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1. Introduction

I cannot recount how often my father reproached me for filling my head with useless fantasies when I chose to pick up J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* or Joanne K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* rather than the latest newspaper.

Discussing young adult fiction, adults will inevitably come up with the question which books are appropriate and good for young adults and which books should remain on the shelves of a bookstore. Generations of young readers have to read didactic novels in high school, that are written to educate them and induce social values but carry a high risk of simultaneously discouraging the young readers to pick up a book for private pleasure. At the same time popular fiction is marginalised and often considered as a waste of time, if not harmful for the young adults' personal growth.

This thesis will compare two series, the *Noughts & Crosses* Trilogy by Malorie Blackman, which is acclaimed by critics and won several awards and Richelle Mead's *Vampire Academy* Series, a New York Times bestselling series which is part of the popular Vampire genre. As we will see, both works contain examples for discrimination on different levels, and even though the issue is tackled quite differently, young adults might acquire knowledge and moral views from both.

The first part of the thesis includes a short introduction to the theory and historical development of young adult fiction, and moves on to elaborate on characters in young adult fiction as well as the aspect of critical multicultural analysis. Theory also focuses on how difference is conveyed in young adult fiction.

In the second part, each series is discussed in separate chapters. The analysis includes the setting, plot and character, as well as the choice of words. With regard to the different approaches to the issue of discrimination in *Noughts & Crosses* and *Vampire Academy*, the focus of the analysis varies. Whereas narration is explicitly discussed in the *Noughts & Crosses* section, it is not a distinguishable aspect of the *Vampire Academy* series,

which instead offers a variety of discriminatory behaviour that is discussed in detail.

Each chapter is summed up in a short overview of the messages transported in the separate series and the effects created. The overall conclusion compares the advantages and disadvantages of both series, offering a short comparison.

Even though each series approaches the issue of discrimination in a very different way, the underlying assumption is that both, didactic novels as well as popular fiction can influence the readers' personal growth in a positive way. Thus it is not important what young readers choose to read, as long as they choose to read.

2. A theoretical approach to Young Adult Fiction

What exactly is young adult fiction? When authors and publishers in the 1970s became aware of a gap in the market, namely “a sub-genre written especially for the adolescent reader” (Knowls and Malmkjær 141), the ‘Teen Novel’ was born. Young adult fiction caters for the needs of “readers too old for children’s stories and not yet ready for ‘adult’ literature...” (Knowls and Malmkjær 141). The new genre was first considered a means to tackle the taboo topics of children’s literature with a new motion of realistic writing: “Sex, death, family tensions, social class, teenage violence and race relations were and are common themes” (Knowls and Malmkjær 142).

But young adult fiction is more than a collection of novels, tackling issues that might present trouble to young adults in their every-day life or discussing problems of our society, bringing them into the awareness of young readers. In the *Edinburgh Critical Guide to Children’s Literature*, Matthew Grenby names the main chapters according to the seven major genres of children’s literature: Fables, Poetry, Moral and Instructive Tales, The School Story, The Family Story, Fantasy and The Adventure Story (*An Introduction to Children’s Literature* 1, Contents), whereas Peter Hunt suggests that “Children’s literature draws on a huge range of genres (even, recently, pornography) and a great deal of time has been spent in trying to chart its boundaries” (“Introduction Vol.1”, 11). In fact it is arguable whether young adult literature is limited to a certain number of genres, or whether it even has any boundaries. Entering a well-stocked bookshop, one can find a microcosm of literature mirroring the genres of adult fiction: There are crime novels, fantasy novels, romances, adventures, autobiographies etc. written especially for a younger audience.

Trying to provide a comprehensive account of young adult fiction in one thesis, would be as impossible as trying to push the entire subject of English Literature into just one book. This chapter will offer a short introduction to young adult fiction, beginning with its development over the centuries and moving on to the position of young adult fiction and children’s literature in literary studies, before the focus returns to the cultural issues in young adult

fiction, in this case the aspect of discrimination analysed from a multicultural perspective.

2.1 The roots of Young Adult Fiction

As mentioned above, young adult fiction became a separate category of literature only in the second half of the twentieth century. Originally critics differentiated between books for children and books for adults, so for most part of its existence, young adult fiction was considered a part of children's literature. However, children's literature itself has not always existed as such. Though there had been "Instructional books, both secular and religious [...] marketed directly at children for centuries" (Grenby, "The origins" 4), "The majority of scholars have placed the start line [of children's literature] in London in the early 1740s" (Grenby, "Birth" 39). But as Grenby points out, few examples of children's books can be found in earlier times. *The Friar and the Boy*, "perhaps the first story appealing directly to children", was first printed in 1510 ("Birth" 42).

Depending on whether books addressed to mixed audiences are taken into account, the origins of children's literature are set earlier, e.g. "Medievalists have recently argued that children's literature began, in terms of both content and readership, in the Middle Ages" (Grenby, "The origins" 5) or even as early as "ancient Sumer in the third millennium BCE" (Grenby, "The origins" 5). Furthermore this approach neglects the position of children's books in other countries; e.g. France, had its own children's stories, albeit legal and social circumstances inhibited further development (Grenby, "Birth" 40).

Hunt describes the "first Golden Age of British children's literature, conventionally from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll, 1865) to the beginning of the First World War [in which] the distinction between books for adults and books for children became more distinct..." ("Same but Different" 73), introducing Lewis Carroll's work as a "new way of writing for children: the implied child reader was treated as an equal rather than as a subordinate" ("Same but Different" 73-74). This new development allowed for more

complex themes or the reflection of social challenges (Hunt, "Same but Different" 74).

Children's literature returned to peaceful rural settings and familiar themes between the two world wars, dealing with trauma and providing calm and protected surroundings (Hunt, "Same but Different" 78). While many authors returned to closed-circle structures, and on some levels invented secure fantastical places, works like J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* hinted at an awareness that "Hobbit or child, there is nowhere that is safe any more [sic]" (Hunt, "Same but Different" 79).

The first appearance of young adult fiction as a whole new category of books was within twenty years of the Second World War, a time in which "almost every British publishing house had developed a children's book department" (Hunt, "Same but Different" 79). In the 1970s the Second Golden Age had begun, and brought "a remarkable number of new 'quality' authors" (Hunt, "Same but Different" 79). While literature for young children mostly kept their circular structure, older children and young adults were now provided with books written for the benefits of the readers, acknowledging their capability to handle more complicated issues and work with open or ambiguous endings (Hunt, "Same but Different" 80).

Though there has never been a time when as many children's books were being published as are in the twenty-first century, Hunt is careful to proclaim our times a Third Golden Age. He reasons that in contrast to the earlier heyday of children's literature, nowadays children's books are mainly published by a small number of large publishing companies, catering for the demands of the market rather than considering the quality of books published, leaving less potential for originality (Hunt, "Same but Different" 81).

Modern society often confronts writers of young adult fiction with incompatible demands (Hughes 80). On the one hand, "children's literature should be realistic and should absorb in some form or other, the social and psychological problems of the day" (Heins 45), on the other hand "we must

try to keep out of his [the child's] mind the knowledge that he is born into a world of death, violence, wounds, adventure, heroism and cowardice, good and evil" (Lewis 23). During its development, "a certain restraint has been imposed on children's writers in the realist tradition when it comes to topics such as terror, politics and sex" (Hughes 80), though in the twenty-first century those restraints have started to dissolve and "political topics such as class and race have recently been self-consciously injected into children's realistic fiction" (Hughes 81).

Realistic fiction still seems to be the most recognized genre in modern young adult fiction, but critics like W.J. Scott acknowledge the necessity to "withdraw sometimes from the real world into one of fantasy, it is of great importance, that the experience given in fantasy should be of good quality, indirectly extending his [the child's] understanding of reality" (qtd. in Hughes 83).

2.2 The position of Young Adult Fiction in literary criticism

Even though young adult fiction has emerged as a category of literature that has been discovered by the publishing houses as a valuable addition to their market, it is often seen as a mere sub-category of children's literature and analysed or discussed on the same set of criteria. For this reason, this thesis will have to rely mainly on theories on children's literature, choosing which of the criteria need to be applied for a younger audience only, and which are relevant for the analysis of young adult fiction. Furthermore, for a long period of time children's literature as a whole remained culturally marginalized and was only slowly recognized as a subject of literary studies. Hunt claims that

In many ways, an instructive parallel can be drawn between the emergence of children's literature and other 'new' literatures (national, ethnic, feminist, post-colonial) that are becoming part of the institutional/ cultural critical map. Just as the literatures of colonized countries have had to fight against the dominant culture, so children's literature (as a concept) has had to fight against the academic hegemony of 'Eng. Lit' to gain any recognition. (*An Introduction to Children's Literature* 2).

He goes on to argue that the position of children's literature is weakened by its status as a female field of research, with mainly female instructors and only very few professors, who take a theoretical rather than practical approach to the matter (Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature* 3). More modern sources prove that in the last decades theorists have become aware of the variety and vastness of children's literature as well as the necessity to analyse it thoroughly (Grenby, *Children's Literature* 1).

They emphasise the importance of their subject, questioning whether there is "such a frightening influential area as children's books" (Aiken 31), given that "they produce material that can affect the outlook of whole generations to an incalculable degree" (Aiken 31). The young readers' perception of the world, society and moral values, is very likely influenced by the books they read during childhood and adolescence. With this in mind, it is essential to carefully analyse how critical social issues, e.g. racial differences or discrimination, are approached.

2.3 Choosing 'good' books for Young Adults

Children's books are published, written and reviewed by adults, creating an imbalance of power between those who choose which books are relevant and those young adults and children who will eventually read them (Sarland 39). Adults decide which books are appropriate, based on the accepted ideologies and politics of their society. For educational purposes in particular, young adult literature often discusses socially problematic issues, i.e. gender, race or class. "When critics state in some way or another that this is a book they judge to be good for children this actually involves saying that the book is good because of what they think a book does for children" (Lesnik-Oberstein 18).

Children's books are used for different purposes at different times – for more things than most books are. Some are 'good' time-passers; others 'good' for acquiring literacy; others 'good' for expanding the imagination or 'good' for inculcating general (or specific) social attitudes, or 'good' for dealing with issues or coping with problems, or 'good' for reading in that 'literary' way which is a small part of adult culture, or 'good' for dealing with racism... and most books do several things. (Hunt, "Introduction: The World" 11)

Often books that are considered 'good' for didactic and educational purposes are not the books children and young adults would choose to read in their own time. Books that are very successful commercially are often regarded as lacking in quality and people tend to publically recommend one type of book, while privately preferring another (Hunt, "Introduction: The World" 3). Especially "important social issues, such as racism, have led critics with the same anti-racist orientation to differ utterly in their judgement of a book" (Lesnik-Oberstein 20).

One purpose of children's books is to shape the "social and moral consciousness of young readers" (Watkins 33), performing cultural work by "legitimizing or subverting dominant class and gender ideologies[...]" (Watkins 33). Kimberly Reynolds states that "children's literature contributes to the social and aesthetic transformation of culture by, for instance, encouraging readers to approach ideas, issues, and objects from new perspectives and so prepare the way for change" (99). She goes on to argue that in any society the education of children according to current ideology was an essential aspect, because in the course of growing up, children learn to make choices, start to ask questions about the world and encounter new ideas that might encourage a reevaluation of cultural norms and help to shape their identity (100).

In the 1970s, critics assumed a directly didactic relationship between young readers and text, suggesting that "if you wrote books with positive characterisations of, and roles for, girls, ethnic minorities and the working class, then readers' attitude would be changed and all would be well with the world" (Sarland 48). However, not all readers identify with the characters and overtly didactic works might be rejected, thus contemporary authors of children's literature tend to avoid didacticism (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 34).

Commercial children's literature is often culturally neglected and thus offers a chance to cross boundaries (Reynolds 109). It is a source of innovation and its "ability to envisage and engage young readers with possibilities for new worlds and world orders [engenders the] transformative power of children's literature, both socially and aesthetically" (Reynolds 107).

In contrast to this argument in favour of popular fiction, Sarland states that “Popular fiction causes educationalists particular concern since it appears to reinforce the more reactionary values in society, particularly so far as girls and young women are concerned” (51). Those assumptions are not necessarily exaggerated: One of the most popular series of our time, the *Twilight* series, promotes an unhealthy teenage love relationship, which culminates in a marriage that endangers the female protagonist’s life and might even promote acceptance of marital abuse (Meyer). However, recent research has found that multiple readings of popular fiction lead to new discoveries about its underlying ideological formulations (Sarland 51).

“May I suggest that the aim of children’s writing be delight, not edification;” (Egoff, qtd. in Lesnik-Oberstein 25). Discussions about what children and young adults should read seem void considered that “in secondary school a surprising number of children read nothing for pleasure except comics” (Aiken 38). Aiken ascribes this observation to the fact that young adults are often confronted with nothing but situation books handed out to them at school, or books that are considered high class reading (38), while they might actually prefer to read popular fiction. In order to work against this development, a tendency to accept popular fiction as sources for critical studies has manifested in an academic context (Sarland 51).

Being aware of an inexperienced audience that might be influenced by the literature they read, it is very important to take a close look at the various aspects of a young adult novel, especially with regard to the fact that children and young adults play an essential role in shaping the future (Reynolds 108).

2.4 Difference in Young Adult Fiction

“It is sometimes assumed that because children’s books are designed for a relatively inexperienced audience they must be uninfluenced by ideology and politics, and in some way can be free of concerns of gender, race, class and so on” (Hunt, Editor’s introduction 39). This assumption seems rather naïve. Children’s literature has always been concerned with social issues, providing the foundation for personal maturation, with the main purpose of “inducting its audience into the social, ethical and aesthetic values of the

producing culture” (Stephens, “Retelling” 91). Changing values in our modern societies are necessarily reflected in young adult fiction. Young adults are encouraged to recognize different cultural perspectives and develop a tolerance for those who differ in terms of gender, race, disability or sexuality (Valonne 174).

Difference can be represented in a variety of aspects. With regard to the works discussed, this thesis will mainly focus on the issue of racial discrimination, or racism as well as discrimination of class. Discrimination is a widely used term in our society, referring to negative actions or utterances against the other, often a minority group. But discrimination is not only used by the socially privileged or the majority, often discriminant acts and views go in both directions. Discrimination can be expressed in various ways, on a personal level, for example through insults, verbal abuses or physical attacks, but also on the state level, when laws deprive minority groups of privileges, political power, economic resources or even civil rights (“Racism”).

Especially racial discrimination, also called racism or racialism, is based on an ideology that suggests a “causal link between inherited physical traits and traits of personality, intellect, morality, and other culturally behavioral features” and judges some races innately superior to others (“Racism”). During times of colonisation and slavery, those races perceived as inferior were often dehumanised so that social practices would not be contradictory to the notion of human equality. In the 1950s and ‘60s the American Civil Rights movement started a combat against institutionalized racism and since then many laws have been changed and discriminant social policies such as segregation have been abolished. However, private beliefs do not instantly change with the introduction of new laws and racism is still a problem within modern societies. (“Racism”) Furthermore, other minority groups, for example queer people or handicapped people, are still fighting against discrimination and for legal and social acceptance.

Young adult fiction seems a very appropriate platform to discuss issues of discrimination, because it “construct[s] narratives of personal growth or

maturity, stories about the relationships between self and others and between individuals and society” (Bradford et al. 12).

2.4.1 Multiculturalism and Postcolonial aspects

The term multiculturalism, which has since become a commonly known and used term, was coined in Canada in 1970 (Paul 85). Until the mid-twentieth century, most children’s books reflected an “Anglo-American, middle-class, implicitly Christian and lily-white” (Paul 87) world. In the 1960s, the civil rights movement brought along political changes that drew new attention to “issues of legal, economic and social equity for people (not just women and people of colour) who had traditionally been disadvantaged by the privilege implicitly afforded to white, Christian men” (Paul 88).

The inclusion of minority groups in literature and especially children’s literature had been at most patronizing or even racist. This slowly changed, but children of colour were still represented as poor or only as supporting characters. Their sole purpose was to initiate personal growth in the main characters, be it tolerance or the acceptance of their own social class but “demarcations of differences between race and class have not been entirely overcome or successfully negotiated away from notions of hierarchy” (Vallone 183). Multiculturalism was often represented in a positive but flashy way, focusing on folklore and traditional food or costumes, creating a superficial integration of various cultures and thus reinforcing stereotypes rather than solving them, while at the same time “inequities, injustices and outrageous historical property thefts and other sins” (Paul 89) remained neglected.

Critical attention shifted only gradually to the colonial encounter, revealing the negative consequences of centuries of colonisation. Society started to breach the issue of the marginalisation of Indigenous populations as well as the exploitation of African people for the economic purpose of slave trade (Paul 90). “Place and displacement are central [...] to the field of postcolonial studies, which deals with the effects of colonization on societies and cultures” (Bradford, and Baccolini 44). Some former colonies still repress the memory

concerning colonisation, in a process of “censoring and so forgetting a painful past redolent with violence and conflict” (Bradford 3) and for over one decade post-colonial theories were neglected in the critical studies of children’s literature (Bradford 7).

[...], postcolonial literary studies consider how texts inscribe the shifting relations of power and knowledge evident in colonial and postcolonial societies, and in their discussions of traditional narratives, postcolonial literary studies resist universalizing interpretations, preferring to focus on the local and the particular. (Bradford 8)

In her work on postcolonial children’s literature, Clare Bradford differentiates between settler societies e.g. North America or Australia, where indigenous people were displaced by Europeans who came to settle the land and became a new nation and societies that were part of the British colonial empire, where power was exercised through education, administration and law, or the history of slavery, which describes displacement and exploitation, especially of African people (3). She goes on to argue a focus on African American studies, due to the British and American dominance in the scholarship of young adult fiction and their attempt to set history right (8). The emphasis in African American studies lies on the “lasting effects of racialized discrimination” (Bradford 8), which will be discussed in this thesis. Other aspects of post-colonial theory, e.g. the position of indigenous people, are not relevant for the analysis and will therefore not be considered any further.

A new demand for more diverse representation brought about a change in the landscape of children’s literature. After multiculturalism had been introduced in a desirable and positive manner, new literature emerged which drew a darker picture, retelling the stories of colonisation and repression. “As post-colonial discourses have penetrated into mainstream publishing, formerly marginalised people have been able to tell their own stories of the colonial encounter” (Paul 97). One approach to critical discourse is to determine “how children’s texts represent the experience of colonialism in the past and its effects in the present” (Bradford 9). Literature and historical writing that had been mainly produced by male WASP authors, was now questioned and reconstructed “by introducing the perspectives and views of colonized others (Bradford 100).

“[...]at the inception of multicultural children’s literature cultural flows tended to be in one direction, because perspective and focalization were usually located with a principal character from the dominant, or majority, culture” (Stephens, *Schemas and Scripts* 18) Since young readers tend to identify with and show empathy for literary characters, it is highly significant, who those characters are and how they are presented. Negative or racist representation in children books promotes “certain values – essentially white, male and middleclass” (Sarland 41). Starting in the early 1980s, a new development encouraged authors to include characters from marginalized social or racial groups in order to promote “working-class, anti-racist and anti-sexist values” (Sarland 42).

John Stephens notes that “it has been uncommon for the literature to address the problematics of contemporary cultural diversity, and then almost only in the YA novel” (“Schemas and Scripts” 17) and argues that “models of human rights and human equality can be simplistic and may fail to engage with the actual politics of diversity” (“Schemas and Scripts” 17).

2.4.2 Critical Multicultural Analysis

Umberto Eco states that all texts carry ideological assumptions and offers three potential reader responses: “they can assume the ideology of the text, [...] they can miss or ignore the ideology of the text and import their own, [...] or they can question the text in order to reveal the underlying ideology” (qtd. in Sarland 49). The latter approach can be described as critical multicultural analysis.

Critical multicultural analysis is an attempt to “untangle multiculturalism from ‘multicultural children’s literature’” (Bothelo qtd. in Bothelo, and Rudman xiv), asking a number of critical questions. One set of critical questions has been proposed by Nathalie Woolridge:

- What (or whose) view of the world, or kinds of behaviors are presented as normal by the text?
- Why is the text written that way? How else could it have been written?

- What assumptions does the text make about age, gender, [class], and culture (including the age, gender, and culture of its readers)?
- Who is silenced/ heard here?
- Whose interest might best be served by the text?
- What ideological positions can you identify?
- What are the possible readings of this situation/ event/ character? How did you get to that reading?
- What moral or political position does a reading support? How do particular cultural and social contexts make particular readings available? (e.g., who could you not say that to?) How might it be challenged? (qtd. in Botelho, and Rudman 4)

Contemporary texts which are produced in modern postcolonial societies can still contain colonial and assimilationist agendas which stand in contrast to the anti-racist and anti-colonial developments in modern Western societies (Bradford 3). “Children’s literature is marked by a pervasive commitment to social practice, and particularly to representing or interrogating those social practices deemed worthy of preservation, cultivation or augmentation, and those deemed to be in need of reconceiving or discarding” (Bradford et al. 2).

Cultural criticism has the major tasks of “unmasking what appears as natural as a social construct which favours a particular class or group in society” (Watkins 36). There is a danger of fiction enculturating readers “into the dominant discourses of capitalism – class division, paternalism, racism” (Sarland 52), which requires readers to consciously read against texts, proving that “fictions that are responsible for the transmission of such values are far more complex than was at first thought” (Sarland 52).

With this in mind, young adult readers might need help or guidance to discover the underlying cultural aspects of some texts, and should thus always have a chance to ask questions or discuss texts with a more experienced reader, be it a teacher, a parent, or a friend.

2.5 Characters in Young Adult Fiction

The question if readers necessarily identify with one or several characters in a book is still not completely solved. In children’s fiction, writers tend to create repulsive and unlikable characters in order to prevent identification (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* viii). But in any case characterisation and the

presentation of issues through the characters are highly important aspects in children's literature

“Young readers usually have stronger empathy with literary characters, mainly because they perceive them as ‘real’” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 7). Thus the characters' experiences in a novel, their perception of the plot and certain events or aspects, influence the young readers' perception of the text. Nikolajeva states that younger readers prefer to read about protagonists of the same age and especially boys are more likely to enjoy stories about protagonists of their own gender, whereas girls don't seem to mind (*Rhetoric* 7). Readers connect with the characters, whose actions and experiences can be observed, but not influenced, even if the readers sense that a character's decision might have negative consequences (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 20).

Characters can become bearers of ideology, be it the “ideology of their social class [...] the ideology of their gender” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 15) or the ideology of their race or culture.

Considering that younger readers are likely to identify with one of the protagonists or main characters in a book (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 7), the choice who those characters are and how they are introduced to the reader is essential for the effect of the narration. In the following chapters, the aspect of character in young adult fiction will be analysed and later applied to the works chosen for this thesis.

2.5.1 Characters and their voice

In some cases the characters' only function is to be agents of the plot, whereas in others the character has a fully developed psychological existence. Nikolajeva names four types of characters in children's literature: the romantic hero, high and low mimetic characters, and ironic characters (*Rhetoric* 30-37).

The romantic hero or romantic heroine is based on the mythical hero of fantasy and fairy tales, who is superior to ordinary human beings, and most common in children's fiction (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 30). Since their first

appearance in romantic fiction, the hero has often been empowered through a magical helper or object, and returns to being a normal human being as soon as the plot finishes and the magic is lost (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 31). In contemporary fantastic young adult fiction, the hero can be a supernatural being, e.g. a magician, a witch or a vampire.

“High mimetic characters are humans who are superior to other humans in terms of, for instance, bravery, wisdom, patriotism, and so on” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 33). In young adult fiction, those characters often set examples for other characters, as well as for the readers and are used for didactic and educational purposes (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 33).

Whereas high mimetic characters are commonly used as role models for young readers, and sometimes seem too good or virtuous to be true, low mimetic characters are very realistic, by all means ordinary, but presented in an all but ordinary manner (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 36-37). Nikolajeva describes the low mimetic character as the “most natural subject position for contemporary young readers” (*Rhetoric* 27). Contemporary children’s and young adult fiction favours low mimetic characters, because they represent real people, and characters are only temporarily elevated to a high mimetic or romantic level (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 47).

The term ‘ironic characters’ refers to characters, “who are weaker, physically and spiritually, than their peers, in addition to being inferior to their parents and other adults” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 37). Since children and young adults generally seem or feel powerless against adult authority, their characterisation is always ironic to a certain point.

“Since the implied author is responsible for the ideology of the text – that is, the views and opinions expressed in it explicitly or implicitly – the relationship between the implied author and the character is of overall importance” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 4). In young adult fiction, the author has to find a balance, if they want to express their views through the character and at the same time retain a natural tone. Often adult secondary characters add

their insight and opinion, to help form the young protagonists' views (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 4).

Focalisation limits the information which the reader is able to gather from a narrative. Non focalised narrative, also described as omniscient narrative, treats all characters equally in the aspect that the narrator can enter each character's mind and change perspective continually (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 61). External focalisation does not enter the characters' mind and only provides external observations, whereas internal focalisation enters the thoughts of one certain character and narrates from this character's point of view (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 62). Nikolajeva describes narrations with multiple internal focalisers as "polyfocalization" or "multifocalization" (Rhetoric 62).

Depending on the choice of narrative perspective, the reader experiences the plot and the world through the character's eyes. In homodiegetic narration, the narrator is a character in the narrative. Characters who narrate their own story are described as autodiegetic. Both methods provide a challenge in children's literature, because the narrator "is by definition naive and unreliable, since the child lacks knowledge, experience, stable views and opinions, the capacity for self-evaluation and self-reflection, and so on" (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 5). However, there is a vast majority of first person narrative in modern young adult fiction (Nikolajeva, *Power* 122), where the protagonists have already reached a certain level of life experience, or are at least convinced they have reached the insight of an adult. It is important to keep in mind that those narrators remain to a certain point unreliable and naïve, because even though teenagers often consider themselves grown-ups, they are not.

Especially in fiction written for children, but also in young adult fiction, characters are constructed in a way that is meant to correspond with the implied reader: "they think, behave, and speak the way the implied readers are assumed to think, behave, and speak" (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 6). The construction of characters will also be affected by "age, gender, level of education, cultural background, and so on" (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 6) of the implied reader.

2.5.2 The protagonists

Nikolajeva claims that identifying the protagonist in young adult fiction is as important as in any other work of literature, but is often neglected. “The question of the protagonist brings forward not only the complexity of characterization but also the complexity of texts” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 49). It is not always easy to identify the protagonists of a text, even if we go by the “obvious principle [that] main characters, or protagonists, are, by definition, those who stand in the center of the story and around whom the story rotates” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 49).

Several criteria can be employed to define the protagonist of a story. First of all, many examples of children’s literature have the protagonist in the book’s title, but in numerous other cases the title names a minor character or misguides the reader e.g. “*Mary Poppins*” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 50f) or the title uses a collective application e.g. “*The Borrowers*” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 52). The second approach, to identify the protagonist(s) of a story by order of appearance, is also unreliable because, as Nikolajeva points out:

If we made a random choice among the books most often mentioned in general studies of children’s fiction and thus perceived as children’s literary canon,” we would probably discover that half of the books start by presenting the protagonist, in some way or other, already in the opening sentences, while the rest do not, and may even establish ambiguity of some kind. (*Rhetoric* 53)

Thirdly the frequency of the character’s presence throughout the novel might be an indication. However, counting how often a character is mentioned does not always lead to a conclusive result (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 57). Nikolajeva describes “novels that have several characters, with separate chapters devoted to each” (*Rhetoric* 57), though not all of those characters are necessarily protagonists.

Another criterion indicating the protagonist could be first person narration, suggesting that the narrator tells their own story and is consequently the protagonist of the story. Since various examples of literature employ first person narrators who tell another person’s story, the narrative mode does not necessarily define the protagonist (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 58). “Applying the

notion of focalization, rather than the criterion of the first-person (autodiegetic) narrator, we might come closer to a more precise definition of the protagonist” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 61), because when the story focuses on one character, it cannot follow others.

Nikolajeva’s last criterion for the identification of the protagonist is the characters’ development and change during the course of the story. Depending on the nature of the text, those changes can be either in social status or in the moral, spiritual or educational level and can be explicitly stated as well as implied (*Rhetoric* 63-64). But in spite of the fact that this criterion can be considered most certain and essential to the definition of character, there are still cases in which, due to genre, the protagonists do not change (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 64-65).

With regard to the fact that none of these criteria necessarily defines the protagonist and can thus stand on its own, it is reasonable to apply a combination of aspects for the identification of the protagonist.

Furthermore, the protagonist might change during the story, especially in a series of books different chapters or volumes can evolve around different characters. If a number of characters act as one, they can be described as collective characters. However, multiple protagonists with changing perspectives and voices within a narrative are described by the postmodern term of intersubjectivity (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 88). In contrast to an omniscient narrator, who simultaneously adopts the perspectives of several characters, the intersubjective characters alternate in perspective: “one character is abandoned while the other is focalized” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 91).

Intersubjectivity is used in contemporary psychological novels, because it allows for a male and female protagonist at the same time, thus catering for the needs of readers of different gender, which is highly significant in the case of young adult fiction (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 91). Both characters, or each character, have their own stories and development but are in some way connected, functioning as a supportive character for each other’s progress.

The choice of protagonist has great impact on the credibility of the text. Collective characters all share the same experiences and sentiments about the narrated events and create the illusion of an objective reality, whereas “the use of individual characters creates ambiguity since a single focalizer [...] questions the objectivity of the character’s experience” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 108). Intersubjective characters combine several subjective experiences to form a complex consciousness, thus avoiding several problems of young adult fiction, e.g. portraying the human consciousness as objective, gender stereotypes or the fact that children and young adults may not be able to fully perceive and analyse their surroundings in the way an adult would (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 108-109).

2.5.3 Secondary characters

In addition to the protagonist(s), stories generally feature a variety of other characters. Especially in children’s literature there is at least one adult character guiding and teaching the child protagonist; the relationships towards parents, teachers or siblings have an important place in children’s literature, which does not focus on the relationships towards lovers and spouses, as would mainstream fiction (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 111).

However, in young adult novels (first) relationships of love gain more importance, probably due to the fact that the teenage audience starts to show interest in relationships towards lovers, whereas the absence of adults, especially parents, or the role of adults as unreliable and antagonising characters is a common criterion (Hunt, *Same but Different* 80-81). If parental figures are present, their main purpose is to allow for the protagonists to act on their need to revolt against adult authority (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 119).

Secondary characters may vary in number, complexity and function. Characters vital to the development of a story, who cannot be removed without altering the plot are defined as supporting characters. In addition to those central characters, there are often peripheral characters (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 112). Those peripheral characters might not have an essential function for the plot, but can be important for the characterisation of the main

characters (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 113). Stereotypical representation of characters, i.e. amplifying one single trait of character, can occur for central, as well as peripheral, characters. Common stereotypes in young adult fiction include evil teachers, bullying classmates or the model student (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 115).

Typical roles for the secondary character include parents and parental figures, peers, the antagonist and deus ex machina (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 116-124). Parents and parental figures are necessary in children's and young adult fiction, because it is highly unlikely that the protagonists are ready to live on their own. In the best case, parents provide support and guidance, but with growing age of the protagonist, parents become less important, in some cases their absence provides trouble for the protagonists, in others they turn to be a nuisance that needs to be avoided, an authority to revolt against (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 116, 117).

Peers are often classmates or friends, who help the protagonists in their development or provide a reason for the quest, e.g. the protagonists have to save a classmate or a friend (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 122).

The antagonist, most likely an adult, is often stronger and more powerful than the child protagonist, and can only be defeated by outwitting them or using typical characteristics of a child, e.g. purity of heart (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 123).

Quite common in traditional children's fiction, the deus ex machina approach is less used in modern stories. This figure, often an adult, appears at the end of a story to set things right, be it with their wealth or their influence, and thus take away the power from the child or young adult protagonist (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 124).

2.5.4 Characterisation

Consistency is one of the most important requirements a literary character has to meet, especially in children's literature. Even though real people do not generally tend to be consistent in their character traits, literary characters

are solely defined and understood through their behaviour and personality described in a book, so that inconsistency might have a confusing and even disturbing effect on the audience (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 128). “Part of the traditional aesthetics of children’s literature is, for didactic purposes, to pretend that texts reflect a reality and that characters are psychologically credible” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 25). If only little and superficial information or single traits are mentioned, the character is considered a flat character, as opposed to a round character, who has a fully developed personality and thus seems more realistic.

An author has several means of characterisation. In order to create a reliable representation of the characters, a combination of explicit and implicit characterisation is used.

With the rise of the novel, description has become the method of choice for presenting characters, often in the way of introduction at the beginning of a novel. First of all it can be used to draw an image of the character, informing the audience about physical features e.g. hair colour, height etc. The appearance of a figure might be a hint at their function and their character, but especially in realistic novels physical appearances, for example hair colour, often have no deeper meaning (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 183, 187). A character’s description is based on the same principles, which apply to appearances in reality: some features for example eye colour or hair are noticed, while others will only be considered if they are in some way out of the ordinary, e.g. a blind eye or missing teeth. In this way, the author introduces the characters as if the audience would meet the person. Very often the descriptions are even less complete, leaving the characters’ appearance to the readers’ imagination (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 184).

Descriptions can also include the characters’ state of mind, e.g. if the face is tear-stricken or pale in contrast to rosy or with a bright smile. Thus the description can be general or adapted to one specific moment in the narration. Furthermore, traits of character, as well as evolution can be explicitly stated in a description. In addition it is always important to note, who describes the characters. From an authorial point of view the description can

be accepted as absolute, whereas a description from another character's point of view might be very ambiguous (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 187, 189).

Other than description, characters are defined through their actions, or reactions to certain events. Situations in which a character might react are often related to "the five main facts of human life: birth, food, sleep, love, and death" (Forster qtd. in Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 199), but may also occur during work or school, e.g. is the character lazy or diligent? Actions can be divided into ordinary and extraordinary actions, of which the latter are more interesting for the characterisation (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 221).

"Direct speech is a powerful characterization device" (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 239) as characters are constructed through the words they say and how they say them, e.g. power relations can be defined by who dominates the speech act, or how the characters interact in dialogues. In third person narratives, the author can provide an insight on the characters' thoughts quoting monologues (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 244). However in the first person narrative, internal characterisation can be provided by the character's thoughts and inner monologues.

In addition to the methods of explicit characterisation, the author can use implicit characterisation to create a fuller and more realistic character. Lifestyle, clothes or the relation to alcohol might not be common choices in children's fiction (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 268), but are getting fairly important in novels for young adults. Even if teenagers are still subject to rules made by adults, they are likely to revolt and act out against those rules, or they might not, which tells as much about their character.

Proper names in fiction are often chosen with purpose, their sound, their meaning or their origin can be very important for the characterisation. An example for the interconnection of name and personality can be found in Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story*, when the protagonist loses his name along with his identity (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 269).

The matter of age is crucial in children's as well as young adult fiction, because young readers are more likely to identify with characters of roughly

the same age (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 271). The precise age might also be important, because of the fast development during childhood and adolescence. A child of six will know much less than a child of seven, who is already in school; a seventeen year old will have much more rights and responsibilities once they turn eighteen. “Amazingly many children’s novels portray characters of eleven or twelve [...] the age of initiation in many archaic cultures” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 271). This age also seems to constitute a boundary towards young adult fiction, in which stories of initiation and growing up often occur and character age varies from about twelve to late teens, and sometimes even early twenties.

The identity of a character can also depend on the place in which they live. A convention of the dystopia is the ‘misfit’ protagonist, “the quintessential ‘displaced’ person: the citizen who feels out of place and at odds with the otherwise generally accepted values of the society” (Bradford, and Baccolini 49). How the character interacts within their society and environment provides great insight on their personality.

Other hints to a character’s personality are for example food preferences or other habits. Characters’ likes and dislikes as well as their hobbies are other indications to their personality. In some cases, characters are also defined through special attributes, be it a characteristic weapon for a fantasy hero, or special clothes or tools (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 273-277).

Frequently, characters are presented through contrast, a method borrowed from the genre of fairy tales. Those contrasts can either be physically or morally and can apply to gender, manners, social status etc. “Quite a number of classical novels have a supporting character contrasting the protagonist in looks and temperament” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 277).

In some cases the contrast is exaggerated by omitting the character traits that would show similarities. “Characterization by omission implies that some cardinal fact about the character or some important trait is not mentioned so that the reader is misled in making inferences about the character” (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 280). Often the omitted parts are revealed later, giving

the characters' behaviour a new meaning or turning the sympathies in the characters' favour or against them.

Generally, implicit characterisation demands more active reader participation than explicit characterisation (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 281), but is often considered more reliable, because the reader finds out about the characters rather than being told about them. In most cases, a combination of explicit and implicit devices is used.

3. Malorie Blackman's *Noughts & Crosses* Trilogy

This chapter will focus on the *Noughts & Crosses* trilogy by Malorie Blackman, consisting of *Noughts & Crosses*, *Knife Edge* and *Checkmate*, but, will also consider the sequel *Double Cross* to some extent, which is set in the same context and includes some of the trilogy's characters. At this point it is worth mentioning the recently published short story *Callum*, which provides an alternative ending to Sephy's abduction in *Noughts & Crosses*, as well as the novella *An Eye for an Eye*, describing a meeting between Jude and Sephy, set after Callum's execution and before Callie Rose's birth. However neither of those will be explicitly discussed in this thesis.

Noughts & Crosses has won the Children's Book Award, as well as several other awards for children's literature (Blackman, *Checkmate* "About the Author"). It is highly acclaimed by critics, e.g. the Sunday Times describes the first novel as "A sad, bleak, brutal novel that promotes empathy and understanding of the history of civil rights as it inverts truths about racial injustice... But this is also a novel about love, and inspires the reader to wish for a world that is not divided by colour or class" (qtd. in Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses*).

Creating an awareness of racial injustice and racism in the UK seems the major issue of the books, especially in view of Malorie Blackman's statement on her homepage: "Race and racism are emotive issues that most people are loathe to discuss but I think they should be discussed, no matter how painful" ("*Noughts & Crosses* Q&A"). Various comments on Blackman's webpage ("*Topics for Discussion/ Debate*"), as well as the discussion of *Noughts & Crosses* in lectures on children's literature and young adult fiction (Reichl, University of Vienna, e.g. winter 2012) justify the assumption that the novel is frequently read and discussed in a classroom context. Recently Malorie Blackman also appeared on the multimedia platform of *tes*, the largest network of teachers in the world, where teaching material accompanying her books is provided.

Blackman's political allegory has also been adapted as a play for the Royal Shakespeare Company, again additional material for teachers is provided on the official homepage ("Noughts & Crosses").

3.1 Setting

Hunt describes *Noughts & Crosses* as "an urban nightmare, with little hope" ("Same but Different" 83). The narrative's setting is "a supposedly British, but effectively an 'anywhere', [...], Western, inner-city landscape" (Wilkie-Stibbs 241), where the socially marginalised, white Nought¹ population lives alongside the privileged, black Cross population.

Even though the story is set in a fantastic world, which plays with the readers' expectations of racial relations by empowering the black Crosses and thus "defamiliarizing a set of naturalized assumptions" (Wilkie-Stibbs 241), it remains very close to realistic writing. Especially in *Noughts & Crosses*, historical facts are re-written. Mirroring the protests during the US American civil rights movement, when African Americans were first allowed to join higher education, Callum is one of the four Nought students who face protests, hatred and violence on their first day in a formerly all black high school (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 54-56). In addition the historical persons mentioned during history class (133-137) are all historical figures, who have been neglected in British history lessons (444), but are highlighted in the Cross culture to emphasise the superior black intellect.

The characters have no chance to escape the dystopian setting, as Callum points out bitterly: "This place is like the whole world and the whole world is like this place. So where could I go?" (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 21) But the political climate is one of change. Noughts have ceased to be slaves and during the twenty years covered by the trilogy they gradually receive civil rights along with other rights, such as eating at a Cross restaurant (Blackman, *Checkmate* 215). In spite of changing laws, the political climate remains charged, as "either side of the political divide

¹ In the books the term 'Noughts' only gradually becomes capitalised, a stylistic aspect that will be discussed in a later chapter of this thesis. For reasons of consistency I will use the capitalised writing, except in direct quotes.

become[s] radicalized into [...] extremist positions” (Wilkie-Stibbs 243). The Liberation Militia violently fights the Cross hegemony through terrorism, whereas reactionary politicians counter the attacks with capital punishment and repressive ideas.

In the first novel, *Noughts & Crosses*, interracial relationships seem forbidden by law, as Sephy’s thoughts during her sexual encounter with Callum indicate: “It was forbidden. Against the law. Against nature” (Blackman, 382). Laws against interracial marriages were quite common in the USA during the 1950s, for example “If convicted of marrying in violation of Virginia’s law against interracial marriage, each person could be sent to the state penitentiary for at least one year and for as long as five years” (Wallenstein, 177). But instead of imprisonment, Callum faces death penalty for impregnating a Cross girl, namely Sephy. Shortly after his execution however the law seems to change, as Cara Iomega is ready to openly date Jude in *Knife Edge*.

Until the end, the narration remains “ghettoized into rich and poor zones divided along racial lines” (Wilkie-Stibbs 242). Meadowview remains a place with higher crime rates and a mainly poor, white Nought population, which the characters seek to escape. While *Noughts & Crosses* reminds us of the civil rights movement, *Checkmate* mirrors our contemporary society, in which racism is still rooted in the minds of parts of the population and terrorism is one of the greatest social issues. *Double Cross* shifts the main focus from racially discriminatory laws and the fight for equality to the difference of class, reflecting on organised crime and the higher risk of marginalised groups to be influenced by this phenomenon.

3.2 Plot

Focusing on racial differences and the consequences, plot is one of the major means by which *Nought & Crosses* creates awareness of the difficulties in society. Thus this chapter will provide short information on each part of the trilogy as well as the sequel.

3.2.1 Noughts & Crosses

Sephy and Callum are best friends, but their friendship changes when Callum starts to attend Sephy's high school as one of the few Nought students in the country, who are accepted into higher education. Their friendship is attacked by classmates and teachers, but also by other family members. After Callum's sister Lynnette kills herself, his father Ryan and the older brother Jude join the Liberation Militia. Callum finds out about a planned attack on a shopping centre and manages to save his friend Sephy, but soon his father is imprisoned and convicted for terrorism and murder. Though he is pardoned from execution, Ryan McGregor dies in prison. At the same time Callum is expelled from high school, due to his family's involvement with a terrorist group. Sephy has her own family struggles as her mother develops a drinking problem, and she starts drinking as well. Recurring misunderstandings and growing frustration about the situation drive the two friends apart.

Three years later, when Sephy returns from boarding school, Callum, who is now a member of the Liberation Militia and under the command of his brother Jude, tricks her to meet him and abducts her. Their cell wants to blackmail Kamal Hadley, a high profile politician, but Callum soon feels remorse and admits his lingering feelings for Sephy. They make love, and Callum is still trying to figure out how to save her, when Jude and another member of the cell return. Their operation has failed and they have to flee. Callum helps Sephy to get away from her capturers, and hides.

When he finds out that she is pregnant with his child, he returns to meet her. They plan a future together, but Callum is captured and convicted for abduction and rape. Kamal Hadley offers to avert the capital punishment, if Callum convinces Sephy to have an abortion, and offers Sephy to save Callum under the same condition. Their choice is not explicitly stated, however the book ends with Callum's execution and a birth announcement announcing the birth of Callie Rose McGregor, Sephy Hadley's daughter.

3.2.2 Knife Edge

The narrative describes two different plotlines that eventually find together: Sephy has given birth to her daughter Callie Rose. Even though her mother offers her a place in her old home, Sephy decides to move in with Callum's mother Meggie. She still loves Callum and wants to keep him alive in her memories, telling her daughter all about him. When she receives a letter with Callum's last hurtful words to her, she abruptly stops and starts to live her own life. She becomes the lead vocalist of a Nought band, but their performances cause trouble. At the same time, Sephy starts to neglect her daughter.

Jude has to hide from authority, as well as from the Liberation Militia who wants to punish him for the failed mission. He blames Sephy for his brother's death and is planning revenge. While trying to keep a low profile, he meets a young Cross woman named Cara Iomega. Trying to exploit her for money, he slowly falls in love with her. But when he becomes aware of his feelings, he beats her up and she dies in hospital. Evidence leads to Jude and he is caught and imprisoned.

Seeing Meggie about to lose her last child, Sephy tries to make up for Callum's death by testifying for Jude. He is freed, but in the aftermath of the media troubles Sephy's band colleagues ask her to leave. Feeling rejected and disillusioned by the events, Sephy nearly suffocates her daughter in an attempt to protect her from the world.

3.2.3 Checkmate

The recurrent theme of *Checkmate* is Callie Rose's development as a teenager and her trouble defining her identity, being neither Nought nor Cross. Her uncle Jude, who has become the general of the Liberation Militia, uses her insecurity as well as her conflicts with Sephy to recruit Callie Rose as a suicide bomber for his organisation, all the while pretending it would be her father's wish.

The majority of chapters describe a present in which Callie Rose is fifteen years old, already a member of the Liberation Militia and set to kill her grandfather Kamal Hadley in a suicide bombing on her 16th birthday. In different plotlines the reader is offered insights on the Liberation Militia and Jude's plans, Sephy's struggle to solve her relationship issues, provide for the family and communicate with her teenage daughter, as well as Callie Rose's everyday life.

In between the major plotline there are several analepses, chapters that describe Callie Rose's childhood, explaining her development, the problematic relationship towards her mother Sephy and how her uncle gradually turns her against her family and into a terrorist. Those analepses are marked by chapter titles stating Callie Rose's age and include Sephy's story: She now works as a singer and song writer and starts a relationship with her employer Nathan.

In *Checkmate*, Meggie McGregor and Jasmine Hadley actively participate in forming the plot. Eventually Jasmine locks Sephy and Callie Rose in her cellar and confronts Jude with the bomb Callie Rose has built. While Sephy manages to reach her daughter, Jasmine and Meggie try to reason with Jude and fail, which leads to Jasmine blowing herself up in order to kill Jude and save her granddaughter.

3.2.4 Double Cross

This novel can be considered a sequel to the *Noughts & Crosses* trilogy, if not a part of the series. It is set some weeks after Callie Rose's 16th birthday and the death of her uncle Jude and her grandmother Jasmine. Though some parts describe Callie Rose's struggle to cope with the events of *Checkmate*, the major part of the plot is dedicated to Callie Rose's boyfriend Tobey. Thus the focus of the story shifts from the McGregor/ Hadley family to a Nought boy, who lives next door to Callie Rose and is her classmate at Heathcroft High.

The story mirrors in some parts the storyline of *Noughts & Crosses*, retelling the story of the poor Nought boy, who attempts to escape his social

class, going to a privileged high school. Even though Callie Rose is not fully perceived as a Cross, her social status is higher than Tobey's and their relationship still meets prejudices. Instead of the Liberation Militia, Tobey faces the problem of organized crime. In a neighbourhood divided into territories between two major criminal families who control drugs and other criminal activities, it takes only one mistake for Tobey to be drawn into the middle of gang conflicts and crime. Callie Rose nearly dies and Tobey is at the verge of becoming a murderer, but eventually they pull through. In contrast to *Noughts & Crosses*, *Double Cross* ends with hope: Even though they still have a lot of problems to face, both Callie Rose and Tobey graduate high school and are set to study law at university.

3.3 Characters in the *Noughts & Crosses* Trilogy

The first volume, *Noughts & Crosses*, introduces two families from different racial and social backgrounds that are connected through their youngest children's friendship.

The Hadleys are a Cross family of high social status, consisting of Kamal Hadley, a high-profile politician, his wife Jasmine Hadley, who comes from a very wealthy family, and their daughters Minerva and Persephone, called Sephy. Their home is generally described as a huge place with vast adjoining property and a private beach. Even though the family is wealthy and could live a carefree life, they are unhappy; the father is absent most of the time, and the mother develops an alcohol problem.

The McGregors are a Nought family with five members: Meggie McGregor, her husband Ryan McGregor and three children, named Lynette, Jude and Callum. They live in Meadowview, an urban district for the socially disadvantaged. Callum describes their home as a "rundown hovel" (Blackman, *Noughts* 31) especially in comparison with his best friend Sephy's house.

Sephy and Callum, the protagonists and narrators of *Noughts & Crosses*, grow up together until Meggie McGregor loses her job as the Hadley's housekeeper. The children remain best friends and later turn into lovers.

Their daughter Callie Rose is one of the protagonists in *Checkmate*. While most of the other family members remain secondary characters, and only occasionally take over the narration in *Knife Edge* and *Checkmate*, Jude becomes the second protagonist in *Knife Edge*, after Callum's death at the end of the first book. In *Checkmate* he returns to being a supporting main character, whereas Sephy remains a protagonist throughout the entire trilogy.

There is a variety of other secondary, peripheral characters that will be mentioned where they add to the meaning of the plot or the characterisation of the main characters, but not separately analysed. The only main character who is neither related to the McGregors nor to the Hadleys is Tobias 'Tobey' Durbridge, Callie Rose's boyfriend and protagonist in *Double Cross*.

The intersubjective characters in *Noughts & Crosses* as well as *Knife Edge* offer the reader a female as well as a male protagonist, rendering the books interesting for male readers as well as female readers. In *Checkmate* however, Callie Rose is the most identifiable protagonist which leads to the Guardians assumption that "this will be extremely popular among teenage girls" (qtd. in Blackman, *Checkmate*). This description acknowledges Nikolajeva's theory of young adults preferring 'homovocalization', i.e. a narrative agency of their own gender (*Power* 122).

3.3.1 Persephone 'Sephy' Hadley

In the first chapter of *Noughts & Crosses*, Sephy is "fourteen in three weeks" (Blackman 23). Coming from a highly privileged Cross family, she is rather naïve, happy that her best friend Callum will join her in high school; her greatest worries seem to be maths and physics. Her voice is that of a child with a more or less carefree life, she has not lost her innocence and is convinced that the divide between her and Callum or between Noughts and Crosses can be overcome. She is ready to argue with her best friend about her beliefs:

'There's more to life than just us noughts and you Crosses.'
My stomach jerked. Callum's words hurt. Why did they hurt? 'Don't say that...'
'Don't say what?'

‘Us noughts and you Crosses.’ I shook my head. ‘It makes it sound like... like you’re in one place and I’m in another, with a huge, great wall between us.’

Callum looked out across the sea. ‘Maybe we are in different places...’

‘No, we aren’t. Not if we don’t want to be, we aren’t. [...]

‘I wish it was that simple.’

‘It is.’

‘Maybe from where you’re sitting.’

(Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 25)

For her best friend Callum, Sephy is ready to revolt against her family, the school and society. She wants everyone to know about their friendship and feels hurt and offended when Callum does not appreciate her efforts. Even though she is genuine, she is judged not only by her Cross schoolmates, who eventually beat her up for associating with Noughts, but also by her Nought classmates, who don’t believe in her motives. In her naiveté, she does not fully grasp the consequences of her actions. Her attempt to protect Callum at his first day in school goes horribly wrong:

“‘STOP IT! YOU’RE ALL BEHAVING LIKE ANIMALS!’ I shouted so hard my throat immediately began to hurt. ‘WORSE THAN ANIMALS – LIKE BLANKERS’” (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 56). To stop the bullying, she uses an insult she has heard at home, a derogative for Noughts. Describing them as worse than animals, she accidentally harms them more than the crowd and her intentions turn out the opposite. Only gradually she becomes aware of the fact that her “well-meant but badly thought out” (309) actions might be rather harmful, or at least hurtful for others as well as for herself.

But even after her alienation from Callum she decides to keep fighting for equality. In her new boarding school, she joins a group of “Crosses fighting for a change in the system. [...] We each made a pledge to do what we could – now and in the future – to further the cause of true integration between noughts and Crosses” (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 334).

She loves Callum and absolutely trusts in him, which leads to her abduction by the Liberation Militia. Being held hostage, hurt and scared, Sephy is still willing to believe in her formerly best friend and their love. After her rescue, when she discovers she is pregnant, she decides to keep her

child. Eventually when she has to choose between the life of her lover Callum and that of their unborn child, she chooses the child. But her love for Callum accompanies her for the remainder of the trilogy.

At the end of *Noughts & Crosses*, Sephy is barely eighteen years old, one of the book's last pages shows the birth certificate of her and Callum's daughter Callie Rose, whom she is going to give Callum's second name (443).

Her optimism fades as the plot develops. While she remains idealistic until the end of *Noughts & Crosses*, in the later books she spends her energy raising her child, fighting her own problems, rather than taking on the problems of society as she was set to do as a teenager.

Knife Edge takes up the plot and starts shortly after Callie Rose's birth, covering the first few months, maybe a year of Sephy being a single mother, who has not graduated high school and does no longer want any contact with her family. Her romantic ideals concerning the memory of Callum and her future are quickly replaced by disillusion. By the end of *Checkmate*, she is in her mid-thirties.

Sephy is clearly a protagonist, and remains a protagonist throughout the trilogy. The reader follows her evolution from an innocent girl towards a strong woman and mother. In all books she takes over the position of a narrator, for a great number of chapters, which are generally focused on her. In *Noughts & Crosses* about fifty per cent of the chapters are dedicated to Sephy, in *Knife Edge* the number is slightly lower, mainly because there are more than two narrators and in *Checkmate* most chapters are dedicated to Callie Rose. Since she is the only character who constantly remains a narrator, most of the events in the trilogy are told and evaluated from her perspective. The reader knows Sephy's thoughts and feelings about the other characters, about certain situations and her society. This renders the question in how far she can be considered a reliable narrator very important.

The character of Sephy is low-mimetic for most of the plot. She is an ordinary school girl with an extraordinary view on society. At the beginning

her social criticism is mainly induced by her friendship with Callum and his ideas. After his death she sticks to her values and tries to promote equality between Noughts and Crosses, joining a band of Noughts, and living in a poor district of the city. Rather than choosing to live with her mother, Sephy stays with Meggie McGregor, emphasising the familial connection she feels to Callum's mother in spite of his death. Her ideals of actively changing society fade. Instead she becomes a singer and struggles to raise her daughter. She is still strong minded, ready to fight injustices but at the same time tired of fighting for acceptance.

Feeling guilty for Callum's execution, she testifies for his brother Jude, knowing that he has murdered a Cross woman. Her testimony sets Jude free, but the relationship between the two does not improve. Sephy regards Jude as a monster and considers herself "the very last person Jude wants to see" (Blackman, *Knife Edge* 268). After Callie Rose's birth she is continually faced with problems, which eventually lead to a mental breakdown, mainly caused by post-natal depression, during which she nearly suffocates her baby daughter.

In *Checkmate* Sephy is mainly characterised through the troubled relationship with her teenage daughter Callie Rose. Continuing analepses describe her struggle of being a single mother of a mixed race child, as well as her troubles to move past Callum and find another love. After her relationship with Sonny, a young Nought who works with her first in the band and later as a song writer, she eventually ends up accepting Nathan's proposal. In spite of her acceptance of Noughts as being equal as well as the idea of mixed couples, her final choice is to marry her Cross employer. Through the flashbacks she remains a protagonist, however by the time Callie Rose is a teenager, Sephy has reached a level of maturity in her love life as well as in her role of being a mother. Thus at the end of *Checkmate*, she ceases to be a protagonist and adopts the role of the parental figure for Callie Rose.

Blackman explains that the choice of classical names for Sephy and her sister Minerva was inspired by the myths of Persephone ("Noughts &

Crosses Q&A”). The name ‘Persephone’ is derived from Greek, and fits the character not only because of her abduction in *Noughts & Crosses*, but also because of its meaning ‘bringer of death’ (“Persephone”), a meaning which resonates in the plot of *Noughts & Crosses*. After their failed attempt at blackmail, Jude warns Callum to stay away from Sephy “or she’s going to be the death of you” (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 399), and he is right, for Callum is captured while trying to meet Sephy, which leads to his execution. In addition, Sephy nearly brings death to her daughter Callie Rose, due to post-natal depression.

3.2.2 Callum McGregor

At the beginning of *Noughts & Crosses*, Sephy’s best friend Callum, is 15 years old. With Sephy’s help, Callum has managed to pass the entrance exam for Heathcroft High, the privileged Cross high school Sephy is attending. Callum is a Nought, thus his skin is white and his hair brown. The most striking physical attribute seem to be his eyes, which Jasmine Hadley remembers years later when she thinks about “Callum, who as a boy always had that ready smile – and the saddest grey eyes. Eyes old before their time. Eyes that had seen too much, too young” (Blackman, *Checkmate* 35).

From the start his personality seems ambiguous. In comparison to Sephy he is rather pessimistic or realistic about his position in society. “You’re in the inside, Sephy. I’m not” (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 21). But his open display of resignation is contrasted by his thoughts and dreams. He believes in his chance to escape poverty and discrimination, is convinced he can have a higher education and make something of his life. He is always ready to argue with his family, especially his brother, to defend his best friend Sephy or to argue against Jude’s terroristic tendencies. When he finds out about a bombing planned by the Liberation Militia, Callum’s first thought is to save Sephy. He does not condone his father’s and brother’s actions, but at the same time he wishes to save both from persecution.

Eventually he joins the Liberation Militia and even turns against his former best friend Sephy, when he tricks her into a meeting and abducts her. His

personality is openly challenged in *Knife Edge*, when Jasmine's point of view is added: "I still don't understand how Callum could've done it. He was supposed to love my daughter and yet he could do that to her. He kidnapped her and victimized her and had sex with her. [...] She was vulnerable and he knew that and yet he still took advantage" (Blackman, 352). She questions Callum's love for her daughter, and even though the reader of *Noughts & Crosses* is aware of Callum's true feelings in the end, his image is changed by those reproaches as well as by the letter he wrote just before his execution, stating that he never really loved Sephy and exploited her for his means (Blackman, *Knife Edge* 147-149).

In the final part of *Noughts & Crosses*, he has to face the consequences of his actions. "Callum McGregor is going to hang for what he did to you" (Blackman 428). Kamal Hadley's threats suggest that Callum is executed for raping Sephy, which the reader knows he didn't do. Even if he was convicted for her abduction, in the light of him helping her to escape and her attempts to save him, death penalty seems highly exaggerated. Several characters attest to Callum's innocence. Even the prison waiter, whom Callum has befriended during his imprisonment, feels compassion towards the allegedly murderous terrorist. "Forgive me, Callum," Jack whispers. I turn my head. 'Don't be silly, Jack, you haven't done anything.' 'Neither have you,' says Jack." (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 439). Especially Sephy claims "Her other son [Callum] was innocent and that didn't get him anywhere, did it?" (Blackman, *Knife Edge* 297)

But was he, really? When Sephy questions Callum's ability to kill her and reproaches him for leaving the dirty work to others he admits "You wouldn't be the first dagger I've killed. Not by a long shot." (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 363). But those words could also be simply a reaction, trying to scare her and keep his composure. However, recalling his career in the Liberation Militia, Callum's inner monologue hints at him having injured and killed several Crosses. "To prove myself as a private I had to take on three of them [...] And one of the daggers died later from his wounds" (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 341-342). He does not elaborate what he had to do, to prove himself as a sergeant.

The information on Callum's past in the Liberation Militia remains vague; especially his actions are left to the readers' imagination. This omission is a strong aspect of characterisation, creating Callum as a martyr, the good child that was forced into terrorism "My dad said something once about the Liberation Militia. He said that once they had you, they never let you go" (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 336). His evaluation of the Liberation Militia suggests that Callum would want to leave but can't, a theory that is repeatedly hinted at, but not proven. Callum has joined the terrorist group of his own free will and actively participated in their actions: "By the time I was nineteen, I'd gained my stripes – and lost my soul" (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 341). He is in fact a murderer and a terrorist and has committed several crimes that would justify capital punishment in court.

What makes him a martyr and creates compassion is the idea that Callum is hanged for having a love relationship with a Cross woman. Callum's refusal to save his life at the cost of his unborn child, his crushed dreams and star crossed love affair distract from his negative personality traits and his criminal actions and distinguish him from his brother Jude.

Callum's reluctance to join the Liberation Militia, as well as his continuing inner struggle to cope with his choices establish him as a good person "who is forced by the circumstances to do things he hates, he has to switch off his personality, switch off the true 'Callum', just to be able to do them" (Blackman, "Noughts & Crosses Q&A"). Having lost his sister and his father due to discrimination, being kicked out of school and losing his friendship with Sephy are some of the reasons why Callum follows his brother into the Liberation Militia. On the one hand he is proud to be one of the organisation's youngest sergeants on the other hand his success is due to his reckless actions. "I was known as the crazy one – the first one into danger and the last one out. [...] So much so that Pete had to take me to one side and tell me to take it a bit easier or I'd wind up dead. No-one realized that that was the whole point" (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 341). He has lost his perspectives and the optimism, has given up on life. "[Because] the Callum Ryan McGregor who loved to sit on the beach and watch the sun go down didn't exist any more. He'd been taken and I'd been left in his place. A poor

trade, but an inevitable one” (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 337) However if the circumstances are enough to justify terrorism and murder, if his development really was as inevitable as he perceives is, remains disputable.

Callum’s crimes are more hideous regarding that he is fully aware of being a terrorist. He does not delude himself that he is a ‘freedom fighter’. His letter in *Checkmate* states as much, when he admits “I’m not blameless, Sephy. I’ve done things, terrible things, that I’m not proud of. I’ve hurt and maimed and killed – and I am so sorry. I’m not a saint” (Blackman 402). But his words are also proof that his old personality is not entirely lost. He regrets his actions and does seek forgiveness. Those last words complete the image of a character who is more complex, than simply being good or evil. His choices may not have been the best and if he deserved to die for his crimes is a matter of opinion, however he is not the martyr he seems to be at the end of *Noughts & Crosses* and at the same time he might as well be, because the story development seems to suggest that he never had a chance for happiness.

Callum is both, protagonist and narrator of *Noughts & Crosses*. His point of view offers the perspective of the discriminated minority. He is more mature and more experienced than Sephy, knows a lot more about history and culture. In contrast to her, he worries about school and his image, knowing that he only has one chance to escape his social class. His personality changes radically, even though his good nature cannot be completely destroyed. With his death he ceases to be protagonist as well as narrator, however two letters, one in *Knife Edge* and one in *Checkmate*, return his voice once more, challenging and completing his personality. There are no indications that Callum does not qualify as a reliable narrator though it may be argued that first person narrators cannot be considered reliable because their perspective always remains subjective.

Callum’s name is a variation of ‘Calum’, an English/ Scottish name, based on the Latin word ‘columba’, signifying ‘dove’. Its symbolic meanings are peace, purity and the Holy Spirit (“Calum”). Blackman chose the name to resonate Callum’s nature as a person, who has to give up his personality, his

identity and his soul to adapt to the circumstances (“Noughts & Crosses Q&A”).

3.2.3 Jude McGregor

In *Noughts & Crosses*, Jude is a peripheral character whose main function is contrasting his brother Callum and later influencing him to join the Liberation Militia. After Callum’s death, Jude takes over the position of the second protagonist. There is chance for development throughout *Knife Edge*, but eventually Jude’s inability to change his views and let go of his hatred and racist ideas wins over. In *Checkmate* he remains one of the narrators, but is no longer protagonist, his personality does not evolve, and even when he is the centre of attention, his focus is often on Callie Rose. He turns to being an antagonist, a mentor for his niece, who misguides her into joining the Liberation Militia by slowly feeding her with lies and hatred.

Jude is characterized through his own thoughts and actions, but especially through the eyes of his mother Meggie, who alerts the reader how much Jude’s development actually mirrors that of his younger brother Callum. Meggie losing her position at the Hadley’s household deprives Jude of his chance to enter high school. His exclusion from higher education and thus society is the main source for his bitterness and hatred against the dominating Cross society.

When Jude becomes aware of the fact that he is falling in love with a young Cross woman, Cara Imega, it does not change his attitude towards the other. Instead he chooses to beat Cara to death, a choice which will follow him until his very last minutes in *Checkmate*. Even then he cannot admit his true feelings, asked by his mother about the murder, he states: “I didn’t murder anyone, Mum, [...] Murder implies I unlawfully took the life of another person. All I did was kill a Cross” (Blackman, *Checkmate* 487). Jude’s killing of Cara Imega breaks the very last taboo of young adult according to Nikolajeva, namely one young adult character, though no longer a teenager, killing another (*Rhetoric* 222).

Jude deliberately chooses not to deny his actions, and answers Meggie by clearly displaying his remorselessness, even though he might be aware that this choice will offend his mother and Jasmine. When he sees his last moments come, he resorts to his laws filled with hatred: “*If Heaven is full of Crosses, I’d rather live in Hell*” (Blackman, *Checkmate* 491). His attitude proves that Jude has not developed, is probably not able to change. As the defeated antagonist, he is punished in the end, being killed by the bomb he instructed.

In the end it is Meggie, who continuously tried to see the good part in Jude, who passes judgement, recognizing and thus showing to the reader the monster he has become. Jude has turned into a man from whom even his own mother turns away. He is sentenced to death, even though capital punishment has been abolished. Again he is set in parallel to his brother, but whereas Callum’s execution was the tragic and seemingly unjust fate of a misguided young man, Jude’s death seems well deserved.

The character of Jude McGregor is low-mimetic. His major achievement is the fast career in the Liberation Militia. He justifies his cruel and ruthless actions mainly with his brother’s death. Claiming he will avenge Callum, he attempts to hurt Sephy and Callie Rose, ignoring his brother’s love for the enemy. At one point in he reflects on his brother “Callum, who was like my good reflection. He was the one in the family who was meant to make it. Get out. Get on. Get ahead. And if he couldn’t make it, what hope did the rest of us have?” (Blackman, *Knife Edge* 40). Those thoughts hint at Jude being as hopeless as his brother was, as influenced by the circumstances. Yet his personality does not allow for deeper reflection, instead he covers his feelings with hatred and violence.

“Don’t use my name in public, Mum,’ Jude said softly. ‘I’ve told you before.’ ‘So what should I call you?’ I asked. ‘Jude is your name. Your dad picked it out especially.’” (Blackman, *Checkmate* 218) The name Ryan McGregor picked for his oldest son is from Hebrew origin and means “he, who is praised” (“Jude”). After Jude enters the Liberation Militia and climbs up in ranks, he invents a new identity by the name of Robert Powers. Robert

is a German rooted name that signifies “famously famous” (“Robert”), together with the surname Powers it proves Jude’s high ambitions and hint to his position as the leader of the Liberation Militia. Giving up his name, Jude also gives up his old personality and identity to which Meggie clings until his death.

3.2.4 Callie Rose Hadley

In *Knife Edge*, Callie Rose is a baby and cannot actually be considered a character. Throughout *Checkmate*, her age continually changes, from roughly seven years to her sixteenth birthday.

While younger, Callie Rose seems to be a happy and optimistic child, easily fooled by her neighbour Tobey and only faintly aware of the negative reactions towards her family. She does not understand why some classmates would make fun of her. She accepts herself “‘I think it’s lucky that I’ve got a Cross mum and a Nought dad. [...] ‘Cause I think I can’t go round liking one and not the other, can I? ‘Cause I’m both” (Blackman, *Checkmate* 107). When she is ten years old, she meets her uncle Jude for the first time. Her perception slowly changes. She notices that she is not fully accepted neither by her Cross nor by her Nought classmates. She starts to react defensively and aggressively “‘I’m not half anything’ I said with contempt. ‘Where’s the line running down my body to separate the Nought bit from the Cross bit?’”(Blackman, *Checkmate* 294)

As a teenager, Callie Rose is romantically involved with a Cross schoolmate, but later starts a relationship with her best friend Tobey, who is a Nought. On the one hand, their story told in *Double Cross* reminds of the love story between Callum and Sephy. On the other hand, her struggle to find her identity which is neither Cross nor Nought resonates in the choice between a Nought and a Cross lover.

After she finds out that her father Callum had been a terrorist, Callie Rose does not trust her mother, who kept this information from her. Instead she turns towards her uncle. Jude’s influence is barely perceivable at first. He organises a meeting between her and her grandfather, proving to her that

even some family members do not fully accept her. Misguided by Jude's stories about her father, Callie Rose joins the Liberation Militia. She is convinced that she has to follow in her father's footsteps, and is trained to build a bomb, chosen to be a suicide bomber who shall kill Kamal Hadley, her own grandfather. She no longer believes that Callum loved Sephy, and mistrusts her mother and grandmother who try to convince her otherwise.

On her sixteenth birthday, she visits her grandmother Jasmine and is locked up in the cellar forced to face her mother. During their conversation she gradually reconciles with her past. The love of her family reverses the change Jude's hatred created and Rose regrets her actions. In *Double Cross* she also feels responsible for her grandmother's death, not knowing that Jasmine chose to die but aware that she was killed by her bomb.

Callie Rose is again not only protagonist but also narrator of *Checkmate*. When she is younger, she writes letters to her father telling about her school life and ideas, her voice being very naïve and young. Later her perspective changes little by little, her voice becomes more mature and is in some cases hardly distinguishable from her mother Sephy's.

In the birth announcement Callie Rose was supposed to have the surname McGregor, but since Sephy was not married to Callum and he is no longer in a position to acknowledge his daughter, Callie Rose's legal surname is Hadley. However, in the first chapter of *Checkmate* the character introduces herself with the words "My name is Callie Rose. No surname." (Blackman, 19) The name Callie Rose was chosen by both her parents at the end of *Noughts & Crosses*: Callum suggests Rose, because of their secret meeting place whereas Sephy wants to add Callie to honour her lover (Blackman, 416). In *Checkmate*, the name reflects the character's sense of identity. After Sephy received Callum's letter, she calls her daughter 'Rose', while Meggie still insists on the full name 'Callie Rose'.

When Callie Rose learns about her father being a terrorist and murderer, and is influenced by her uncle Jude, she uses Callie to emphasise her connection with Callum and distance herself from her mother and childhood.

Eventually her full name is used, and after the discussion with Sephy, Callie Rose can resolve some of her problems and can fully embrace her identity.

3.2.5 Secondary Characters

In addition to the protagonists there is a variety of secondary characters. Students and teachers in Heathcroft high represent a microcosm of the world the story is set in. Even though there are some teachers who wish to help the Nought students, the headmaster and other teachers are against the Noughts joining their school and openly show their disregard. The history teacher Mr Jason emphasises that all important scientists and inventors in history were Crosses and when Callum tries to argue he reacts aggressively: “How dare you spread these pathetic lies about nought scientists and inventors?’ Mr Jason’s hands were clenched at his side now and he glared at me furiously” (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 137). Even though the Nought students try their best to fit in and catch up, they are expelled one by one, just like Callum is expelled for his father’s criminal actions.

The most important secondary characters are the remaining members of the McGregor and the Hadley family. Each of them has a certain function for the narrative:

Ryan McGregor, Callum’s father, is at the beginning rather optimistic about his son joining higher education. He is not very strong or dominant, and fails to take his position as the patriarchal head of the family. After Meggie reproaches him for letting a fight between their children getting out of hand, which eventually leads to Lynette’s death, Ryan changes his behaviour radically. He joins the Liberation Militia, participates in the bombing of a shopping centre for which he is imprisoned and convicted. His behaviour indicates that he is not a convinced member of the Liberation Militia, he shows regret for the lost lives and Callum later reflects “My dad said something once about the Liberation Militia. He said that once they had you, they never let you go” (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 336). Ryan McGregor’s death in prison drives Callum and Sephy further apart, because

Callum suspects that his father's death is not an accident and blames the Cross legal system and the Crosses.

Meggie McGregor seems to be the dominant parental figure for Callum and his siblings. She is less enthusiastic about Callum's education, being disappointed by her friendship with Jasmine Hadley and aware of the fact that Crosses tend to blame Noughts and give them no chance to proceed. In *Knife Edge* and *Checkmate*, Meggie's perspective is added to the narrative. She mainly adds information on Jude's character and functions as a connection between her son and Sephy as well as Callie Rose. Eventually Meggie is put in the position of judging Jude for his actions. When Jasmine offers her a chance to save Jude's life, Meggie tries to see his positive qualities but fails. Her personality seems to be rather coherent with Callum's estimation in *Noughts & Crosses*. She is a strong person, who fights for her family. But she has been so embedded in the social order that she cannot easily adapt. Even in *Checkmate*, she still refers to her kind as 'noughts' and feels uncomfortable in public places. Her thoughts also offer an insight on the historical reality of racial differences in the trilogy's world.

Lynette McGregor is a very passive figure in *Nought & Crosses*, nevertheless she holds a key position. After their fight, Meggie informs Callum and Jude that their sister's mental disorder is due to her being attacked and nearly killed by a group of Noughts, just because she was dating a Cross. Lynette denies her identity, claiming to be a Cross. When she is forced to face reality, she becomes the first victim that dies because of the consequences of racism. Her voice is heard in her final letter to Callum, when she reveals that her death was a suicide and not the accident in which the rest of the family believes (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 168). Her last wishes for Callum, to have more luck in his relationship with Sephy, already hints at the fact that their love might be as impossible and fatal.

Kamal Hadley takes the position of an antagonist. He is a very influential politician, but member of a party that does not support the Noughts' equal rights. In fact, his political views oppose the idea of Noughts being integrated into society. Even though his public façade seems to indicate otherwise, he

refuses to treat Noughts with respect. When he finds out about Sephy's pregnancy, he tries to force her into having an abortion and eventually forces her and Callum to choose between Callum's life and the child's life (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 425-429). Even though it is not explicitly stated, because neither of the narrators can see inside Kamal's thoughts, his words imply that he actually enforced Callum's punishment, in order to control his daughter and retaliate upon him for the abduction as well as her refusal to abort.

In *Noughts & Crosses* Jasmine Hadley is described as a weak character who has a drinking problem and does not care much about her children or their friends. Other aspects of her personality are revealed in *Knife Edge* and *Checkmate*, when Jasmine receives the chance to narrate parts of the story from her perspective. She is not as ignorant or indifferent as Sephy assumes. Being aware of her mistakes and her part in the tragic events that destroy the McGregor family, Jasmine tries to make up for her behaviour. Eventually she sacrifices herself to save her granddaughter Callie Rose. It is Jasmine who sees the similarities between Callie Rose's best friend Tobey and Callum, and she takes the position of the deus ex machina at the end of both *Checkmate* and *Double Cross*. In *Checkmate*, Jasmine solves the problem of Jude corrupting Callie Rose by killing him. In *Double Cross* she acknowledges in her will that she failed to help Callum and bequeaths part of her fortune to Tobey in order to provide for his further education.

Even though Tobey Durbridge is the protagonist of *Double Cross*, he will only be considered for his function as a secondary character in *Checkmate*, since the thesis does not focus on the sequel. Tobey is Callie Rose's best friend and a Nought. His main function seems to be a reminder of Callum, a Nought boy who falls in love with a Cross girl, or in this case a half-Cross girl. When Callie Rose shows interest in her Cross classmates, he is jealous and reminds her of her dual identity. In a fight he reveals Callum's true identity and unintentionally drives Callie Rose closer to Jude. Growing up in a slightly more welcoming environment, Tobey is less bitter or aggressive than Jude or Callum. He can make use of the chances given to him. His feelings for Callie

Rose also give her a reason for wanting to stay alive at the end of *Checkmate*.

There are various other relevant secondary characters, whose existence or behaviour add to the impact of the *Noughts & Crosses* trilogy, for example Sephy's band members, her employer or Cara Imega and her friends. However for the purpose of this thesis it is not relevant to mention each of them separately.

3.4 Choice of Words

“It was just a word. A word Dad had used. But it was a word that had hurt my best friend. A word that was now hurting me so very, very much. I hadn't fully realized just how powerful words could be before this” (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 58).

Blackman conveys a lot of meaning through her choice of terminology and titles. *Noughts & Crosses* reminds of a children's game that “once you've grasped its objective and tactics, [...] inevitably ends in a draw – a no-win situation” (“Noughts & Crosses Q&A”). The events described in her books show that racism also leads to a no-win situation, the discrimination and hatred leads into a vicious circle that destroys both families alike. On a greater scale, the Liberation Militia sees themselves as freedom fighters; they kill and hurt members of the privileged Cross society who reacts with repression and persecution which lead to more retaliation on the side of the Liberation Militia. As long as the cycle is not broken, neither side can win.

Knife Edge signifies a thin line that divides two possible outcomes. This title probably refers to Jude's development. His relationship with Cara Imega might have been a turning point in his perception of Crosses, he could have accepted a change for more tolerance, but he kills her instead. After this murder, when he is captured, his life is at high risk or as the blurb suggests “on a knife edge” (Blackman, *Knife Edge* blurb). Again choices can make the difference and in this case Sephy chooses to save him. Another, more tangible aspect of a knife edge is its sharpness, its ability to hurt and even destroy people. In the course of the book, Jude cuts ties that link him to the

past and to his family. Parts of a good personality he seemed to have shared with his brother are left behind.

The trilogy's last volume, *Checkmate*, again uses terminology from a game. Check is much more complex than noughts and crosses, it calls for more strategy and at some point both sides may have to sacrifice a pawn to succeed. Especially Jude's plans for Callie Rose are proof for a lot of strategic thought. Ever since Callum's death, Jude has planned to take revenge through his niece and remains patient for sixteen years, gradually influencing her with indirect methods, for example, introducing her to her grandfather, letting her read Callum's letter or taking her to a Liberation Militia training camp. For his plan to destroy Kamal Hadley and affect politics, he is willing to sacrifice Callie Rose, whom he merely sees as a pawn.

In spite of his strategies, he eventually faces defeat when the women around Callie Rose join forces and turn against him. Jasmine Hadley is ready to sacrifice herself and Meggie chooses to rather sacrifice a son, she has already lost, than risk her granddaughter's life. Their choices resemble a strategic move in a chess game: sacrificing the queen to reach checkmate. In addition to stopping Jude once and forever, Jasmine Hadley also chooses to go against her ex-husband, giving information to the press which is not defined. Though Kamal Hadley survives, his political career does not. In the end the heads of both discriminating parties, the Liberation Militia on the one side, the radical political opposition on the other side, are defeated and can be considered checkmate.

In Blackman's society the underprivileged class is referred to as 'Noughts', a term that describes the number zero, signifying nothing. And this is exactly how the Noughts are treated, they are nothing and in *Double Cross* the dehumanisation of the white population is spelled out by a police officer: "Nought deaths are strictly N.H.I. [...] No humans involved" (Blackman 72). She moves on to explain "As long as it's blankers killing blankers, who cares?" (Blackman 72).

'Blankers' is the derogative used for Noughts.

'They are blank by name and blank by nature'[...] 'Blank, white faces with not a hint of colour in them. Blank minds which can't hold a single original thought. Blank, blank, blank,' Lola recited. 'That's why they serve us and not the other way around' (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 85).

The term is established as an insult in an early chapter of the first novel and follows the characters through the books. But not only Crosses use this derogative to insult Noughts, some members of the minority are quick to discriminate against others, trying to emphasise their higher position in society. In *Double Cross*, one of Tobey's white colleagues calls a homeless person a blanker and clarifies "'I'm not a blanker, I'm a Nought,'" (Blackman 244) not noticing that his Cross colleagues snicker behind his back.

His attitude reminds of Callum's reaction to Sephy's use of the word 'blanker' and indicates its impact: "I'm not a blanker. I may be a nought, but I'm worth more than nothing. I'm not a blanker. A waste of time and space. A zero. I'm not a blanker. I'M NOT A BLANKER" (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 57). Even though the meaning of 'nought' is in fact 'zero', the term is socially accepted and established as neutral by the characters, even though the significance of using this term to refer to the minority remains evident for the reader.

The choice of the term 'Cross' for the privileged black population mainly seems to complement the term 'Nought' in order to fit the title. However there is room for the analysis of deeper meanings: From the perspective of the Noughts, the privileged other provides problems and disadvantages they have to endure, reminding of the expression 'a cross to bear'. Another aspect is the adjective 'cross' referring to someone who is angry or irritated, and especially the Liberation Militia crosses the government through their actions. Irritation and anger are also reflected through those politicians suggesting that Noughts should not be allowed into the country, let alone receive civil rights.

Jude and other members of the Nought society use 'dagger' as a derogative for Crosses. 'Dagger' is another word for cross, but also refers to a weapon with two sharp edges. The dagger is weapon that cannot be

trusted as it is often used in history and literature for backstabbing or assassination, and Jude repeatedly claims that Crosses cannot be trusted. Especially Callum uses the term dagger to degrade and dehumanise his victims. He tries to see his friend Sephy as a dagger, instead of a person, indicating that he cannot bear the thought to kill a human being, let alone a friend.

The number of syllables and the double consonant 'g' resemble the term 'nigger', an offensive term referring to African Americans, or black people in general. Though in our society there is no negative connotation towards the term 'dagger', the usage throughout the *Noughts & Crosses* trilogy creates an aggressive and violent meaning of the word, somewhat reflecting the historical development of several terms that were historically used for African Americans and are nowadays no longer accepted because of continuing abusive use.² The gradual change in attitude towards the Nought population resonates in the spelling of the term. In *Noughts & Crosses*, the minority group is exclusively spelled with a minor 'n', contrasting the always capitalised Crosses. In *Knife Edge*, the spelling changes according to the narrator's or speaker's attitude towards Noughts. In the direct speech of characters such as Cara Imega, who perceive and treat Noughts as equals, the term is always capitalised, while in cases of those discriminating Noughts the word remains spelt with a minor 'n', which also applies for the quoted newspaper articles. The contrast of 'noughts' and 'Crosses' demonstrates the difference in hierarchy, but with the development of society more and more characters seem to accept 'Noughts' as equal to 'Crosses', or at least start to close the gap. However, Meggie seems to have a hard time to believe in the equality, she keeps thinking of herself as 'nought' The feeling of inferiority is also deeply ingrained in Jude, who in spite of his claim to fight for equality continues to use 'noughts' rather than 'Noughts'.

² cf. discussion about replacing offensive terminology in German children's books, e.g. in Zeit Online

3.5 Narration

Blackman's novels are character-driven, rather than plot-driven. Even though several events are described, the main focus of the books lies on the inner monologues, the feelings, thoughts and evaluations certain events elicit in the characters. The effects of certain parts of the story are enhanced by the choice of narrator. It is important to note, who tells what. How are certain events described from the different perspectives? We experience the effects of racial discrimination through the eyes of the characters who are either suffering from the consequences of racism or are being racists themselves.

3.5.1 The characters as narrators

In the *Noughts & Crosses* the choice of narrative perspective is essential. In chapter 3.2 of this thesis the different characters and narrators are introduced. Depending on their personality and their general perception and actions, their description of certain events, but especially their evaluation of certain events has a specific meaning or impact. Blackman offers voices from the minority as well as from the privileged group in order to offer different perspectives. However, the privileged Crosses are only represented by characters who are in favour of Noughts' equal rights or show a certain amount of tolerance and acceptance for the Nought population, whereas the Nought narrators include Jude, who discriminates against the Crosses and even resorts to violence and murder. Racist Crosses, such as Kamal Hadley, express their opinion and views in dialogues. However the reader gains no insight on their thoughts and motivation.

At the beginning of the trilogy, Sephy represents the upper class dominant race and is not affected by racism on a daily level. The impact of her telling us about the unfair treatment of her classmates as well as her slowly rising awareness of the extent of discrimination in her society is different from the impact Callum's words have.

I smiled. 'That plaster's a bit noticeable.'
 'They don't sell pink plasters. Only dark brown ones.' Shania shrugged.
 My eyes widened at that. I'd never really thought about it before, but she was right. I'd never seen any pink plasters. Plasters were the

colour of us Crosses, not the noughts (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 74).

Obviously a member of the minority would already be aware of the difficulties to find a plaster matching their skin colour, whereas the dominant group would consider skin coloured plasters as naturally existing products. For the readers of *Noughts & Crosses*, the existence of pink or light coloured plasters is natural. However some might start to wonder if darker coloured plasters are as easily available in our society.

Callum's words often have an accusing or even preaching effect. When he tells Sephy about the history of Nought repression, his words seem unauthentic. Rather than talking to his friend in a natural conversation, Callum informs the reader about the setting in *Noughts & Crosses*: "Until a few years ago we were only allowed to be educated up to the age of fourteen – and in noughts-only schools at that, which don't have a quarter of the money or resources that your schools have" (Blackman, 23). With regard to Callum's personality, his criticism on Cross society seems more justified than his brother's perspective. Jude claims that he has been – and still is - treated unfairly whereas Callum's proves that he is treated unfairly.

Whereas Callum makes a difference in his narration, if not in his actions as member of the Liberation Militia, between Crosses according to their attitude and cannot see his former friend Sephy as an enemy, Jude sees all Crosses as the enemy. He dehumanises them and is ready to kill Cara Imega in spite of her proven friendship and affection. Callum's behaviour and opinions encourage the reader to identify with his ideas and create an awareness that terrorism is not only caused by personal feelings of hate, but also social misconduct. Jude's continual hate against all Crosses proves that discrimination is not only enforced by the dominant social group. Jude blames Sephy for his brother's death, and justifies his actions through his dead brother even though Callum's thoughts and wishes, as well as his final words, indicate that he does not blame Sephy nor wishes her any harm.

When Meggie insists that Jude was a good person and puts him on the same level as Callum, her point of view seems highly unreliable. Being

Jude's mother and having lost every other family member, Meggie is bound to focus on her son's positive qualities. She is willing to believe his claims of innocence, even though she suspects that he is lying. Her love and trust in Jude make her reevaluation at the end of *Checkmate* all the more condemning.

The unreliability of the characters can be seen in many cases where the difference between what the characters say in dialogues and what they actually think is emphasised. "“Did you hear what I said?’ I tried again. ‘I love you.’ ‘Love doesn't exist. Friendship doesn't exists – not between a nought and a Cross. There's no such thing.’ Callum replied” (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 307). In spite of this denial, Callum starts to hug and kiss Sephy only a few moments later and when he confesses his feelings years later, he admits that he already told her that he loved her that night (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 380).

3.5.2 Additional narrative methods

Throughout the trilogy, most of the events and ideas are presented through the different character's perspective. In addition to their narration, the author uses several other narrative devices.

In *Noughts & Crosses* some of Callum's and Sephy's feelings are expressed through prayers. These, as well as strong thoughts or wishes, are emphasised by the use of italics in order to state their significance. Even though Callum knows that “*noughts aren't supposed to believe in you or pray to you because you're really the God of the Crosses*” (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 96), he expresses his feelings of helplessness calling to a higher being, implying that only a miracle or divine intervention can solve their problems and make their relationship happy.

Similarly letters are also written in italics. Lynette writes a letter to Callum, revealing the truths about her death and influencing his point of view. Sephy writes down her feelings, which she cannot directly express, but when Callum reads her letter too late, their friendship fades and he joins the Liberation Militia. The fatal consequences of the unread letter are inspired by

Shakespeare's tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*, where the lost letter leads to both character's deaths (Blackman, "Noughts & Crosses Q&A"). If Callum had read the letter in time, he might have reached Sephy in time and not joined the Liberation Militia. The play with "if"-realities is a strong aspect of Blackman's novels. Several missed opportunities, misunderstandings or wrong choices build up to the tragic development of Sephy's and Callum's relationship. In *Knife Edge* and *Checkmate*, Callum's letters influence Sephy's and Callie Rose's perspectives and have direct impact on the characters' development. In addition, both Sephy and Callie Rose, partly address their narration to another character: At the beginning of *Knife Edge* Sephy writes to Callie Rose, who as a child addresses letters to her dead father Callum.

Especially in *Knife Edge*, vital information about the politics and story developments are narrated through newspaper articles. Even though some of the articles seem irrelevant to the actual story, they indicate great changes in society. Some of those changes, for example a new bill that "gives the police the right to stop and search any nought who is genuinely believed to be carrying drugs, excess alcohol or components which could be used in the manufacture of explosives" (Blackman, *Knife Edge* 213) are negative and remind of discriminatory anti-terrorist laws. Other news indicates a growing tolerance for Noughts, as one article informs about "Noughts to join *Pottersville* [...] the nation's favourite soap" (Blackman, *Knife Edge* 261). Some of the articles are directly related to the plot, for example when Jude names Andrew Dorn as a traitor in the Liberation Militia, the next newspaper excerpt informs the reader about Andrew Dorn's death (Blackman, *Knife Edge* 331).

After Sephy starts to write her own songs, some of her emotions and thoughts are expressed within the texts she creates. In "No Words" (Blackman, *Knife Edge* 206) she copes with the effects of Callum's letter and reflects on the impact his death had on her life. Some of the songs she performs with her band are also deliberately chosen to express certain thoughts she cannot say out loud, for example she insists on singing "Bad

Attitude” (Blackman, *Knife Edge* 233-234) after being bullied for being a “dagger bitch” (232) in a Nought Club.

3.5.3 Leaving the comfort zone

Most of the story is written in simple past, creating a comfortable distance to the events. However, at the end of *Noughts & Crosses*, Blackman chooses to have Callum narrate his own execution in present tense. Following the characters last moments through his own eyes, reading his final thoughts and emotions, creates a highly disturbing experience for the reader. “Jack pulls my arm to lead me to the rope. *Please God, I don't want to die...* Sephy... Tears run down my face” (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 440).

Callum's head has been covered with a hood, so that the witnesses of his execution will not see his face when he dies hanging. His blindness enhances the effect of how he describes his experience. He does not know if Sephy chose to deliver his child. He does not know, how she feels or if she will attend his execution, until he hears her voice calling out his name. “The noose is being pulled down over my head and around my neck. But I can hear her. *I can hear her. She's here*” (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 440). The narration is reduced to a minimum. Single sentences with little coherence reflect the last thoughts. He calls out to her, he hears her call out. This immediacy seems rather authentic, in his last moments the character no longer cares for description and only essential information is passed on.

When Callum calls out for the last time, his sentence is interrupted: “SEPHY; I LO...” (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 440). It can be assumed, that Callum's last words are interrupted by the execution and consequently his death. In the last chapter, Sephy's description of the event confirms as much: “The trapdoor opens. [...] He drops like a stone. [...] There is no sound except the rope creaking and groaning as Callum's body swings slowly to and fro” (Blackman, *Noughts & Crosses* 441).

3.6 Lessons taught in *Noughts & Crosses*

In the *Noughts & Crosses* trilogy, discrimination is a double-edged sword. On the one hand the privileged Crosses discriminate against the Noughts, who have lower education, and consequently badly paid jobs and lower living conditions. On the other hand the Liberation Militia recklessly kills Crosses, seeing them as the enemy. One of the main dangers of discrimination seems to be the dehumanisation of the other that is employed by both sides to justify their behaviour as well as their actions.

There is no black and white in Blackman's narrative. The change of perspective contradicts the idea that everything would be better if the minority was in power instead of the majority. Racism from either side creates a no-win situation.

As a dystopian allegory, Blackman's world parallels reality. "There's the America of the 1950s, South Africa under apartheid, and in the handling of the Liberation Militia, the IRA of the 1970s and Eighties." (Dominic Cooke qtd. in "Noughts & Crosses").

Especially in *Noughts & Crosses*, the author reminds the reader of the recent history of racial injustice and discriminatory laws after the abolition of slavery in the UK and the US. Several aspects of segregation and discrimination are borrowed from the actual history of the postcolonial societies. Enforcing the death penalty only against terrorists of the Liberation Militia, in other words only against Noughts, as well as the various cases of Noughts being imprisoned, for example Ryan McGregor in *Noughts & Crosses* and Jude in *Knife Edge*, but also Tobey, who is brought in for questioning in *Double Cross*, without being suspected of a crime, mirror a reality in which African Americans are overrepresented in prisons but also on death row or in the numbers of executions (Allen, and Clubb, 177). Callum being executed not for murder or terrorist activity, but for allegedly raping Sephy, reflects the historical fact that "African Americans [...] continued to be executed in larger numbers for nonlethal offenses, particularly for rape and attempted rape" (Allen, and Clubb, 74).

Even though society changes throughout the trilogy and eventually the situation for Noughts has improved, the differences in social status are still evident. Noughts have access to higher education; however they often have no access to the financial means they would need to afford it. At the end of *Checkmate* and *Double Cross*, many problems have been solved but more do still exist. For the readers, those remaining issues indicate that there are also remaining issues of discrimination and racism in their own societies.

4. Richelle Mead's *Vampire Academy*

This chapter is dedicated to the *Vampire Academy* series by Richelle Mead, consisting of six novels: *Vampire Academy*, *Frostbite*, *Shadow Kiss*, *Blood Promise*, *Spirit Bound* and *Last Sacrifice*. According to Richelle Mead's website, the story of *Vampire Academy* will be continued in the *Bloodlines* series, which focuses on different protagonists and will not be discussed in this thesis.

According to the official website, the *Vampire Academy* series reached #1 on the New York Times bestselling lists. Being part of popular literature, the series has not won any prizes for its content but is highly commercialised. On another tab of the website, additional merchandise such as hoodies and jewellery inspired by motives of the books can be ordered. There are no indications that the *Vampire Academy* novels are read in a classroom context. Neither the official *Vampire Academy* website, nor the author's website provide additional material and in her Q&A section Richelle Mead explicitly discourages her readers to approach her for school projects (Richelle Mead).

In addition to the sequel series, a film adaptation of the novels is planned, starting with *Vampire Academy: Blood Sisters* (imdb) in 2014.

4.1 Setting

The *Vampire Academy* series are an example of urban fantasy, a genre which does not create its own world but is set in the real world, adding mystical creatures, who live on the fringes of human society, only rarely trying to integrate. In this case the mystical creatures are two different types of vampires, the living Moroi and the undead Strigoi, as well as dhampirs, who are half human and half Moroi.

Moroi are "good vampires [...] They're alive, and they possess the incredibly cool power to wield magic in each of the four elements – earth, air, water, and fire" (Mead, *Frostbite* 1). They have their own society, in which their interaction with humans is limited to the so called feeders and the

Alchemists. Moroi need blood to survive, but only take little amounts without hurting the donors.

While Moroi are born, Strigoi are made; humans, dhampirs and Moroi can be forced to become Strigoi through the exchange of blood. In addition Moroi can choose to turn Strigoi by deliberately killing someone while feeding. They represent the classical vampire, “they’re strong, they’re fast. And they kill without mercy or hesitation. They’re immortal, too” (Mead, *Frostbite* 1); undead creatures that can only be killed by the classical methods of staking, burning or decapitation. The Strigoi “as an outsider [...] appears to reject all forms of traditional values [...]” (Day 34). They do not care about lives and generally kill their victims while feeding. Moroi are their preferred victims as Moroi blood enhances a Strigoi’s powers.

Even though the Moroi magic could provide a powerful weapon against the Strigoi, “the Moroi strongly believe magic should only be used peacefully” (Mead, *Frostbite* 1) and prefer to be protected by dhampir guardians. Half human, half Moroi, dhampirs “got the best traits of both races. I’m strong and sturdy like humans are [...] But like Moroi, I have really good senses and fast reflexes (Mead, *Frostbite* 2). Dhampirs are trained to fight for the Moroi, mainly serving as guardians. Though they are a highly valued asset for any Moroi family, they are not accepted as full members of the Moroi society. Just like the vampires dhampires³ actually exist in Romani folklore” (Wilson Overstreet, 26).

In the past few years, vampires have experienced a revival in popular literature and especially in young adult fiction. DeMarco ascribes the young adults’ fascination for those creatures of night to the fact “that vampires represent everything that most teenagers are not but might like to be – fearless, attractive, powerful, cool, independent, unsupervised, and intelligent” (qtd. in Wilson Overstreet 13). Often those vampires are no longer

³ The term ‘dhampire’ is commonly spelled with a final –e, however Mead chooses to spell ‘dhampir’ consequently without an e. In this case the original spelling is used adapting to the source of this information, whereas for the rest of the thesis the term will be spelled according to Mead’s preference.

a threat to humanity, choosing to live of animal blood and integrate into society. “Literary vampires have always been able to pass as human [...] but contemporary vampires are scarcely distinguishable from their human neighbors – or classmates” (Wilson Overstreet 62).

However the society in *Vampire Academy* is rather an allegory for human society, as the vampires strictly remain with their own kind. Thus they do not represent the other or the forbidden temptation, they are merely an exotic variation on the classical high school story. Rose and Lissa are not human, but their every-day life, their loves and worries resemble in most cases those of the human teenager. They might have additional powers or identities and fit some of DeMarco’s criteria mentioned above, but they are certainly not any less supervised than their human equivalents.

The first three novels are mainly set at St. Vladimir’s Academy, an institution, where Moroi are educated and dhampirs are trained to be guardians. This boarding school is somewhere in Montana, “miles away from any real city” (Mead, *Vampire Academy* 15), surrounded by forests and close to the mountains. In *Blood Promise*, the setting alternates between several locations in Russia that Rose visits during her journey, and St. Vladimir’s, where Lissa remains. After graduation, the story is moved to the Moroi Court, a town-like settlement, where only Moroi and dhampirs live, but also includes various North American locations that Rose and her companions pass. The hierarchical structure of the Moroi society reminds of a traditional monarchy, where the queen holds actual political power in addition to her representative functions. The Moroi council resembles the House of Lords, however there does not seem to be a House of Commoners.

4.2 Plot

Two major plotlines run through the entire series and connect the novels: Rose Hathaway’s journey of maturation as well as the political rise of Princess Vasilisa Dragomir. In addition to those recurrent themes, each novel has its own more or less closed plot. In the following chapters, the plot of each novel is shortly summarised, focusing only on the elements which are important for the major plotlines and the aspect of discrimination.

4.2.1 Vampire Academy

After two years of hiding, Rose and Lissa have to return to St. Vladimir's Academy. Once they are back in school, both girls have to face the consequences of their flight as well as trouble with classmates and school life. Especially Rose has to prove herself and is forced to absolve extra training with the guardian Dimitri if she wants to catch up with her classmates and graduate as a guardian.

Even though Lissa's position in school is more acknowledged, she has to face her own problems. She finds it hard to re-establish old friendships and has still not figured out her dominant magical element. In addition to her troubles, someone bullies her by positioning dead animals in her room and her bags, trying to trick her into revealing her ability to heal.

Eventually Lissa's secret abilities are discovered and she is abducted by her uncle Victor Dashkov who wants to use her for his own purposes. With the help of their bond, Rose can instruct the school's guardians to rescue Lissa. Victor's daughter Natalie chooses to turn into a Strigoi to free her imprisoned father, but is killed in the attempt.

4.2.2 Frostbite

Rose is supposed to take an exam with another guardian away from campus. When she and Dimitri reach their destination they discover the family has fallen prey to Strigoi. The attack was carried out by a bigger number of Strigoi, with the help of humans. This new development in alarms the authorities, who discourage travelling of single Moroi and encourage the students of St. Vladimir's Academy and their family to spend the winter holidays together in a ski resort. Another attack alerts Moroi and guardians alike and new strategies of protection are discussed. For the first time, the dwindling numbers of guardians are mentioned and new rules and laws are suggested. Some Moroi want to lower the graduation age for guardians or even force dhampirs into duty, whereas others, like Tasha Ozera, suggest that Moroi use their magic to fight alongside their guardians.

At the resort Lissa meets Adrian Ivashkov, another spirit user. The two start to practise their magic together.

Some of Rose's friends find out about a Strigoi lair and decide to sneak out of the resort to take revenge for the recent attacks on royal Moroi families. Rose and Christian follow in order to safely return them home. But on their way to the bus stop, the group is captured and brought into a cellar. The Moroi are offered the choice to deliberately change into Strigoi while the dhampirs are saved as food. With the help of Christian's fire magic, Rose manages to free herself and the others. They try to flee, but meet the Strigoi on their way out. Rose tries to fight them, but fails. Her friend Mason, coming to her help, is killed by a Strigoi.

Just before the Strigoi can kill Rose, Mia attacks them with her water magic and distracts them enough to provide Rose with a chance to kill both of the undead. Shortly after that, the guardians arrive and return their students to home. Even though Rose has managed to kill two Strigoi on her own, the loss of her friend Mason creates the awareness that fighting the undead is not only honourable but also very dangerous.

4.2.3 Shadow Kiss

In the wake of the Strigoi attacks, students of St. Vladimir start to actively use their magic to attack and attempt to learn fighting. Using offensive magic at the borders of the school grounds weakens the magic protection enough that the Strigoi can attack St. Vladimir. In an attack of a huge number of Strigoi, many guardians and Moroi are killed, but a high number is also abducted. Rose convinces the other guardians to hunt down the Strigoi and save the captives. In the following rescue they manage to save some lives, but lose several guardians, one of them is Rose's instructor and lover Dimitri. Through the ghost of her friend Mason, Rose finds out that Dimitri is not dead, but has been forced to turn into a Strigoi himself.

4.2.4 Blood Promise

Rose decides to leave St. Vladimir's Academy to hunt down her former instructor and lover Dimitri. She travels to Russia, where she expects to find him. Instead she meets the Alchemist Sydney and travels with her to Dimitri's hometown, a small town where dhampir women, who choose not to work as guardians, live alongside humans.

She follows a group of Strigoi hunters to Novosibirsk where she finally meets Dimitri. But she cannot distinguish the monster from her former lover and is captured. Dimitri tries to convince her to be awakened willingly, describing the life as Strigoi as a godlike way of being. Eventually Rose manages to break free and assumes to have killed Dimitri. She finds out that there might be way to save a Strigoi, but it is already too late. Only after her return to St. Vladimir's she finds out that Dimitri is still undead.

4.2.5 Spirit Bound

Rose and Lissa break Victor out of a high security prison so that they can find his brother Robert, who allegedly saved a Strigoi. They find out that in order to save a Strigoi, a spirit wielder has to stake the Strigoi with a spirit infused stake. Even though Rose is convinced that it would be too dangerous for Lissa to come that close to a Strigoi, Lissa practices to charm a stake as well as combat techniques, planning to save her best friend's lover. When Dimitri abducts Lissa and Christian as baits for Rose, the two Moroi cooperate and manage to stake the Strigoi.

Dimitri, being the first recorded case of a Strigoi who has been retransformed into a dhampir, is imprisoned, questioned and tested until the authorities declare him to be no threat. However, he claims that his time as a Strigoi has essentially changed him so that he no longer wants a relationship with Rose.

After the age laws that reduce the guardian's graduation age to 16 have been passed, Queen Tatiana is murdered and Rose is arrested for murder and high treason.

4.2.6 Last Sacrifice

Being accused of having murdered the Moroi queen, Rose is facing trial for treason and probably execution. When the evidence against her seems overwhelming, her friends and family break her out of prison and she flees with Dimitri as her protector. Sydney joins them and helps them hide with a group who call themselves the keepers. Again Rose encounters another choice of life style that contradicts the rules and values she grew up with.

Through a message from the late queen, Rose finds out about Lissa having an illegitimate sibling. Unwilling to leave her fate in the hands of others while doing nothing, Rose convinces Dimitri and Sydney to search for the secret member of the Dragomir family, whose existence will allow Lissa to take her position in the Moroi council. In the course of their quest they have to cooperate with their enemy Victor and his brother and save Sonya Karp, a former teacher who turned Strigoi to escape spirit magic. Not only do they find Lissa's sister, who turns out to be Jill Mastrano, a friend of Christian's, Rose also discovers the true murderer of Queen Tatiana.

In order to stall time, Lissa has run for queen of the Moroi, even though she is not eligible to be elected because of laws that require at least one other family member. While Rose is away, Lissa successfully passes every test and wins over great parts of the non-royal Moroi population, but also some of the royals. Meanwhile Rose returns to court, introducing Jill Mastrano, the illegitimate daughter of Lissa's father Eric Dragomir. At the same time she exposes Tasha as the murderer of the late queen. When Tasha tries to run and nearly shoots Lissa, Rose throws herself in front of her friend. She survives, but the spirit bond is broken in the process. She wakes to discover that Lissa, who now fulfils all the requirements for becoming a member of the Moroi council, has been elected queen.

4.3 Characters in Vampire Academy

At the beginning of *Vampire Academy* the two protagonists Rose and Lissa are introduced, along with Dimitri another main character who accompanies Rose throughout the story. Consisting of six volumes, the

series features a great variety of secondary and minor characters. In the first three volumes those characters are mainly classmates, teachers and instructors, as well as family members. In the later books Rose encounters many new and different characters during her journey. This chapter will focus on the protagonists Rose and Lissa, but also discuss some of the other main characters, e.g. Dimitri Belikov or Christian Ozera. Due to the great variety of characters, only a very limited number will be discussed in this chapter.

In *Vampire Academy* the aspect of character is less relevant than in *Noughts & Crosses*, especially with Rose being the only narrator and there are only two protagonists throughout the entire six novels. In addition the representation of discrimination through characters is less distinctive. Thus this chapter on characters won't be as extensive.

4.3.1 Rosemarie 'Rose' Hathaway

Rose is one of the protagonists and the first person narrator of the *Vampire Academy* series. She is a dhampir with Scottish and Turkish roots, her dark hair and tanned skin, as well as her curvy figure are continually put in contrast with the pale, slim features of the vampires around her. As a student of St. Vladimir's, Rose is trained to become a guardian. Having missed two years of practice, she has private tutoring but soon manages to catch up with her classmates and even overcome them.

Most of the narration and events indicate that Rose is a high mimetic character. Being a dhampir, she is naturally faster and stronger than humans, has better night vision and senses. In addition to those supernatural features, her abilities as a novice exceed those of her classmates. Due to her spiritual connection with Lissa, she has an uncanny ability to predict danger and take care of her protégé. She is very dedicated to fulfil her duties as a guardian and always ready to put Lissa's life and welfare before her own. Occasionally she is lowered to an ironic level, where she cannot influence the adults' decisions and has no power to decide how she wishes to spend her life.

Whereas Rose describes her personality as wild and reckless, pointing to the reputation she gained with her classmates, her actions and intentions

indicate that she can be very mature and responsible. At some points she seems very grown up, at others she slips into an immature and childish attitude. However, her reputation seems to be caused mainly by misunderstandings, or rather Rose's point of view creates the impression of her being treated unfairly. But Rose refuses to be victimised. In the final chapters of *Last Sacrifice* she recaps her experiences: "I'd watched Mason die, fought in the St. Vladimir's attack, been captured by Strigoi in Russia, and then lived on the run as a wanted murderess" (Mead, *Last Sacrifice* 578), but "In spite of everything that's happened, I've never thought of myself that way. Being a victim means you're powerless. [...] Always... always I've done something to fight for myself... for others" (Mead, *Last Sacrifice* 580).

Her voice is that of a teenager, turning her into an unreliable narrator. Every event she describes is perceived through her eyes, thus subjective, and might be different from another character's point of view. Even though Rose can experience Lissa's thoughts and feelings through the bond, the narration is formed by her interpretation or evaluation of those experiences.

Being brought up in a Moroi academy, the values and rules set by the ruling majority have been ingrained in Rose and influence her narration. Through her experiences and journeys, Rose's perception of her own society gradually changes, she starts to question and reevaluate the truths she grew up with. Her descriptions of other characters' feelings are assumptions, observations or interpretations and not necessarily correct.

Rose's love for Dimitri also influences her perspective. She starts to understand that she will never be able to freely live her own life and develops a grudge against her best friend. "The icky feeling [...] was gone. It had been replaced by anger and jealousy, feelings born of what I couldn't have and what came so easily to her" (Mead, *Shadow Kiss* 5). Furthermore, Rose absorbs the negative effects of spirit and thus pays the price for Lissa using her magic. Her personality suffers from the bond, as she cannot longer control her emotions. The situation improves, when they learn how to cure the effects of spirit with charms.

In spite of her changing feelings about her duty to guard Lissa and the Moroi, Rose remains true to her promise. When Lissa's life is at stake, Rose is ready to kill her former lover. She also proves her dedication when she catches a bullet to protect her best friend. Convinced that she is going to die, her last thought remains "*They come first*" (Meads, *Last Sacrifice* 551).

4.3.2 Vasilisa 'Lissa' Dragomir

Rose's best friend Lissa is supposedly the last living member of the Moroi royal lineage of the Dragomirs and thus carries the title of a princess. She is slightly younger than Rose, but in the same grade in high school. Being Moroi, Lissa can wield magic, however at the beginning it seems she has not specialised in any of the elements. When spirit is discovered as the fifth element with dangerous side effects, Lissa tries to limit her use of magic.

Lissa's emotions and thoughts are accessible through the bond she shares with Rose. But it is important to note, that every insight on Lissa is filtered through Rose and often interpreted with her set of ideas and values, which makes them unreliable.

With her special powers, Lissa is paralleled to St. Vladimir, the patron of her academy, who was known as a great leader and who was also able to heal. Rose discovers that both, St. Vladimir and Lissa share their affinity for the element of spirit. Like the famous saint, the princess can use her abilities to rise and become a great leader, namely the next queen of the Moroi. Another asset she shares with St. Vladimir is her friendship to her shadow-kissed guardian. Resurrecting Rose after a car accident, Lissa has unintentionally forged the bond between them. Gradually she learns to use her spirit magic and discovers new abilities with the help of other spirit users.

Even without the bond, the friendship between Rose and Lissa is special as Moroi generally do not tend to associate with dhampirs. In spite of being the Dragomir princess, Lissa does not choose her friends according to status. She falls in love with the outcast Christian Ozera and is not afraid to openly date him. In addition to her friendship with Rose, Lissa also has a friendly relationship with Eddie, another novice. She does not accept the queen's

interference with her love life, and stands up for her ideals. Contrary to most members of the Moroi society, she also treats feeders with a certain amount of respect and tries to protect them from abuse (Mead, *Vampire Academy* 207)..

When Queen Tatiana meets Lissa for the first time, she elaborates on the importance of her name: “Many heroines in Russian fairy tales are named Vasilisa. Vasilisa the Brave, Vasilisa the Beautiful. [...] All accomplish great things, triumphing over their adversaries.” (Mead, *Vampire Academy* 146). Even though Tatiana moves on to insult Lissa, stating that “names do *not* make a person” (Mead, *Vampire Academy* 146) the choice of this character’s name is obviously deliberate and very fitting to her story. In the Russian folktale, Vasilisa the Beautiful has to fulfil several tasks given to her by the Baba Yaga, but eventually marries the tsar and becomes tsarina (Afanasyev). Similarly Lissa eventually becomes queen of the Moroi, after she has come to terms with her own situation of being royalty and a spirit user and has solved the tasks given by the retired queen Ekaterina. The meaning of the originally Greek name is ‘royal’ or ‘queen’ (“Vasilisa”) and also suits Lissa’s development.

Her surname Dragomir is Slavonic and means ‘precious’ and ‘famous’, as well as ‘peaceful’ (“Dragomir”). Being the last of her line, Lissa’s existence is very precious to the Moroi, up to the point that guardians are sent to save her when she is abducted. She becomes famous because of her ability to heal Strigoi, as well as for her political and diplomatic aptitude.

4.3.3 Dimitri Belikov

Rose meets Dimitri at the beginning of her story. He becomes her instructor and they fall in love, but shortly after they actually start a love relationship, Dimitri is turned into a Strigoi. His fate causes Rose to leave her chosen path of becoming a guardian and is the main reason for her journeys. Eventually Dimitri is returned to his former self, the first recorded case of a cured Strigoi. He is treated like a criminal and continuously put on trial. He

crushes Rose's enthusiasm "Do you really think they're going to let me be a guardian again? It'll be a miracle if they let me live!" (Mead, *Spirit Bound* 358)

During his existence as a Strigoi, Dimitri seems happy enough with his situation. However afterwards he claims to be altered, describes the state of being Strigoi as a dreamlike experience, though his description rather indicates a nightmare. But even though he takes time to heal, he eventually does heal. Thus his development is a new discovery that might bring hope to anyone who has lost a family member or a loved one to the Strigoi. It also questions society's perception of the Strigoi.

Even before Dimitri is turned into a Strigoi, he sees the ambiguity of the guardians' actions: "No one gets over their first kill... kills... easily. Even with Strigoi... well, it's still technically taking a life[...]" (Mead, *Frostbite* 324). He acknowledges the necessity to kill Strigoi in order to protect the Moroi, but does not take their deaths lightly.

Dimitri's views and opinion greatly influence Rose's personality. In some aspects he supports her development towards an adult, in others he is the cause for her change. Their relationship reveals to Rose that even guardians and dhampirs have their own needs and wishes that they have the right to be selfish in some parts. In spite of his strong sense of duty, Dimitri puts Rose's mantra in perspective, encouraging her to occasionally put herself before her best friend Lissa.

Rose often mentions Dimitri's opinion or reactions to confirm her own evaluations, for example her position in the dhampir age debate. Learning about the decree his reaction confirms Rose's outburst: "That's insane,' he said. 'Morality aside, they aren't ready that young. It's suicide" (Mead, *Spirit Bound* 449). At times it seems that Rose accepts his beliefs as universal truths. When they contradict her own ideas, she is willing to reevaluate, if reluctantly.

4.3.4 Christian and Tasha Ozera

Christian Ozera is Rose's classmate, a fire using royal Moroi. At first, Rose sees him as a disturbance and bad influence on Lissa, but eventually their friendship grows as Christian and Lissa start to go out. Christian is marginalised because of his parent's choices, but proves himself throughout the story. In his position of being Lissa's boyfriend, he supports the development of her personality, mainly by adding new perspectives. He is one of the first Moroi who actively use their elemental magic to fight Strigoi, saving Rose's life when St. Vladimir is under attack in *Shadow Kiss* and joining her in the following battle (Mead, 367). His successful involvement causes the guardians to reconsider the idea of having Moroi fighting against the Strigoi and Dimitri informs Rose "Change is happening before your eyes. People are going to remember this day as a turning point" (Mead, *Shadow Kiss* 391).

Christian's aunt Tasha Ozera is the main advocate for dhampir rights. Even though she is marginalised because of her family ties with Christian's parents, she is not afraid to openly speak in court, start political discussions and fight for her ideals. In *Frostbite* Rose discovers that Tasha has feelings for Dimitri and is one of the few Moroi women who would consider having dhampir children (Mead, 123).

Even though Rose sees Tasha as a good person with strong ideals, she has to expose her as Tatiana's murderer at the end of *Last Sacrifice*. Unaware of the queen's attempts to have Moroi be trained in self-defence, Tasha is willing to kill in order to reach her objectives of protecting the dhampir rights. In spite of Tasha trying to frame Rose, she is not perceived as an antagonist, but rather as a misguided friend.

4.3.5 Rose's parents

Janine Hathaway is one of the few Moroi women who have chosen to join the guardians' forces rather than raising their children. Even though Rose claims to dislike her mother and reproaches her for neglecting her parental duties, she is set to follow her example and become a good guardian. Rose

desires a deeper bond with her mother, but admits “It could have been worse, I suppose. I could have been raised with blood whores” (Mead, *Vampire Academy* 183), indicating that she in fact respects her mother’s choice.

The story plays with the traditional idea of a *deus ex machina* figure (Nikolajeva, *Rhetoric* 124), the missing parent, namely Rose’s Moroi father Abe Mazur, is rich and influential and could set everything right. However, Rose is not disempowered by her father’s appearance. She accepts his help, but regains control of the events and moves on without further help. Due to his wealth, Abe has several guardians in spite of not being a royal. He is also not afraid to bend the law or speak up in court. Contrary to common practice, Abe Mazur shows interest in his dhampir daughter and cares for her. At the end of *Last Sacrifice* the relationship with Rose’s mum seems to be renewed, turning her parents into an example for an unusually stable pairing of a Moroi and a dhampir.

4.3.6 Victor Dashkov

Prince Victor Dashkov is Lissa’s uncle, a good friend of her late parents. At first he seems to be a friend of Lissa and Rose, but he turns out to be the antagonist when he abducts Lissa and tortures her so that she will use her magic to heal him (Mead, *Vampire Academy* 299). Even though he is defeated and imprisoned by the end of the first novel, Rose perceives him as the antagonists throughout the story, until she eventually kills him in *Last Sacrifice* (Mead, 457). Victor talks about political change and adds many information to the story, however this character is not relevant for the aspect of discrimination and is thus only shortly mentioned in his function of being the antagonist.

4.4 Choice of Words

Similarly to the ‘noughts’, the lower position of dhampirs in Moroi society is indicated through the spelling of the term ‘dhampir’. Whereas both types full-vampires, the ‘Moroi’ and the ‘Strigoi’ are capitalised, the half vampires are spelled with a minor ‘d’.

At the beginning of *Vampire Academy*, Rose states that “most Moroi and their guardians were of Russian or Romanian descent” (Mead, 22). Accordingly many characters have typical Eastern European names and surnames. Some other terms that describe aspects of Moroi and guardian tradition are also borrowed from Russian, for example the traditional tattoos that indicate Strigoi killings are called ‘molnija’ marks, and the special star-shaped tattoo Rose received for the battle at St. Vladimir’s is called ‘zvezda’ by the Keepers (Mead, *Last Sacrifice* 177).

The use of Russian vocabulary emphasises the otherness of the vampire society. Furthermore, the Eastern European words and origins remind of the most famous example for traditional vampire novels, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, which is set Transylvania, a historical region of Romania (Stoker).

4.5 Discrimination in Vampire Academy

Since the story is told by Rose, a young dhampir guardian, the position of dhampirs in the vampire society is a very important aspect of *Vampire Academy*, however the series does not exclusively focus on racial discrimination. In a critical reading of Rose’s narration, discrimination against classes, choice of lifestyle, family connections or mental health can be discovered. Furthermore the relationship between vampire society and human society is not closely explored and even the position of the Strigoi is disputable.

4.5.1 Racial discrimination

Even though dhampirs are valued as guardians and considered important members of the Moroi society, they are treated as second class beings. Exploiting the dhampirs’ natural inability to reproduce with each other, Moroi society teaches dhampirs from an early age to live by the absolute rule “*They come first*” (Mead, *Vampire Academy* 124).

Guardians must be prepared to sacrifice their lives for the Moroi they protect, the guardians’ whole existence circles around those vampires. When Rose and her friends are attacked in *Frostbite* they fight back, but even

though the dhampirs have a good chance of winning they immediately stop and surrender when one of their attackers seizes a Moroi classmate “Novices had a saying drilled into us from an early age: *Only they matter*” (Mead, 257). Yet Rose acknowledges “The Moroi expected a lot from us, but they did recognize that the guardians were – more or less – only human” (Mead, *Vampire Academy* 66), referring to the fact that guardians are entitled occasional holidays or a day off.

Dhampires who choose not to become guardians are not criminalised or forced into service, but unaccepted by society and marginalised.

At first Rose, being brought up in this society, does not question her obligations and position. When she finds out about a guardian who had “[...] abandoned his Moroi and run off with another guardian [...]” (Meads, *Vampire Academy* 81) and had thus broken “the most sacred promise among our kind: the promise of a guardian to protect a Moroi” (*Vampire Academy* 19), she is shocked. In spite of the narrator establishing the rules of Moroi society as natural order, critical readers might already question the situation: Why should dhampirs not have the right to choose their jobs or live a married life unrelated to the question if they can reproduce? Only after Rose falls in love with her dhampir instructor Dimitri, she starts to feel that the expectations the Moroi have in their guardians are unfair.

Starting with a Strigoi attack in *Frostbite*, the discussion about the dhampirs’ position in Moroi society commences. Some Moroi argue that dwindling numbers of guardians are the cause of more attacks and are quick to suggest that all dhampirs should join the forces: “Where are all the dhampir women? Our races are intertwined. The Moroi are doing their part to help the dhampirs survive. Why aren’t these women doing theirs?” (Mead, *Frostbite* 166), equalising Moroi men fathering dhampirs with dhampirs putting their lives in danger to protect the Moroi. In *Spirit Bound*, radical voices have gone so far as to suggest compelling dhampirs to fight (Mead, 487).

Another approach is to have guardians graduate at the age of sixteen, a motion that eventually leads to a decree that lowers graduation age of dhampirs. Arguments that dhampirs will be deprived of their youth are countered “Believe me, I would love to see your people enjoy their youth. [...] we’re just letting those dhampirs’ skills go to waste by waiting a couple of years. This plan will protect *both* our races” (Mead, *Spirit Bound* 372). Rose’s success is one of the main arguments of those who are in favour of the age decree, though it is quite obvious that she is an exception. In *Frostbite* Mason, one of her classmates who are in favour of fighting Strigoi at a younger age, is killed in a fight at the age of seventeen.

Tasha Ozero, the main advocate for dhampir rights states that sending minors to fight or forcing dhampir women into battle will only create “Strogoi fodder” (Mead, *Frostbite* 168). She is convinced that novices “need those extra years to develop mentally as well as physically” (Mead, *Frostbite* 168) and Rose points out that lowering the graduation age for guardians will not protect both races, but “it’ll kill mine off faster!” (Mead, *Spirit Bound* 372)

Tasha’s solution for the Strigoi problem includes an active participation of the Moroi who should use their magic abilities to fight alongside the Strigoi. An idea that meets with resistance, for as Queen Tatiana points out “Moroi lives are precious, [...] They shouldn’t be risked” (Mead, *Shadow Kiss* 161). Lissa reacts to this statement claiming that “Dhampir lives are precious too” (Mead, *Shadow Kiss* 161).

Others like Christian are willing to put their lives on the line to save others, no matter of which race, and after he and Rose prove that cooperation between Moroi and guardians can be very effective in the fight against Strigoi, more and more Moroi and dhampirs start to support the idea of joining forces. Especially non-royal Moroi are in favour of training their own fighting skills. Only after Tatiana is killed, Rose discovers that the queen secretly ordered royal Moroi to be trained in self-defence.

Another aspect of discrimination against dhampirs is less fatal, but nevertheless existent. When Rose dates Adrian, the queen tries to interfere

by telling her that Moroi men never seriously consider a relationship with dhampir women. Even though sexual affairs between Moroi and dhampirs are accepted, especially for the breeding of more dhampirs, it is highly uncommon for Moroi women to associate with dhampir men. Dhampir women who choose to raise their children instead of joining the guardians' forces are insulted to be blood-whores, a phenomenon that will be separately discussed in 4.4.5.

In a secret meeting, the royal Moroi honour the fallen guardians, showing respect for the dhampirs' dedication and their sacrifice, but when Rose is caught sneaking in, her presence is considered worse than that of her uninvited Moroi friends "How dare you and your impure blood invade the sanctity of our – [sic]" (Mead, *Spirit Bound* 344). Even though this is the single incident when a Moroi openly states his opinion of dhampirs being inferior in an insulting manner, many other events hint that he is not alone with this opinion. When Lissa invites Rose along for an official Moroi dinner, she is the only dhampir present who does not work as a guardian. Dhampirs are accepted in the background as protectors and in some cases valued as friends, but not as equal members of the Moroi society.

Rose is aware of the dhampirs' status and the Moroi's attitude towards her race and critically describes the queen's visit at St. Vladimir's:

She moved through the novices' section fairly quickly, though she did nod and smile here and there. Dhampirs might just be half-human, illegitimate children of the Moroi, but we trained and dedicated our lives to serving and protecting them. The likelihood was strong that many of us gathered here would die young, and the queen had to show her respect for that. (Mead, *Vampire Academy* 145).

Though their lives are greatly influenced by Moroi politics, dhampirs are not represented in council. They cannot influence politics through vote, and even though the guardians have some kind of authority to choose their recruits appointments, they cannot influence the council's decision to lower the guardian's age.

In spite of those examples for discrimination against or disregard for dhampirs, the guardians seem to accept the current situation. They approve

of Rose's outburst after the decree has been passed, secretly disagreeing with the new law, but there are no movements or protests started by the guardians and they do not join in the arguments. The advocates who openly claim and defend the dhampirs' rights are mainly royal Moroi, first of all Tasha Ozera and Lissa.

4.5.2 Discrimination of class

The Moroi society distinguishes royals from non-royals. Even though there is no open discrimination of commoners, they seem to have little importance. This impression might be due to Rose's little involvement with non-royals, yet some aspects confirm her estimation.

Only royal families are guaranteed to have one or in some cases even two guardians. Because of low guardian numbers, commoners have to be very lucky or very rich to have one for their family. This might be the main reason why non-royals are in favour of Moroi learning self-defence. In a heated discussion after the first attacks in *Frostbite*, a royal Moroi expresses his view: "They don't have any guardians of their own, of course they're scared. But that's no reason to drag *us* down and put *our* lives at risk" (Mead 223).

Rose doesn't elaborate in how far non-royals can actually influence political decisions. They are not represented in the council, nor can they vote. Those commoners who do not work for royal families tend to live and work in human society, trying to blend in.

The line between royal and non-royal Moroi is already drawn at St Vladimir's Academy. The students rarely mingle and when Rose uncovers Mia's identity as a non-royal, it hurts the Moroi girl's reputation.

4.5.3 Other forms of discrimination

Rose mainly describes the situation of the dhampirs and mentions the class struggles within Moroi society. But throughout her story she mentions other reasons for discrimination and bullying.

Even though the Ozeras are a royal family, Christian and his aunt Tasha are marginalised. Tasha has no guardian of her own. Christian is treated as an outcast at St. Vladimir's Academy. They are judged for association, because Christian's parents deliberately chose to become Strigoi. Only when Christian starts to date Lissa and Tasha openly fights for dhampir rights and gains a certain status in politics, their situation gradually improves.

Lissa also has to face difficulties because of her familial circumstances. She is discriminated both, in a positive and a negative way. On the one hand, the Moroi go out of her way to protect the last of the Dragomirs. On the other hand she is not allowed to take part in politics and is not considered a full royal, due to her having no living family members. When an illegitimate daughter of Eric Dragomir is discovered, Lissa gains full rights.

In her narration, Rose observes another aspect that influences Lissa's life: Those Moroi who have not specialised in any element are likely to develop problems with mental health. The discovery of spirit as the fifth element helps to raise awareness for those who use it and their problems. However, Rose remembers her teacher Miss Karp, another spirit user who suffered from persecution complex, being led away by guardians and in *Spirit Bound*, when Rose and Lissa free Victor from his prison they pass a locked ward in which Lissa senses other spirit users.

4.5.4 The position of humans

Most humans accepted within the vampire society are feeders, humans who are addicted to the endorphins in the vampire's saliva and willingly offer their blood in exchange for the bite. "Feeders were food, pure and simple. Well-treated food, yes, but not food you became friends with" (Mead, *Last Sacrifice* 144). Rose remembers an incident at St. Vladimir's that proves some Moroi's disregard for humans. One royal Moroi brings a feeder to a secret party and several guys abuse her "doing a sort of group feeding, taking turns biting her and making gross suggestions. High and oblivious, she let them" (Mead, *Vampire Academy* 207). Considering the addictive saliva and the sexual connotation of a vampire bite, Rose's description of the

events remind of a group rape, using drugs to subdue the victim. Even though many others witness the incident, only Lissa seems upset and willing to help a feeder.

With the exception of feeders, Moroi and dhampirs do not generally interact with humans, seemingly considering them inferior or irrelevant. They are shocked to learn that humans actually help Strigoi to attack and kill Moroi.

During her journey, Rose learns about another group of humans with a certain importance for Moroi society: the Alchemists, who have knowledge about the vampires and hide their existence from other humans. Alchemists are called, if Strigoi are killed and need to disappear. They keep track of the vampires, be it the royal court or the keepers. They seem to have various other functions, most of which remain a secret to Rose and thus the readers. Even though the Alchemists choose to work with, if not for the Moroi, the relationship between the groups is very tense. Sydney repeatedly shows her distaste for either kind of vampire, as well as for the dhampirs. In *Last Sacrifice*, Dimitri informs Rose “Alchemists are loyal to their order. They don’t like us. She [Sydney] hides is – they’re trained to – but every minute with the Keepers is agony” (Mead, 186).

4.5.5 Meeting other cultures

During her journeys, Rose encounters vampires and dhampirs who have chosen a different lifestyle and don’t share the values of the Moroi majority.

In *Vampire Academy*, Rose explains that she is one of few female novices, because many dhampir mothers chose not to become guardians in order to raise their children” (Mead 80). The communities where dhampirs raise their children have a certain reputation. “I don’t know how much of it was true, but rumors said Moroi men visited all the time for sex. and [sic] that some dhampir women let them drink blood while doing it. Blood whores” (Mead, *Vampire Academy* 80). Rose is very prejudiced against those women and repeatedly emphasises that she would never choose to give up being a guardian.

Later she learns that Dimitri has been brought up in a dhampir commune. Though he explains that those aren't as bad as the rumours suggest, and speaks fondly about his family, he also shocks Rose by referring to his own mother as a blood whore (Meads, *Vampire Academy* 185). However, when Rose leaves St. Vladimir's to search for Dimitri, she visits his family and home town. In spite of her earlier judgement, she enjoys living in the commune and learns to accept this different choice of life style.

Rose discovers that not all dhampir women raising their children are blood whores. Some aspects of the rumours seem justified, as Dimitri's older sister has two children already, his second sister is pregnant and his youngest sister is very interested in meeting Moroi men. However, none of those women offers her blood, nor do men visit them like prostitutes. The community is part of a human town, where the dhampirs fit in very well. She eventually meets some young dhampirs who choose to use the fighting skills they acquired at their academy to hunt down Strigoi rather than work as guardians and protect the Moroi.

Even though Rose still plans to return to Lissa's side and hopes to eventually become her guardian, she starts to understand that dhampirs have choices and just because she chooses to follow the path of a guardian, those who don't are not any less respectable. She accepts the motives and values of people she meets, and consciously decides on her own priorities, rather than following the rules she was brought up with.

Meeting the Keepers is a different situation, because Rose cannot identify with their "pseudo-Amish cult" (Mead, *Last Sacrifice* 177), especially with the idea of humans, dhampirs and Moroi living together as equals. When she finds out that the group's leader, a Moroi, is married to a human, Rose is shocked. "But Moroi and humans? That was beyond comprehension. Those races hadn't gotten together in centuries" (Mead, *Last Sacrifice* 144). At the same time the Keepers call the Moroi court and the society in which Rose grew up "the Tainted" (Mead, *Last Sacrifice* 148) indicating that they reciprocate the reluctance to associate with this society.

When Dimitri suspects that the Keepers might have troubles with Strigoi, living in the wilderness, away from civilisation and protection, he and Rose learn that even though a group of Moroi, dhampirs and humans seems like an easy target, they are not “Because we fight back” (Mead, *Last Sacrifice* 178). Each member of the Keeper’s society is ready to fight, which unifies them as a group and gives them strength. This revelation proves Tasha’s claims that Moroi and dhampirs fighting together might actually turn the odds when it comes to protect their society against the Strigoi.

4.5.6 The Strigoi as other

“[...] I mean, aside from killing Strigoi. Which isn’t murder at all, really” (Mead, *Last Sacrifice* 433). Sydney’s estimation of Rose’s character includes her opinion about Strigoi, an opinion most characters in the *Vampire Academy* series share. Strigoi are the undead monsters that attack and kill Moroi, dhampirs and humans. They need to be defeated, and in spite of the common defensive policy of the Moroi court, several characters are in favour of actively seeking out the Strigoi in order to hunt and kill them.

Guardians and Moroi continuously underestimate the Strigoi’s ability to work in a group. “Until recently we’d never heard of them banding together in such large numbers” (Mead, *Shadow Kiss* 368). Allegedly Strigoi do not care about their own kind, and are unable to cooperate. However, in *Frostbite* the Strigoi who recognises Christian remembers the boy’s parents: “I knew your parents. Great people. Unparalleled. Their deaths were a shame [...]” (Mead, 266). Even though they had turned Strigoi, Christian’s parents refused to leave their child behind. Furthermore they did not harm him by choice, which indicates that they did in some way care about him.

Similarly, Dimitri tries to stay away from Rose after he is turned into a Strigoi. She assumes he evaded her, afraid of being killed but he explains “So we wouldn’t be in *this* situation. Now we are. And the choice is inevitable” (Mead, *Blood Promise* 292). He chose to leave, because he did not want to face the choice of killing Rose or forcefully turning her into a Strigoi. He is the first Strigoi Rose actually meets and talks to. Even though

she repeatedly claims that he has turned into an emotionless monster, his behaviour contradicts the prejudices Moroi society has about Strigoi.

Dimitri wants to convince Rose to willingly become Strigoi. He claims that his awakening has put him into a God like position and proves that he is not undead. “My heart beats. I’m breathing” (Mead, *Blood Promise* 297). Even though he could force Rose to turn or kill her any time, he chooses not to. His behaviour might be abusive, but he is not an instinct driven, evil creature. The changed behaviour rather reminds of the behaviour of bad people. In spite of Rose’s opinion of him being a monster, the reader might start to question the dehumanisation of Strigoi.

The doubts created by Dimitri’s behaviour are reinforced when Rose and Lissa discover a method to heal Strigoi and return them to life. On the one hand the fact that they have to be restored to life proves their undead status. On the other hand Strigoi can be cured, which indicates that their status resembles a disease that causes personality disorders rather than a separate race or form of being.

With regard to this development the whole idea of killing Strigoi as socially accepted behaviour has to be put on trial. Can it be justified to kill someone who might be cured instead? However, neither Rose, nor the other members of Moroi society seem to reevaluate their view on Strigoi. On the contrary, Dimitri faces severe distrust and problems after he has been returned to his true nature of being a dhampir.

4.6 Lessons taught in Vampire Academy

When Lissa candidates to be elected queen, her speech conveniently sums up the problem of discrimination in the Moroi society:

‘We’re a people at war,’ she began, voice loud and clear. ‘We are constantly attacked – but not just by Strigoi. By one another. We’re divided. We fight with one another. Family against family. Royal against non-royal. Moroi against dhampir. Of course the Strigoi are picking us off. They’re at least united behind a goal: killing.’ (Mead, *Last Sacrifice* 510)

Her words indicate that the issue of discrimination is in fact an important aspect of the *Vampire Academy* series. The discrimination against dhampirs is the main reason why Lissa wants to actively participate in the political decisions. She promotes the idea that “We are one people, [...] Moroi and dhampir alike” (Mead, *Last Sacrifice* 510). Her ideals meet approval, because she eventually is elected queen of the Moroi.

The change in the Moroi society is furthered by the ruling Moroi, whereas the dhampirs hardly interfere with the politics. There are no protests or attempts to fight for equal rights, let alone terrorism. The colonised group remains patronised by their colonisers as the dhampirs depend on royal Moroi such as Lissa or Tasha but do not stand up for their own rights or against the discrimination.

With regard to the narrative instance, Rose, who has barely experienced the life of a guardian and as an adult, the lack in activism might be her perception rather than reality. She is not omniscient and thus may not know of any activists groups that exist secretly, just as she was not aware of Tatiana furthering Tasha’s cause by having Moroi trained. If older members of the guardians choose to offer criticism, it is always formulated carefully, probably adapted to fit the ears of a teenager.

A critical reader will be aware of the different types of discrimination in *Vampire Academy*. Often it is very covered and seems less fatal than in the *Noughts & Crosses* series. Especially the bullying at St. Vladimir’s Academy is a form of discrimination with which young adult readers might be able to identify. Even though Lissa and especially Rose suffer from rumours spread by Mia and other classmates and feel hurt and excluded, they do not hesitate to retaliate and discriminate against Mia, exploiting her status as a commoner. The discriminatory behaviour causes harm to both sides, whereas breaking the vicious cycle both sides can accept each other and even become friends.

Tolerance, acceptance and equality are promoted as important aspects of society, in the microcosm of high school as well as in the Moroi society as

such. Even though the setting is distinctively fictional, Vampire Academy can be seen as an allegorical story that corresponds to the young adult readers' reality.

Even though problems remain, and especially the conflict with the Strigoi seems to be insolvable, *Last Sacrifice* ends on a positive note. With Lissa as the new queen, a first step towards social change has been made and there is hope for a better future. If society actually does evolve towards more tolerance and equality might be revealed in the sequel series.

5. Conclusion

In spite of the common perception that popular fiction can have a less positive impact on young readers, the analysis of *Vampire Academy* shows that it can be compared to a didactic work like *Noughts & Crosses*. Both series treat the sensitive issue of discrimination in a very different way. Whereas Blackman focuses on racism and includes historical facts into her narration, actively teaching young readers about the history of racism, Mead approaches the issue from a merely fictional perspective, adding different aspects of discrimination to the equation.

Noughts & Crosses uses a variety of methods to create awareness for the issue of discrimination. Especially the first novel includes examples for discrimination or information about the historical developments or the society as such on nearly every page. The dystopian setting, as well as the seemingly endless number of tragedies for the McGregors as well as for the Hadleys and the huge amount of information on the aspect of racism and discrimination can be, in parts, overwhelming. The narrative grows even more disturbing, considering how close certain events are to the actual history of racism and discrimination in postcolonial nations.

Blackman seems to choose each word deliberately, and in spite of her attempt to create authentic voices her characters repeatedly seem to be a mere mouthpiece which she uses to promote her views and pass on her messages. This preaching effect grows weaker in the later novels, but especially Callum tends to lose his authenticity when he elaborates on the Nought's grievances.

Because of its elaborate style and the variety of aspects influencing the narrative, *Noughts & Crosses* is perfectly suited to be discussed in a classroom context. The novels seem to be at least partly written with this purpose, considering the high amount of additional material and Malorie Blackman's active participation in the discussion with teachers as well as students.

In *Vampire Academy*, the aspect of discrimination is merely integrated into the narration which includes a variety of other aspects. Nevertheless, the discussion of dhampir rights is one of the major issues for the characters and thus becomes important to the reader. Furthermore, Mead adds other problematic aspects of a teenager's life, be it love relationship or annoying adults. Thus she offers more opportunities for the young readers to identify with her characters. Rose's colloquial account of the events facilitates the reading. Even though the series does not exclusively focus on discrimination, it establishes a set of values which condemns racism and the marginalisation of minorities in its own way.

Both series do promote equal rights for the minority, but at the same time call attention to the fact that the end does not justify the means. Tasha's development in *Last Sacrifice* is a warning that even the best intentions can be harmful if radicalised. Her treason is similar to Callum joining the Liberation Militia in *Noughts & Crosses*.

For a young adult reader, *Vampire Academy* might be more appealing because it ends with hope. The situation for dhampirs has not been solved, but political change has been induced. Rose's optimism at the end of *Last Sacrifice* raises positive expectations, the belief that even severe problems like racial discrimination can be solved if the different parts of society join forces to make a difference. On the other hand one can criticise the happy ending as a perfunctory depiction of an all-too-perfect world. Discrimination is not as quickly or as easily abolished as *Vampire Academy* seems to suggest. However, it is necessary to encourage young adults to reevaluate their beliefs and tackle their problems and they might be more inspired if a positive outcome seems likely.

Contrary to this representation of a we-can-make-a-change mentality, the narration on *Noughts & Crosses* remains more pessimistic. Giving a more realistic account of the development of racism and discrimination, Blackman's society needs decades to achieve changes in their legal system and reach a level closer to equality of the discriminated race. Even though the Noughts' situation does not seem as hopeless in *Double Cross* as it was

for Callum in *Noughts & Crosses*, members of the marginalised group are still very likely to fail their attempts at success, no matter how much effort they put into their ambitions. This dystopian estimation might discourage young adults to actively participate in changing their society. However it could also elicit a stronger desire to fight inequalities and create a better future.

Both series have their advantages and disadvantages. *Vampire Academy* might not be as appropriate as a compulsory reading in high school, but it will definitely influence its readers' perception of discriminatory behaviour. *Noughts & Crosses* is a recommendable reading, but its brutal depiction of reality might offend sensitive readers.

Similarly to *Vampire Academy*, there are many other examples of popular young adult fiction that provide their readers with an indirect discussion of critical social issues. At the same time didactic readings such as *Noughts & Crosses* develop in a direction that encourages young adults to read more. Combining both genres to further the young readers' personal growth and teach them the desirable values of society, in this case tolerance and acceptance of the other seems the solution of choice. Only recently Malorie Blackman published her latest novel *Trust Me*⁴, which combines the issue of racial discrimination with a vampire narrative.

⁴ For further information see Malorie Blackman's webpage, bibliography.

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Abstract German

Bücher für Kinder und Jugendliche haben einen großen Einfluss auf ihre Leser und können auf dieser Weise gesellschaftliche Veränderungen und Entwicklungen fördern. Nicht zuletzt deshalb ist die Jugendliteratur eines der wenigen literarischen Gattungen, in denen kritische gesellschaftliche Themen, wie zum Beispiel Rassismus und Diskriminierung angesprochen werden.

Oftmals werden Jugendbücher nicht von den potentiellen Lesern selbst, sondern vielmehr von deren Eltern, Lehrern oder anderen Erwachsenen ausgewählt. Die Auswahl geschieht anhand einer Vielzahl von Kriterien, vor Allem aber anhand der Frage wozu diese Bücher gut sind. Bestimmte Gattungen werden im Unterricht und von Eltern bevorzugt, während Kinder und Jugendliche privat zu anderen Werken greifen würden.

In dieser Arbeit wird Malorie Blackmans *Noughts & Crosses* Serie, eine didaktisch aufgebaute Romanreihe über die historische Entwicklung von Rassismus und die durch Diskriminierung entstehenden Konsequenzen, mit Richelle Meads populärer Bestseller Serie *Vampire Academy* verglichen.

Beide Werke behandeln das Thema Diskriminierung auf komplett unterschiedliche Art. Ziel ist es, die unterschiedlichen Vorgehensweisen zu analysieren um festzustellen, in wie weit die Serien dazu geeignet sind, jungen Lesern dieses kritische Thema näher zu bringen. Die Grundannahme dieser Arbeit ist, dass sowohl didaktische Literatur als auch Populärliteratur einen positiven Einfluss auf die Werteentwicklung junger Leser haben können und daher weniger der Aspekt was gelesen wird, sondern dass gelesen wird im Vordergrund stehen sollte.

Abstract English

Books for children and young adults greatly influence their readers and can thus promote social changes and development. This is one of the main reasons why young adult fiction is one of the few genres that address sensitive social issues, such as racism and discrimination.

In many cases books for young adult readers are chosen by parents, teachers or other adults, rather than the potential readers. There is a variety of reasons for choosing a certain book, but the main aspect seems to be the question of what the books are good for. Certain genres are preferred in the classroom context as well as by the parents, whereas children and young adults would choose to read different books for their pleasure.

This thesis compares Malorie Blackman's *Noughts & Crosses*, a series of didactic novels that focus on racism and the negative consequences of discrimination, to *Vampire Academy*, Richelle Mead's bestselling popular series.

Both works treat the issue of discrimination completely different. This thesis aims to analyse the different approaches in order to determine in how far those series are suitable to introduce young readers to this critical social issue. The underlying assumption is that both, didactic novels as well as popular fiction can influence the readers' personal growth in a positive way. Thus it is not important what young readers choose to read, as long as they choose to read.

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