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Monsters of Men: Masculinity and the Other in Patrick Ness's *Chaos Walking* Series

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ABSTRACT
To date, studies of gender issues in young adult dystopian novels have been dominated by a focus on constructions of female subjectivity, girlhood, and the potential for female empowerment. However, little critical attention has been correspondingly dedicated to examining how regimes of masculinity, traditional privileges of male power, and male adolescence are represented and mediated in dystopian fiction for teenagers. Patrick Ness's exploration of normative and transgressive embodiments of masculinity in his dystopian *Chaos Walking* series for young adults powerfully addresses tensions between power and vulnerability, autonomy and conformity, and concepts of boyhood and manhood. Through their experiences with the possibilities of telepathy, biotechnology, and interspecies relationships, Ness's protagonists must negotiate with the simultaneous attraction of the fragmented self and its threat to the regulation of conventional manhood, as male characters struggle to sustain their inherited understanding of themselves and the relation between self and other. Through his problematizing of the boundaries between traditional hegemonic and Other, human and alien codes, and his emphasis on the importance of non-hierarchical and inclusive co-existence, Ness proposes a receptive, expansive, and egalitarian paradigm of masculinity.

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The exploration of male subjectivity, threats to traditional concepts of manhood, and the potential for new configurations of masculinity are central themes in Patrick Ness's dystopian *Chaos Walking* series for young adults. Ness's science fiction sequence, comprising *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008), *The Ask and the Answer* (2009), and *Monsters of Men* (2010) and three companion short stories, has won the Guardian Award, the Costa Children's Book Award and the Carnegie Medal and has been praised for its thought-provoking investigation of genocide, terrorism, dependence on technology, ecological disaster, war, trauma, colonization, and redemption. As Stephanie Dror has observed, the series is "implicitly metaphorical of twenty-first century reality [including] the constant bombardment of Noise, which directly parallels contemporary Western society's incessant information feed and network of connections and communications" (2014, p. 58).

Set in the far future on a planet called New World, which was colonized by a group of utopian human Christian settlers a generation prior to the start of the first novel, the series chronicles tensions between the human settlers and the indigenous people, the Land, in the context of the destabilizing and divisive impact of human characters' experience with Noise, a planetwide biological virus that broadcasts every human male's and indigenous inhabitant's thoughts; only the minds of human women remain silent: "something that had caused no end of difficulty, given how eager humans were to be outraged by difference" (Ness, 2013b). Ness traced the exhilaration, as well as the deep anxieties and reactionary resentments, that his male human characters experience when confronted with the alien disorder of Noise. The potential of Noise to empower and also endanger —to affect and to infect—male adolescents' agency and the consequent questioning of hegemonic

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manhood and paternal authority propels the series' protagonists' quest for psychological, emotional, and social coherence and individuation.

The first novel is narrated by Todd, a twelve-year-old boy eagerly awaiting his thirteenth birthday, when he will be recognized as a man by the standards of his male-only, totalitarian society, Prentisstown. All his assumptions about the history of New World are ruptured when he encounters a female for the first time: Viola, "a hole in the Noise" (Ness, 2008, p. 13) and sole survivor of a scouting ship sent to prepare for a new group of settlers. Together they seek the truth about the dystopian Prentisstown regime and what really happened to the original female settlers (including Todd's mother) as they struggle to achieve peace between the megalomaniacal Mayor of Prentisstown, the *Answer* resistance group led by Mistress Coyle, the new wave of settlers, and the Spackle, the term that the colonisers call the Land. The second and third novels, *The Ask and the Answer* and *Monsters of Men*, are relayed through the viewpoints of Todd, Viola, and The Return, a young Spackle who has broken free from his position as slave 1017 to the human settlers and who is driven by a burning need for revenge and his ambivalent mixture of hate and affinity with Todd.

This continuum of diverse narrators across the series affords a valuable opportunity for a more inclusive balance of power between hegemonic and marginalized perspectives and voices. Ness's provocative decision to present male, female, and nonhuman characters as equally legitimate focalizers allows for the otherness of nonpatriarchal subjects "to be textually mediated (through the act of reader alignment, for example) and critiques the processes of exclusion that is inevitably invoked in the production of (white, male) humanist subjectivity" (Flanagan, 2014, p. 41). All three young characters must make monstrous decisions to survive, to do what they believe is right, and to try to protect those they love. As Adrienne Kertzer noted, Ness offered "a trilogy of ideas obsessed with the experience and healing of trauma. … All three protagonists—Todd, Viola, and 1017—are both traumatized and in danger of becoming perpetrators" (2012, pp. 11, 15).

Ness's series dramatizes the debate between nature and nurture: between the recognition of masculinity as a socially-conditioned construct and the presumption of it as a hegemonic, essential, and unitary constant. The traditional hero's quest conventionally concludes with the hero's confrontation with the wild things that challenge the authoritative regime of patriarchal power and his ultimate mastery over these dangerous exotic and alien Others. As Margery Houlihan has observed,

> their confrontation forms the climax of the story and encodes the major dualisms which shape it and which underlie Western attitudes and values: the opposition of the civilised and the wild, of order and chaos, of "good" and "evil." … The [hero's] story defines reality in terms of these binary oppositions, insisting upon their inherent antagonism. [1997, p. 107]

Ness's series challenges this dualistic, patriarchial and hierarchical system of manhood and the nonmanly. Instead, he acknowledges and honors the liminal moments where his teenage characters are caught between the familiarity of the old cultural order and the uncertainty of the new, between the stability of the known universe and the allure of radical but uncharted territory for the construction of new, interdependent, and alternate identities. I therefore agree with Stephanie Dror's assertion that the series "endeavours to break down rigid male and female gender identities, interrogate what can be categorized as natural and unnatural, and question the distinction between the child, the young adult, and the adult" (2010, p. 102).

Although Todd is ultimately successful in constructing a satisfying and coherent code of masculinity, his self-conscious preoccupation with becoming a man dominates the series as he berates himself for being "the boy who can't kill" (Ness, 2008, p. 451) and therefore, in the eyes of Prentisstown, "the biggest, effing waste of nothing known to man" (Ness, 2008, p. 84). The Mayor's emphasis on war as a necessary condition and performance of manliness informs Tom's compulsion to repeatedly call attention to his manly behavior throughout the first novel as overcompensation for his anxieties, his feelings of inadequacy, and his nonhegemonic status as mere male child, instead of a man. Ness poses his young protagonist, and by extension, his young-adult readers, with thought-provoking questions concerning the relationship between masculinity and

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violence, and youth and manhood. Even Todd wavers in his protestation that '"war makes monsters of men"' when faced with the Mayor's assertion that '"it's war that makes us men in the first place. Until there's war, we are only children"' (Ness, 2010, p. 11). Kerry Mallan has argued that, traditionally, "war has provided an ideal *mise-en-scène* for the staging of masculinity. The warring male body signifies the masculine ideal of control, dominance, and mastery, and battle becomes the ultimate test of manhood, summarily sorting out the weak and the cowardly from the strong and heroic" (2002, p. 18). Todd's desire to acquire the phallic weapon of "a hunting knife like the one Ben carries on the back of his belt. Now *that's* a present for a man" (Ness, 2008, p. 11) combines his emulation of his adoptive father, Ben, as a role model of masculine authority, as well as his conditioning to accept a norm of an aggressive and hierarchical model of masculinity.

Masculinity in dystopian narratives for young adults

Much recent scholarship has been dedicated to the current popularity of young adult dystopian narratives, their appeal for teenage audiences and their explorations of identity politics. To date, studies of gender issues in young adult dystopian novels have been dominated by a focus on constructions of female subjectivity, girlhood, and the potential for female empowerment in such works as Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy, Veronica Roth's *Divergent* sequence, and Scott Westerfield's *Uglies* series. For example the collection of essays, *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*,

> focuses on the ways in which the dystopian mode provides girls—who continue to be constructed as passive and weak within much of contemporary Western culture—with the means to challenge the status quo, even as many of these works remain invested in elements of romance that may be seen as limiting girls' agency. [Day, Green-Barteet, and Montz 2014, p. 4]

However, little critical attention has been correspondingly dedicated to examining how regimes of masculinity, traditional privileges of male power, and male adolescence are represented and mediated in dystopian fiction for teenagers.

Recent works in men's studies and Queer Theory on the nature of masculine identity have refuted assumptions that manliness is a monolithic and natural characteristic and have, instead, emphasized its contextual and relational nature and its psychic fragility, exploring how notions of manliness are historical and cultural constructs made up of varying and competing forms. Instead, masculinity is posed as continuously constructed within an evolving social structure of sexual power relations that are predicated on producing homosexuality and femininity as an aspect of its constituent Other. Because manhood has traditionally been bound up with expectations of power and because power is in the continual process of being contested and transformed, so achievement of masculinity is likewise tenuous. As Judith Butler has argued, performing one's gender is "not a singular act, for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (1993, p. 12). These socially constructed identities create a sense of expected normality that, in turn, creates binaries in modern culture between what is deemed normative (the expected norm) and identities that are labelled as deviant (in opposition to the constructed norms). Emphasizing a Lacanian commitment to the importance of stories, Karen Coats has argued that "what we get from children's literature are the very patterns and signifiers that define our understanding of and our positions with respect to the Other and, in so doing, structure our sense of self" (2004, p. 4).

It is, therefore, illuminating to also address male characters' negotiation, resistance, and acceptance of hegemonic, socio-political discourses and to study the associated ideological dimensions and representations of a full spectrum of gendered ontology in youth culture. Dystopian literature offers adolescent audiences an especially rich platform for interrogating and problematizing conventions of the productive and repressive dimensions of power. As Joseph Campbell argued, "By seeing the parallel between what happens to the protagonist of a YA dystopian novel and their own stirrings,

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the adolescent [reader] is given the opportunity to explore how their own culture constructs their adolescent, abject, powerful-and-simultaneously-powerless subjectivity" (2014, p. 175). Ness's exploration of normative and transgressive embodiments of masculinity powerfully addresses tensions between power and vulnerability, autonomy and conformity, and concepts of boyhood and manhood. Through their experiences with the possibilities of telepathy, biotechnology, and inter-species relationships, Ness's protagonists must negotiate with the simultaneous attraction of the fragmented self and its threat to the regulation of conventional manhood as male characters struggle to sustain their inherited understanding of themselves and the relation between self and other.

Whirler, an abbreviation of *New Worlder* (Ness, 2013d) and the term which New World's animals call the alien human colonizers, tellingly comments on the turbulent motion and instability of male human Noise. Ness deploys a range of striking techniques to graphically render this chaos of words, images, sounds, and blurry personal/collective boundaries including using different typography, italics, bold, sentence fragments that run into and over each other, and scratchy fonts for different psychic voices: "The Noise is a man unfiltered, and without a filter, a man is just chaos walking" (Ness, 2008, p. 42). Ness's emphasis on the present tense throughout the series coveys the absence of a Freudian protective shield, the immediacy of the adolescent experience and the incessant, inescapable onslaught of Noise. Moreover, the transparent plastic dust jackets of the UK hardback editions of the novels, which are overlaid with patterns and fragments of Noise dialogue from each novel, reinforce the sense of immersion in Noise: "Everything on this planet talks to each other. … Everything. That's what New World is. Informayshun, all the time, never stopping, whether you want it or not" (Ness, 2008, pp. 390–391). The relentless manifestation and exposure of male thoughts and the associated awareness of constantly being watched invokes a panopticon environment that induces "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). Ness did risk alienating some readers with these strategies of defamiliarisation, because the series demands "a keen and attentive reader, able to take a huge leap of imagination and use intricate and contradictory paths of empathy" (Nikolajeva, 2014, p. 262). However Ness's refusal to simplify the richness of his narrative style, and thus to speak down to his young adult readers, along with his belief in teenagers' capacity for enquiry and their readiness for cognitive dissonance, are admirable.

Noise and abjection

According to Julia Kristeva, an abject force is that "which disturbs identity, system, order" (1982, p. 4), and thus poses a threat to concepts of decency and integrity through decay, infection and disease. In this light, the "talking germ" of (Ness, 2008, p. 4) and alien biotechnology of Noise ruptures the norms of conventional patriarchal human technology, and thus the settlers perceive Noise as a leaky, abject discharge which has corrupted the purity of their original, religious mission and which threatens to collapse regulatory boundaries between colonizer and native, human and alien, self and other. Norah Campbell and Mike Saren have analysed the impact of such "dirty technology" in science fiction narratives, arguing that it suggests

> an animate, sweating, breathing life-force—a concept which disrupts our normative, humanistically-inherited and instrumental perspective of technology by forcing us to consider *technology as life*. … This induces horror because it shows technology covered in its own dirt, which implies life, which in turn implies disorganisation, which implies a disintegration of borders between 'us' (bounded) and 'them' (unbounded), which implies loss of control. [2010, 167]

The derogatory name that the original settlers gave to the indigenous people of New World likewise reveals their conditioned ethnocentricity and reactionary alignment of otherness with abjection. Spackle, the colonial term for the Land, suggests dappling and spotting, which work as convenient markers of these primitive natives' fluidity and nonhegemonic appearance. Moreover, the first settlers decided to come to New World because their technology was not capable of recognizing

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alterity and, thus, their "deep space probes didn't show any signs of intelligent life" (Ness, 2010, p. 353). According to Kristeva, the abject is tied to the fluids of childhood such as excrement, vomit, and blood, and the Spackle are associated in the colonizer's minds with organic materiality, bodily fluids, feces, and shaming contamination. The Land follow the natural cycle and bury their dead in swamps in a practice that appears barbaric to humans; the Land army in the third book surges "down the hill like a river of white blood" (Ness, 2010, 14). When Todd kills an innocent member of the Land during book one, he initially tries to justify this violence by reiterating the taught lie that Spackle deliberately killed all the original settler women, including his mother, and that they started the war, but he becomes increasingly unable to maintain the security and rigidity of his prejudices.

After Todd is accidentally cut by his own knife, which is smeared with Spackle blood, he undergoes a fever, hallucinations, and an epiphany that enables his ultimate evolution into someone who can "hear the voice of the planet … [and] lives within it, lets himself be part of it, lets himself ride the current of it without losing himself" (Ness, 2010, p. 564). Ness dedicated a chapter in the first novel, entitled "A boy called Todd," to chronicling Todd's dissolution and evolving reconfiguration as his consciousness splits and his "shimmering, flickering brain" (Ness, 2008, 340) creates a psychic doppelganger of everything he wants to disown about himself: his capacity for violence, his insecurities about his ineffectiveness as a man, his feelings of powerlessness, and his inability to rescue Viola or save Ben. Revealingly, the doppelganger holds Todd's mother's journal in one hand, representing "the history and truth of Prentisstown" and in the other hand, "holds the knife, representing ignorance and surrender to the dystopia of Prentisstown" (Dror, 2014, p. 123). Upon recovering from this disorienting but metamorphic experience, Todd makes the crucial transition to being able to recognize that the Spackle he killed was not a mere animal, as New Worlders might like to think: ""I killed it,' I say. I swallow. 'I killed *him*. It was a him'" (Ness, 2008, 373).

This ideological journey toward an acknowledgment and acceptance that the indigenous inhabitants and human settlers of New World are equally sentient, and therefore that new paradigms of coexistence must replace dystopian, colonial, and patriarchal regimes is, of course, not a linear or comfortable one. During the second novel, Todd is given the job of branding enslaved Spackle and tries to reconciles this task that the Mayor has given him by privately pledging to look after this vulnerable minority. Ness does not flinch from exploring the ambivalence of Todd's conflicted behavior regarding his simultaneous empathy for and conditioned denunciation of Spackle. Although Todd risks his life to protect these enshackled natives, and in particular 1017/The Return, from a bomb, he masks his feelings of complicity and privileged status within an unjust system with reactionary anger when the Spackle rebuff him and do not supply the gratitude that he expects: "I saved his stupid life and this is the thanks I get? Animals. … Stupid, worthless, effing animals" (Ness, 2009, p. 211). Todd's decision to briefly act under the Mayor's orders as a soldier of Prentisstown haunts him throughout the rest of the series. This is compounded by his forced reliving and rewitnessing of his murder of the Spackle in the first book, as this episode is replayed again and again in the Noise of other Spackle, who give him the imposing yet taunting name, *The Knife*. According to the Return, Todd is "'worse *than the others…. He is worst of all of them… Because he* ***knew*** *he was doing wrong….. Worst is the one who knows better and does* ***nothing***'" (Ness, 2010, p. 84).

Todd's flaws and combination of "goodness with everything about [him] that feels and hurts and regrets and refuses to fall no matter what [he has] done" (Ness, 2010, p. 441) pose compelling moral dilemmas for him, as well as the young adult reader. The title of Ness's first novel and this metaphor of relentless penetration and weaponized masculinity provide a rich opportunity to explore norms and to problematize traditional ideological assumptions of the naturally violent nature of manhood. To possess and, like Todd, to act as a *knife of never letting go*, simultaneously offers a seductive sense of invincible power and the horrified powerlessness of being enmeshed forever. Todd's epiphany regarding the emancipatory and destructive potential of a knife—"It ain't just a thing, is it? It's a choice, it's something you *do*" (Ness, 2008, 83)—is a crucial step in his developmental journey away from the corrosive and reactionary Prentisstown regime toward a new code of masculine integrity.

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Jenna Dutton argued that "the type of man Todd becomes is a matter of choice. Biological manhood is one thing; *doing* something, making a conscious choice to be a Prentisstown man or something else; that makes the difference" and concludes that "Todd is a *fighter* but not a *killer*" (2013, pp. 15, 19). Despite Todd's fundamental goodness, Ness does not allow his young protagonist become self-righteous regarding his secure possession of an essentialized, complacent manhood. Instead the focus is on Todd's arduous process in building and vigilantly maintaining a sense of accountability and individual integrity amidst monstrous temptations to lapse into aggression, prejudice and xenophobia. Significantly, the second novel in the series, *The Ask and the Answer*, begins with a quote from Friedrich Nietzsche as caution and challenge to the novel's characters as well as to the novel's young-adult audience: "Battle not with monsters lest you become a monster and if you gaze into the abyss the abyss gazes into you" (Ness, 2009, p. i).

Noise and dystopian systems of control

Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan have argued that "throughout the history of dystopian fiction, the conflict of the text turns on the control of language" (2003, p. 12) and all the human settlements across New World have devised various methods of coercion and control regarding their response to the onslaught of Noise, the freedom of indigenous Spackle to express themselves, and male anxieties regarding human women being "naturally Noiseless" (Ness, 2009, p. 51). During the two decades of colonization, human societies across New World have self-destructed due to their inability to withstand the relentless gaze of men's thoughts: "Crazy as anything. Noise sent 'em wild. Hear tell of one where everyone wears masks so's no one kin see their faces. … And one where everyone's walls are made a glass and no one wears no clothes cuz no one's got secrets in the Noise" (Ness, 2008, p. 312). Even apparently successful and sustainable communities are reliant on unjust power relations, linguistic silencing, and segregation. Although the town of Haven created a cure for Noise, which allows human men to retain a semblance of privacy and normal gender relationships with human women, the cure has a devastating, silencing effect on the enslaved Spackle. Although humans realize that "the Noise was the only way they communicated. … It turned out we didn't really need them to talk to us to tell them what to do. … So who cares if they needed to talk to each other? [The cure] makes them docile. … Better slaves" (Ness, 2009, p. 100). Meanwhile the town of Farbranch seems sound, but is contaminated by misogynistic fears about female agency and the impossibility of knowing what a woman is really thinking: "Can't trust the word of a woman" (Ness, 2009, p. 379). In Prentisstown, the dystopian system of forced conformity and control over information and historical memory (the Mayor has outlawed and burnt all books and forbidden boys to be taught to read or write) has been extended within the territory of the male psyche through the constant surveillance and regulation of interior as well as verbal communication.

Originally called New Elizabeth, Prentisstown has been rewritten according to a male-only totalitarian system predicated on focussing aggression outwards towards the rest of New World, and enabled through the murder of women who must be eliminated due to their ability to keep the privacy of their own thoughts: "'They couldn't stand the silence…. They couldn't stand women knowing everything about them and them knowing nothing about women'" (Ness, 2008, p. 392). According to Prentisstown doctrine, a boy can only move from young adulthood to manhood via the initiation rite of killing a man in an act where "every last bit of boyhood is killed off" (Ness, 2008, p. 52). This disciplinary system of murderous masculinity relies on collective guilt and the corrupt, corrupting exchange of males: "One man's life was given over to a boy to end, all on his own. A man dies, a man is born. Everyone complicit, everyone guilty" (Ness, 2008, p. 449). Todd is unique in being unable to fulfil this rite of passage, even to save himself and those he loves, and the Mayor becomes obsessed with converting him into a son-like confederate and "leader of men" (Ness, 2010, p. 229) according to the Mayor's vision of martial masculinity: "If he could make every single boy in Prentisstown a man by his own meaning, then he's God, ain't he?" (Ness, 2008, p. 397). Todd, as the youngest native-born son of the first generation of settlers and as litmus test for the Mayor's creed of

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war, symbolically juxtaposes the binary forces of life and death, redemption and complicity: "I was born into all that, all that mess, the over-crowded swamp and the over-crowded sematary and the not-crowded-enough town" (Ness, 2008, p. 9). Dror noted Todd's double-edged potential for both subverting and for perpetuating this vicious cycle: "Todd is the young adult hope at the beginning of the novel, but he is ironically the hope for the dystopia of Prentisstown. If he fulfills this destiny, he will enable Prentisstown to spread and take over New World" (2010, p. 113).

An ongoing challenge for all humans on New World but especially for men is the ability to conceptualize and engage with Noise not as an alien Other and therefore deviant menace, but instead as an enriching opportunity for creating new connections and more egalitarian relationships. Tom Moylan has examined how dystopian authors create spaces of alterity in their fiction in which protagonists might establish an alternative or oppositional discourse. Arguing that "control over the means of language, over representation and interpellation, is a crucial weapon and strategy in dystopian resistance," he concludes that "by regaining language" dystopian protagonists "also recover the ability to draw on the alternate truths of the past and 'speak back' to hegemonic power" (2000, p. 149). Ness presents a range of potential paternal role models for Todd to learn from, resist, or adopt, especially regarding how human males respond to Noise. While Todd feels a disturbing connection with the Mayor and struggles to resist this twisted yet compelling relationship, he is also deeply loyal to Ben, his foster father and 'a kind kind of man that makes him not normal in Prentisstown' (Ness, 2008, p. 34). Ben and the Mayor represent opposing paradigms for performing masculine identity and authority. Ben opens himself up to his own Noise and others' so that his thoughts are "so smooth and non-grasping it's like laying down in a brook on a hot day" (Ness, 2008, p. 36), but the Mayor has developed his ability to weaponize Noise: 'It's every word, crammed into yer head all at once, and the whole world is shouting at you that YER NOTHING YER NOTHING YER NOTHING and it rips away every word of yer own, like pulling yer hair out at the roots and taking skin with it—A flash of words and I'm nothing—' (Ness, 2009, p. 201).

Intriguingly, the Mayor's manipulation of Noise is not just destructive, as it contains nurturing and educational potential: He is able to teach his lieutenants to develop self-management of their own Noise and he even telepathically teaches Todd how to read, as well as to weaponize, Noise. However, the redemptive potential of the Mayor's control of Noise for learning and sharing of knowledge, rather than for dystopian repression, is a gift he explicitly restricts to bestowing just on Todd, the disciple-soldier-son that he yearns for. Instead, it is the visionary "conduits" (Ness, 2010, p. 590) like Ben—who combines hearing "the voice of the Land" with retaining his identity as an individual, while also being "many, part of something bigger"—who will become "the next evolutionary step" for humans (Ness, 2010, p. 424). Conduits such as Ben and Todd implement Moylan's premise of an alternative discourse of coexistence, hope, and collaborative communication between humans and New World's indigenous inhabitants instead of exploitative, reactionary regimes based on hierarchical norms of Othering and colonization: "Echoing through him is a language not of the Land but not quite of the Clearing [humans] either, some deeper combination of the Clearing's spoken language and the Land's voice but sent along the Pathways, along *new* Pathways" (Ness, 2010, p. 529).

Hope and dystopian narratives for young adults

Many critics have noted the didactic impulse of young adult literature in light of adults' ambivalence regarding and teenagers' potential for change and these young people's presumed ability to engage with complex issues. Although Roberta Seelinger Trites praised the young adult novel for allowing "postmodern questions about authority, power, repression, and the nature of growth in ways that traditional *Bildungsromane* do not" in her influential work, *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, she argued that "the underlying agenda of many YA novels is to indoctrinate adolescents into a measure of social acceptance" (2000, pp. 19, 27). The educational and ethical responsibilities that many adult authors feel obliged to fulfil when writing for ostensibly vulnerable

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young readers raise particular challenges for writers imagining dystopian worlds for young audiences because the adult tendency to soften the traditional despair of the dystopia genre inevitably conflicts with the literary tradition of maintaining childhood innocence and offering young readers reassuring hope for a better future. Kay Sambell has contrasted this reluctance of many young adult dystopian authors to "depict the extinction of hope in the narrative resolution of their stories" with the adult dystopia's reliance on the "absolute, unswerving nature of its dire warning" and pessimistic denouement (2003, pp. 164, 165). Sambell contended that this sentimentalizing, conservative strategy ultimately compromises the imaginative and ideological coherence of the vast majority of YA dystopian narratives and she therefore has called for a "new, more fluid style of didacticism" in dystopian writing for youth which would mean "authors must find ways of progressively resisting the pessimistic thesis of the dystopian scenarios they have invoked" (2003, p. 173).

Ness's series offers a thoughtful and valuable response to this challenge of a dystopia that sustains hope but that also respects the adolescent reader's capacity for complexity and refuses to diminish the intense and challenging nature of his speculative fiction. His series exemplifies Raffaella Baccolini's emphasis on the importance of a "critical dystopia's … acceptance of responsibility and accountability, often worked through memory and the recovery of the past, that we bring the past into a living relation with the present and may thus begin to lay the foundations for utopian change" (2004, p, 521). The tension between the dystopian experiences of New World, the utopian desire of the original settlers, the need for hope for a peaceful future for all the planet's inhabitants and the elusiveness of this redemptive goal infuses the series. Ness interweaves Todd's ambivalence about the painful allure of hope with The Return's bitter rejection of the fantasy of a peaceful future where humans and The Land can coexist. Todd's and The Return's painful trajectories toward achieving an optimistic outcome for themselves, those they love and their peoples is set in counterpart with Viola's sense of responsibility to always be hopeful in order to fulfil her dying mother's last request, as relayed in Ness' first online companion story, "The New World" (Ness, 2013a).

Although 'The New World' focuses on the transfer of hope within the family between adult and young generations, the second short story, "The Wide, Wide Sea" (2013c), set during the onset of the original war between human colonisers and the Land, examines the possibilities for the hope of not just harmonious coexistence but interspecies romances on New World. Declan, a 16-year-old human boy, and an unnamed female Spackle teenager fall in love and are subjected to murderous violence and exile because of this taboo relationship. Ness charts the humans', as well as the Land's, ambivalence and xenophobic anxieties regarding this challenge to conservative racial and ideological boundaries. The men of the town call Declan an *abomination* and *pervert*, and claim to be appalled and repulsed by this shameful affair while at the same time their Noise reveals their fascination with the speculative pleasures of this deviant intercourse: "It wasn't pleasant. Full of Declan and the things they imagined him doing, things they professed to be disgusted by, but which they sure seemed to have fully-fledged pictures of floating around their heads" (Ness, 2013d).

Ness exposes the imaginative failure of the human men who focus on the physical aspects of this attachment in not being able to comprehend the extent of the radical difference of the intense bond between the two young lovers. Although they embrace via the Noise, their relationship does not entail or rely on sexual physicality and, instead, proposes an entirely new and potentially revolutionary form of loving communion: "In their shared Noise, they could be intimate in a way completely different than anything he'd ever known. Enough to stop the world" (2013d). There are tantalizing allusions to this not being the only human-Land relationship —"Do you honestly think in the admittedly short history of this blasted world, a human and a Spackle haven't found each other more interesting than decent people think is right?"—but no details are given about the fate of these so-called indecent relationships. Likewise, no sentimental closure celebrating the overwhelming power of love is offered and the reader is left to reflect about the capacity of ostensibly decent people, whether human or Land, to condone and accept such unions. The story ends with the hope for elusive, yearned-for change as Declan and his beloved embark on an uncertain sea

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journey across New World "to a place where we can be. … Across the water … Far … but not impossible."

The final short story, 'Snowscape' (Ness, 2013b), which occurs during the aftermath of the third novel, locates the ongoing struggle for hope within the socio-political framework of collective accountability and the need for personal, community, and trans-community responsibility. The story is narrated by Lee, who has learnt to adapt the Noise of both humans and Spackle as a way of seeing after having been blinded during the wars in book two, and charts an encounter between a group of humans and an isolated Land community that appears to have achieved an utopian level of serenity and control over their Noise. Yet this "narcotized Noise" is exposed as dependent on an exploitative regime where "one Spackle from among them … became the repository for every negative thing they felt. … The Snowscape. Their scapegoat. Suffering so they didn't have to" (Ness, 2013b). Ness does not shy away from exposing the complacency of privilege and the disturbing truth that all communities, even those Others who presumably should have more empathy due to their colonial experiences of injustice, are capable of dystopian means to secure their own self-regard and comfort. The end of the story juxtaposes Lee's reflection regarding the Snowscape's suffering—"All that loss, all that lack of hope. No one should have to feel like that" (2013b)—with a guarantee from the Sky, the leader of all Land, that this monstrous behavior would never happen again, and an exultant message from Viola that Todd has woken up from his coma, caused by wounds from his final confrontation with the Mayor.

This optimistic conclusion to the series continues the war-torn yet hopeful tone of the final chapter of the third book, which ends with a new group of settlers arriving, peace between humans and Land, and the suggestion that Todd will wake soon from his coma with the benefit of new wisdom inspired by his ability to be a conduit—like his surrogate father, Ben—between humans and the Land. The two young male narrators who conclude the series have both been scarred during their struggles for a peaceful world of coexistence between human men, human women, and the Land, but they remain resolute in their rejection of xenophobic aggression, their accountability for their flaws and mistakes, and their willingness to be receptive and welcoming of diverse Others. Elaine Ostry has argued that authors of young adult dystopian fiction "use biotechnology as a metaphor for adolescence … [which] adds a dramatic dimension to the changing adolescent body and the identity crisis that arises from it" (2004, p. 223) and Ness's deployment of the transformative impact of and experiences with Noise affords a fascinating platform for examining the complexities of male adolescence and trajectories towards regimes of manhood. In his 2002 collection of essays, *Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children's Literature and Film*, John Stephens concluded that although work had begun "in making visible the operations of traditional normative masculinity … [so that] masculine subjectivities may be reconfigured, resignified and rewritten," this remains a "

"matter of unfinished business for children's literature" (p. xiv). I believe that Patrick Ness's *Chaos Walking* series confounds this claim and demonstrates the rich potential of contemporary dystopian narratives for young people to problematize reactionary power dynamics and conservative gender conventions and to present a more inclusive and enlightened model of manliness. Through his problematizing of the boundaries between traditional hegemonic and Other, human and alien codes and his emphasis on the importance of nonhierarchical and inclusive coexistence, Ness proposes a receptive, expansive and egalitarian paradigm of masculinity.

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