her romantic interest throughout the book. Their relationship comes to a screeching halt when Saf discovers that Bitterblue—whom he knew only as Sparks up to that point—is actually his queen, and the dynamic between them radically changes:

> In another place, in another conversation between them, she might have slapped his smug face. Perhaps Sparks would have slapped him right now. But Bitterblue couldn't, for Bitterblue, slapping Saf, would only be playing into his game: The mighty queen slaps the lowly subject. And the more like a subject she treated him, the more control he had over the situation. Which confused her, because it makes no sense *that a queen should transfer power to her subject by mistreating him*. (*Bitterblue* 257, emphasis added)

Despite Bitterblue's assertion that this transfer makes no sense to her, the reader is led to understand this as one of the prevailing messages of the series: that a person in a position of leadership with power over others has a responsibility to those they lead, and abuse of that position reduces the legitimacy of that power, inviting rebellion.

Earlier in the novel, Bitterblue contemplates the complex relationship between a monarch and their people: "A monarch was responsible for the welfare of the people he ruled. If he hurt them deliberately, he should lose the privilege of sovereignty. But what of the monarch who hurt people, but not deliberately? Hurt them by not helping them"

(*Bitterblue* 159).[23] Saf forces her to recognize the power dynamics and class structures that dictate their relationship, regardless of her intentions, because of the legitimate power she possesses over him: "I don't think you understand who you are. . . . I don't think you realize how big it is, or how it maroons me. You're so high in the world that you can't see down as far as me. You don't see what you've done." He even points out the biggest problem with her deception when he tells her that "knowledge is power. You knew you were the queen and I didn't. We have never once been equal" (*Bitterblue* 260). One part of that equation is the financial power Bitterblue wields. Po explains to her that he is "exceedingly wealthy, and Raffin is more. There's no word for what you are, Bitterblue. And the money at your disposal is only a fraction of your power" (*Bitterblue* 269). Although each kingdom's ruler has a great deal of wealth under their control, Leck had accumulated much more during his reign through his dishonesty and manipulation, and while some of this has been redistributed to the people or used for recovery efforts, the majority of that treasury still remains the property of the Monsean crown.

Bitterblue may be aware that she is a queen, but up until this point she has been relatively oblivious to the fact that she possesses a degree of privilege beyond the measure of wealth or fame. Being a queen means that she is inherently a member of the ruling class, and the majority of those she leads—the citizens of Monsea, including Saf and his friends—are members of the proletariat. The way that the text draws attention to the issues of class and power structures in this way works within a medieval setting to critique certain forms of systemic oppression that come out of economic systems that rely

[23] Although her use of the default male pronoun "he" when referring to the monarch may seem to imply internalized misogyny, this actually reflects the reality of the seven kingdoms, all of which have kings until Bitterblue becomes Monsea's Queen, many of whom have hurt their people in the ways Bitterblue describes here.

on this strong division between classes. The extreme nature of these divisions—Saf as a lower-class thief and Bitterblue as so rich that there is "no word for what [she is]"—aligns with the way that socioeconomic disparities are becoming more and more stratified over time within capitalist systems globally as the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. As such, *Bitterblue* illustrates systemic class struggle on a personal basis, showing how these systems affect individuals as well as societies more broadly through Bitterblue's experiences exploring the streets disguised as a commoner.

Conclusion

Throughout the Graceling Realm trilogy, Cashore raises philosophical questions about leadership and governance explicitly while telling a story of empowered feminist leaders, able to assimilate their conflicting identities into themselves and use their experiences to improve the world around them. Katsa's process of self-discovery is a story of (re)claiming one's agency in the face of powerful opposition, and she grows into a mentor figure who empowers those around her to impact a broader community in powerful, transformational ways. As Bitterblue reconstructs what power and leadership mean to her and to her people in Leck's wake, she comes to realize the importance of her own commitments to the primacy of truth, the empowering potential of education, the necessity of collaboration and community, and the responsibilities that come with leadership. Bitterblue's narrative is a powerful illustration of a feminist protagonist in a text that presents readers with a nuanced understanding of leadership in ways that invite young readers to think about the way that these issues impact their own lives.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Leadership studies is an important addition into broader conversations about young adult literature to further our analysis of how agency, (em)power(ment), gender, leadership, and resistance are represented. These issues are particularly important to consider within the contexts of dystopian and fantasy novels in which individuals, often in the form of young female protagonists, participate in efforts to affect change on the level of collective transformation.

While some other critics may position characters like Katniss as feminist role models of leadership to young audiences, a consideration of her character through a leadership studies-based framework exposes the fact that this ideal is based on flawed theories. Although many agree that she is more symbolic than anything else, they incorrectly ascribe power to Katniss as a symbolic leader, which ignores how symbolic leadership actually works. What's more, the debate about whether or not she is a feminist icon often reaches a stalemate in terms of her gender expression as progressive or merely further perpetuating the patriarchal belief that in order to be a leader, a woman must take on traditionally masculine traits; however, it is important to consider how such reasoning returns to the regressive trait theory of leadership and its plethora of flaws and problematic implications.

Leadership studies can also contribute to conversations about neoliberal ideologies and how they permeate certain YA texts in troubling ways, which becomes even more concerning when we consider the connections between neoliberal ideologies and flawed ideas about leadership. Coupled with Marxist criticism, leadership studies provides a useful framework for analyzing the development of such ideologies

throughout a series' progression. In some cases, like Lu's Legend trilogy, this framework can help reveal a series' underlying messages that seek to dismantle the problematic ideas set up in the first book. It can also reveal the more complex, ideologically significant moves happening under the surface with characters like June coming to a more mature understanding of her complicated position within a society fraught with neoliberal ideals, and others like Day coming to see their own potential to participate in community-level change through empowerment and transformational leadership practices. By taking the problematic ideologies that permeate readers' own real world and making them a part of the series' initial foundation, the Legend trilogy allows for later installments to refute these ideas in a way that both acknowledges how pervasive they are and then deconstructs them with more progressive models of leadership and resistance; these aspects of the series become apparent through the kind of combined leadership studies and feminist theory framework I have been establishing throughout this thesis for reading for ideology.

Such a framework is perhaps even more valuable with a series like Cashore's Graceling Realm trilogy with its often explicit exploration of leadership issues like responsibility, education, and (em)power(ment), and how those in the leader–follower relationship are affected by trauma, and chronic manipulation, and broken trust. Critiquing characters like King Leck in terms of leadership theory reveals how this kind of toxic charisma works in real life, too, even in the absence of mystical powers like Graces; through these kinds of characters, fantasy literature for young adults performs the important work of raising readers' awareness about how those in positions of power can seek to abuse that power, and strategies for resisting and recovering from that kind of

influence. Especially since the protagonist is a young woman in a position of legitimate power saddled with the responsibility of healing her kingdom from the harm her father perpetuated against the people and herself alike, series such as this one invite analysis through a combined framework of feminist theory and leadership studies, which reveals how self-actualization and empowerment can come through female community, mentorship, and personal engagement with transformational leadership practices. Ultimately, the series conveys the ideology that leaders have responsibility over and are ultimately accountable to those they lead, and if they abuse this position, they invite resistance from those they oppress.

While beyond the purview of this project, an important area for future study would be to look at the ways that series like those analyzed in this thesis affect young readers and their individual constructions of their own understandings of leadership. This kind of study would be participating in leadership studies' history of sociological and psychological primary research, as well as children's literature's own rich body of reader-response work with young readers. It may be a given that the kinds of characters about which children and young adults read play a part in identity construction, but it remains to be seen just how influential fictional representations of young leaders have on young readers. Especially in Western society where leadership is often viewed as an important value to promote within educational systems and other social institutions, it is important to interrogate how literature for young people participates in both perpetuating problematic ideologies and promoting progressive models of leadership.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education

- Master of Arts, Indiana University, earned at IUPUI, Summer 2019
- Teaching Literature Certificate, IUPUI, Spring 2019
- Bachelor of Arts, Ball State University, Spring 2017

Selected Honors and Awards

- Children's Literature Association Graduate Student Essay Award Honor (runner-up), for my essay entitled "The Spaces Between Us: Magic, Myth, and Memory in Laura Ruby's *Bone Gap*," Spring 2019
- Peter Bassett Barlow Award Winner, honoring my essay entitled "A Modest Posthumanist Proposal: Jonathan Swift's Cannibalistic Satire as Proto-Posthumanism," IUPUI, Spring 2019
- New Frontiers/New Currents Grant Partial Recipient, Fall 2018
- Elite 50 of the Graduate Professional Student Government Nominee, IUPUI, Spring 2018
- Travel Fellowship Award Recipient, IUPUI, Fall 2017

Professional Experience

- Children's Literature Association Annual International Conference Intern, Research Assistantship, Fall 2018 – Summer 2019
- Writing Center Lab Instructor, Marian University, Spring 2019
- ENG-L115: Literature for Today Instructor of Record, Teaching Assistantship, IUPUI, Fall 2018

- ENG-L352: American Literature, 1865-1914, Student Teaching Assistant, IUPUI, Spring 2018
- University Writing Center Graduate Student Assistant Director, Research Assistantship, IUPUI, Fall 2017 – Summer 2018
- Freelance editing and personal writing consultant, Summer 2018 – Present

Selected Conference Presentations

- Forthcoming: "Power, Resistance, and Transformation: A Leadership Studies Analysis of Dystopian Young Adult Literature," Children's Literature Association Conference, Indianapolis, IN, 13-15 June 2019
- "The Spaces Between Us: Magic, Myth, and Memory in Laura Ruby's *Bone Gap*," The Louisville Conference on Literature & Culture, Louisville, KY, 21-23 February 2019
- "With Great Power Comes Great Anxiety: The Liminality, Leadership, and Labor of Graduate Student Administrators in the Writing Center," East Central Writing Center Association Conference, Columbus, OH, 23-25 March 2018
- "Our Secret Mission: The Emotional Labor of Searching for Clues in the Writing Center," International Writing Center Association Conference, Chicago, IL, 10-13 November 2017

Memberships

- Children's Literature Association, Summer 2018 – Present
- Modern Language Association, Spring 2018 – Present
- American Conference for Irish Studies, Summer 2016 – Present
- Golden Key International Honor Society, Spring 2014 – Present