

The Posthuman Child as a Genderless Ideal

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Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* series centers around the adolescent criminal mastermind Artemis Fowl and his plot to acquire gold from the Fairy People. The latter here are an underground species who, diminutive in size, are vernacularly called the People. Artemis' continued interactions with the People traces his trajectory from preteen to adolescence and the onset of his puberty. They raise interesting questions about the intersections of technology (magic, gender etc.) and the body of the pre-adult teenager. This article serves to interrogate some of the depictions in the *Artemis Fowl* series, of the ways that the representations of the male protagonist and important Fairy characters complicate the idea of a technologically enhanced child as a site of potential threat. Extending the theory put forward by Susan Honeyman of the romantic child as a free/ neuter space before gender becomes synonymous with embodiment, I argue that technologies of magic and superpowers, as depicted in the *Artemis Fowl* series, leads to the creation of a Posthuman child – one whose “genderlessness” (because of the androgyny afforded by a mechanistic hybrid role) creates new ways of perceiving gender and technology for the adolescent reader of these books. For a young adult reader of the *Artemis Fowl* series, an increasingly technologically enhanced environment delays the onset of a gendered way of living and allows him/her to explore the radical possibilities of an androgynous, posthuman childhood.

Artemis Fowl is a series of eight science fiction fantasy novels. The series combines the elements of a James Bond style thriller, a science-fiction novel and folklore, targeting itself at a young adult audience. The central protagonist is Artemis Fowl II, a twelve-year-old criminal mastermind, who holds a fairy to ransom in an effort to restore his family's declining fortunes. He exploits the magical Fairy People and discovers their fairy technology, which is commonly identified as magic in the human world. The series starts off with Artemis as an anti-hero but in the subsequent books he helps the Fairies in preventing global ecological disasters. Artemis' character undergoes maturity and adolescence over the span of the books. The series' ingenuous take on fairies and the magical world as well its self-reflexive humorous narrative style made it a worldwide success and won its author, Eoin Colfer, many accolades.

The series raises several important discussions around androgyny, gender roles and even re-conceptualizes the traditional image of the body. As a text of children's literature, *Artemis Fowl* intersects the fantasy world of magical creatures such as pixies and fairies and the real world of the pre-teen and re-imagines them to provide new answers to questions of what the body is in the age of technoculture.

One of the central concerns of the Artemis Fowl series is its ruminations on current questions revolving around science and its relationship to the human. Colfer presents for consideration such issues as cloning, experimenting on animals and genetic engineering. Positioned among these concerns is the adolescent teen's search for his own identity, which is woven together with bioethical and technoethical issues. The series raises important questions about the co-existence of humans with the machinic developments of the twenty first century as well as about the very nature of human identity in an age of advanced scientific possibility.

Posthumanism: A Historic Overview

The Artemis Fowl works call to mind Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* and Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman*. The central thesis of these works is to view the body as an object that may be molded by the power of the mind and sheer willpower. In 1985, Haraway published the essay "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" in *Socialist Review*. Although most of Haraway's earlier work was focused on emphasizing the masculine bias in scientific culture, she has also contributed greatly to feminist narratives of the twentieth century. According to Haraway's "Manifesto," "there is nothing about being female that naturally binds women together into a unified category. There is not even such a state as 'being' female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices" (155). A cyborg does not require a stable, essentialist identity, argues Haraway, and feminists should consider creating coalitions based on "affinity" instead of identity. To ground her argument, Haraway analyzes the phrase "women of color," suggesting it as one possible example of affinity politics. Using a term coined by theorist Chela Sandoval, Haraway writes that "oppositional consciousness" is comparable with a cyborg politics, because rather than identity, it stresses how affinity comes as a result of "otherness, difference, and specificity."

In her updated essay "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in her book *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991), Haraway uses the cyborg metaphor to explain how fundamental contradictions in feminist theory and identity should be conjoined, rather than resolved, similar to the fusion of machine and organism in cyborgs. These intersections between feminist theory and identity need to be read in the broader framework of a feminist critique of capitalism.

Hayles understands "human" and "posthuman" as constructions that emerge from historically specific understandings of technology, culture and embodiment; "human" and "posthuman" views each produce

unique models of subjectivity (Hayles 33). Within this framework “human” is aligned with Enlightenment notions of liberal humanism, including its emphasis on the “natural self” and the freedom of the individual (3). Conversely, the posthuman does away with the notion of a “natural” self and emerges when human intelligence is conceptualized as being co-produced with intelligent machines. According to Hayles, the posthuman view privileges information over materiality, considers consciousness as an epiphenomenon and imagines the body as a prosthesis for the mind (2). Specifically, Hayles suggests that in the posthuman view “there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation [...]”(4). The posthuman thus emerges as a recasting of the liberal humanist notion of “human.”

Genderlessness as embodied in the Child

Sarah Chinn notes that by deconstructing binaristic viewpoints, “the figure of the child can help us out of the nature/nurture, born/made debates that so often bedevil discussions of sexual and gendered identities” (151). In her essay “Trans(cending) Gender through Childhood” Susan Honeyman envisions an essentialist conception of the romantic child¹ as the neuter child that embodies a free space before gendering is conceived as being an embodied experience (168). Historically, childhood has been perceived as the “vicariously relished” opportunity to delay or prolong the onset of sexual maturity. This has produced figurations that physically epitomize the absence of gender. Honeyman is of the opinion that by reviving the neuter child as a way of imagining the romantic child, childhood studies, in the tradition of transgender and queer studies can adopt an idealistic position in its theorization of youth as genderless, going beyond the essentialist categories of male/female binaries.

She uses the example of the adolescent as outlined in Francesco Bonami’s “The Fourth Sex” to further elucidate her point:

[...] if we are willing to consider male, female, and homosexual as three categories, three mentally differentiated sexes, then adolescence may be seen as the fourth of these mental states. An utterly peculiar and sexual state, because it is limited to a precise time span, inside an overwhelming metamorphosis that will eventually thrust the individual into one of the three official sexes, or perhaps into all three, thus preserving an eternally adolescent, oppositional, irreverent and innovative character. (qtd in Honeyman 169)

Honeyman positions the figure of the neuter child as occupying a similar position to that of adolescence, being on the borderline. Honeyman envisions the neuter child as a “placeholder” against gendered adulthood that may be idealized as inhabiting transformability. Jody Norton echoes this

idealistic conceptualization of the child by observing that “the child does not only long, in some transient way, for the transformation of the real into the imaginary... In fact, the most profound desire of the child is precisely to transform the romantic (the fantastic, the fantasmatic) into the real” (430).

Therefore, the child is here envisioned as occupying a subject position of ambiguity that empowers him to embody liberatory possibilities about the future and become the catalyst for subversive social dynamics. This liberalistic model is a way by which childhood studies may lay claim to this free discursive space (Honeyman 169). Honeyman uses this critical standpoint to support her argument for positioning the potential of the romantic child as a precursor to the queer/postmodern end of gender. “Childhood studies posits childhood as a liminal social position through which deconstructing sex, transcending gender, and even achieving social neuter can be performed and fantasized” (170).

Genderless Ambiguity and the Posthuman Child

I argue that the Posthuman is an ambiguous subject position which emulates the transformative potential of the free discursive space. It is yet another potent lens through which the modern (romantic) child may be conceptualized. Posthumanism differs from classical humanism by relegating humanity back to one of many natural species, thereby rejecting any claims, founded on anthropocentric dominance. According to this claim, humans have no inherent rights to destroy nature or set themselves above it in ethical considerations a priori. Human knowledge is also reduced to a less controlling position, previously seen as the defining aspect of the world. Proponents of a posthuman discourse, suggest that innovative advancements and emerging technologies have transcended the traditional model of the human, as proposed by Descartes among others associated with philosophy of the Enlightenment period. In contrast to humanism, the discourse of posthumanism seeks to redefine the boundaries surrounding modern philosophical understanding of the human.

The philosopher Michel Foucault placed posthumanism within a context that differentiated humanism from enlightenment thought. According to Foucault, “the two existed in a state of tension: as humanism sought to establish norms while Enlightenment thought attempted to transcend all that is material, including the boundaries that are constructed by humanistic thought” (qtd in Wolfe 12). Drawing on the Enlightenment’s challenges to the boundaries of humanism, posthumanism rejects the various assumptions of human dogmas (anthropological, political, scientific) and takes the next step by attempting to change the nature of thought about what it means to be human. This requires not only decentering the human in multiple discourses (economic, ecological, and technological) but also

examining those discourses to uncover inherent humanistic, anthropocentric, normative notions of humanness and the concept of the human (Miah 72).

***Artemis Fowl* and Posthumanism**

Posthumanism imagines the body as the “original prosthesis” (Hayles 3), and is conceptualized as a vessel for the host consciousness, that can be molded to serve the interests of the individual. In children’s literature, the prosthetic posthuman is generally regarded as the harbinger of a dystopic future, marked by an anthropomorphic hesitation about or suspicion regarding the far-reaching ideological and social repercussions of those developments within information theory and cybernetics, which have been propelling “posthumanism” since the 1940s. Underlying this sense of “suspicion” about a posthuman future is the apprehension of a technologically mediated existence radically changing the established understandings of the idea of the “human.”

The “shell” or the body that becomes the medium for the expression of the will of the owner foregrounds his autonomy and power. Thus gender, conceived as an essentialized biological phenomenon, is rendered irrelevant in a posthuman future. The human body adapts to the changes in one’s identity, desire and knowledge. It becomes a vehicle for the expression of the human mind. Such pragmatic philosophy is one that is practiced by Artemis who firmly believes that “aurum est potestas”: gold is power. Although as a consequence of his adventures, he seems to undergo some personal reformation, on many occasions he manipulates “the People to his own ends” (*The Arctic Incident* 240), and often it has to do with body modification.

In the world of Eoin Colfer’s *Artemis Fowl*, identity has a tenuous hold and ambiguous relation to the body. We see attempts made to stabilize the hegemonic position occupied by the body and what it represents. Innumerable precautions against identity theft in the book are based on physical mapping and coding such as retina scan, voice recognition, DNA swabs etc. which contributes to the idea of our physical make up determining our sense of self. In *Artemis Fowl: The Eternity Code* when Artemis desires to regain his C-Cube, a type of super smartphone engineered by fairy technology, he cuts off Jon Spiro’s² finger to pass through the security system. Despite the finger being reattached, the act is seen as irredeemable (247). In a similar fashion, any kind of physical changes made are perceived as having deep consequences for the characters’ intrinsic selves.

Two characters whose desire to transcend their physical boundaries in the Fowl universe caused them great losses are Briar Cudgeon, an LEP officer and Opal Koboi, the genius pixie arch villainess. Cudgeon, upstaged during a conspiracy against Julius Root, Commander of the LEPrecon force is “accidentally”

shot by Root, using a tranquilizer finger dart invented by Foaly. The dart's sedative reacts with some illegal brain-enhancing drugs he was experimenting with, and the resulting side effects disfigure his once-handsome looks. He is demoted to the rank of lieutenant and given a job as a recycler. "Ugly and demoted, not a great combination" (*The Arctic Incident* 77). Opal Koboi makes a concerted effort to inhabit the transhumanist project. She does this by making an attempt to transform from one being into another. As a pixie, she is roughly the size of a human child, with childlike proportions, including a comparatively large head. Artemis notes the second time he meets her, the first time after the mindwipe, that if he did not know otherwise "he never would have guessed that the female before him was anything but a human child" (*The Arctic Incident* 42). She has her pointy pixie ears made into human ears through cosmetic surgery and implants a human pituitary gland into her brain to incite the secretion of the growth hormone (*The Opal Deception* 173-4). Opal's ruthless hunger for power does not stop her from extracting brain fluids and other parts from various animals causing a breach in the harmonious existence between nature and human/fairy, which is a familiar trope in children's literature. Such actions and attempts finally cost Opal her sanity and her magical powers.

Such examples and their horrific outcomes instill in the child reader a desire to ascribe to the gendered and physical hierarchies that are inherent in society. They are a re-assertion of the essentialist mode of gendered identity that institute a hegemonic relationship of the body to the self and identity. The examples serve to dictate the codes of social acceptance to the potential adult and the warnings against their violation. But, it is noteworthy here that in the example of Opal Koboi one may discern a re-avowal of the power of genderlessness that Honeyman envisions in the neuter child. It is while she is deceptively childlike, owing to her pixie genes, that she embodies the desire for transformation and achieving world domination – a desire nurtured by both Artemis and Opal but it is only the latter who is portrayed as a schizophrenic megalomaniac as she begins to execute her plans through an active transformation of the body. The cover of the fourth book, *The Opal Deception*, portrays her as a fully-grown adult female, her silhouette bearing the outline of breasts. This is an important depiction when examining the power of the posthuman child. I would argue that this indicates that between *The Arctic Incident* and *The Opal Deception*, the second and fourth books of the series marking Opal's first and second appearances, Opal's childlike appearance held the transformative possibilities that she nurtured and had set about achieving by physically altering her body. This potential for power embodied by the genderless child is lost as evidenced by Opal's insanity brought on by her self-induced coma in the fourth book coincides with the onset of gender as evinced by the cover. Opal's genderlessness is embodied in her childlike, human features, which also hold the possibility of transforming her desire for world domination into a reality. In *The Arctic Incident*, when we are first introduced to Opal, she is portrayed as an evil genius responsible

for the highest level of planning and execution of a war by goblins using outlawed lethal lasers against the Lower Elements Police Reconnaissance (LEPrecon) police squad, shutting off all the LEP's power and blaming her only scientific rival Foaly for the entire affair. She is described in the book as a "power-mad pixie" (*Artemis Fowl* 133). Upon the onset of a gendered appearance this potential dissipates into a savage insanity. Opal's hunger for money and power is critiqued in gendered terms. She is chastised repeatedly as being "too ambitious." Her father wanted her to be a housewife, which caused her to take revenge on him by putting him out of business and relocating him to a mental asylum. Her long-time nemesis was the centaur Foaly, who beat Opal and her revolutionary artificial wings with an iris-camera in a competition at college. She is obsessed with humiliating and destroying him. Losing to Foaly caused Opal to develop misandrist tendencies. Her brilliance (she possesses an IQ of over 300) and cunning potential is generally channeled by the author into ways for her to merely exact revenge and portraying her as deranged. Meanwhile, same motives and abilities leverage Artemis on to a plane that allows him to exploit his natural androcentric opportunities as the hero to evolve into a more responsible, sensitive man.

Despite the dire and seemingly foreboding results of body modification outlined above, it is represented as an essential marker of the changes in one's identity. Artemis' father, an erstwhile criminal gang leader, uses a prosthetic limb after losing his leg while engaging in an honest trade. Artemis, through the book series that charts his developments from a criminal mastermind to an ecologically responsible, empathic adult, receives a few body enhancements. Despite not actively seeking them, he does not think about giving them up, hoarding as much of the "fairness" as he can get. For example, in *The Lost Colony*, Artemis and Holly Short travel through a time tunnel and during the journey, first his fingers are switched, then he exchanges an eye for one of Holly's and finally steals some fairy magic granting him limited healing and regeneration capacities.

The Androgynous Posthuman Child

The depiction of such an adaptive and malleable state of physicality in children's literature indicates its pervasiveness in popular imagination. However, the series also outlines the subversion of the relationship between gender and the body. Leslie Fiedler notes that genderlessness is mainly a literary ideal created for the consumption of adults who seek to resolve their own anxieties about sexuality and innocence through the portrayal of such anti-gender children. It is a way of realizing the impossibility of the child molded after their own genderless imaginings (qtd in Honeyman 170).

Honeyman in her essay notes that this realization manifests itself by first denying and then imposing sexual identity on the child. She uses the example of hoydens and bad boy literary characters of

nineteenth century American literature popularized by Mark Twain. Fiedler characterized the bad boy figure as: “Sexually as pure as any milky maiden, he is a rough neck all the same, at once potent and submissive” (268). She notes how in the nineteenth century such “gender blending” was a way to blur the character back into boyhood while in contemporary children’s literature, the ambivalence between youth and childhood is acknowledged by obfuscating both into the category of manhood (274). Thus, the potential for androgyny as an opposition to the “good bad boy” ideal goes beyond mere gender binarism and in fact convolutes the distinctions of gender.

The *Artemis Fowl* series always emphasizes the importance of gender equality and, from a posthuman perspective, goes beyond simply critiquing the sexual prejudice faced by Holly Short as an LEP officer. In *The Lost Colony*, after swapping and replacing one of their own eyeballs with the other’s in their eye sockets, she tells Artemis, “We’ll always be a part of each other now” (371). This statement underscores the importance of transcending any physical and gender boundaries in search of a superlative experience of wholeness. Given the diminutive and fantastical attributes of Holly as an elf and the childhood/adolescent status of Artemis, this speaks to the idea of transformability espoused by the romantic child. The fantastic and the real here, coincides in the possibility of the androgynous, posthuman child. Anne Bugajska in the article “Artemis Fowl - Posthumanism for Teens” notes that “The perfect harmony, the legacy of Enlightenment thought, resurfaces nowadays as homeostasis, which in the posthuman world involves also the equilibrium between yin and yang” (195).

This aspiration for an idealized androgynous identity that transcends physical and gendered thresholds to depict the fluidity of the self is best realized through the position of the posthuman child.

Bugajska notes that in the novels, Artemis himself embodies one of the finest examples of androgyny. His mysterious name is one of the first signifiers for the ambiguity of his gender. It belongs to the female Greek goddess of wisdom entrenched in Greek mythology. Artemis foregrounds this topic by stating that he inherited the name after his father and that it imparts to him the dominance of a hunter (*Artemis Fowl* 267). However, in the discussion of gender, it imparts upon him an ambiguous relationship with a gendered identity. By his own characterization of the name Artemis and its mythological and cultural genealogy, he embodies both masculine and feminine traits thereby occupying a powerful position of transcending gender. Artemis’ physical fusion with Holly and finally, the introduction of his female alter ego Minerva Paradizo, strengthens the claims of androgyny on the part Eoin Colfer for his protagonist.

Artemis Fowl’s trajectory as a conflicted anti-hero seems to echo Fiedler’s imagery of the “good bad boy” who has embraced androgyny as a device of the posthuman world, which he inhabits and must

master. He is established as a cold, ruthless, criminal mastermind, having “the highest tested IQ in Europe” which imparts to him a lethal clinical detachment from human emotions. Artemis, being the successor to his father’s criminal empire and its executor in his absence, however, shares the male reader’s anxiety about adulthood and imposition of responsibility that comes with the assignation of a gendered masculine identity. Apart from his status as a child, the anxiety about his masculinity is staved off by his desperation to find his father, captured by the Russian mafia, and concern for his mother whose subsequent descent into madness forced him to take on adult responsibilities at the tender age of eleven.

The gender blending tropes used for the evolution of his character into a more androgynous ideal are signaled by Artemis’ realization of his follies with his gradual, cautious interaction with the Fairy People, particularly Holly Short. He comes to regret (and apologize for) Holly's abduction and evolves into a more compassionate, loving individual who often takes on the heroic role in the subsequent adventures with the People and embraces the androgynous possibilities inherent in those escapades.

Susan Honeyman notes that the general belief about genderlessness being espoused by pre-pubescence indicates how childhood is perceived as a “desirable but temporary release from the unidentifiable structures of gendered oppression” (170-71). In our protagonist, this desire for escaping gendered binarism and an aspiration to genderlessness is quite strongly manifested by the depiction of his reception of his puberty. By age fourteen he finally experiences his delayed puberty, an experience he finds both intriguing and incredibly annoying. He shows small romantic interest in girls, but his compulsion to present himself in a formal and imposing manner delays many normal social interactions for boys his age. He often describes himself as primarily asexual, espousing the innocence and virginity of the child that shields him from the disruptions unleashed by puberty. He shows no investment in teen dating rituals: “I don’t see myself at school dances Butler” (*The Eternity Code* 8). Artemis’ attempts at rejecting puberty infuses a comic element into the novels: “Is it normal, during puberty, to feel these blasted feelings of attraction at stressful times? During a ransom drop, for instance?” (*The Eternity Code* 265). The disavowal of puberty and rejection of its onset is intimately associated with the social spaces Artemis inhabits thereby explaining why most of his adventures are situated within Fowl Manor or in the capital city of Haven, the residence of the Fairy People.

Androgyny and the Female Reader in Posthumanism

Honeyman notes that following a constructivist premise of gendering, this escape can be vicariously experienced by envisioning childhood as disembodied gender (172). She sees the potential for “neuter possibilities” when adopting a constructivist attitude to youth. Honeyman observes how despite the

restrictive canonization of nineteenth century children's literature along gender lines, there was ample potential for gender subversion. These books have garnered a wide female readership, who received access to these books espousing an escape from gender restrictions through their brothers (172). Elizabeth Segal says of these girl readers: "the girl reader, no doubt, identified with these enviable heroes as she read and, theoretically could have used them as role models [...]" (176-77)

More persuasive accounts of countergendering were embodied in the depiction of early cross-dressing heroines depicted by DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook through their documentation of real female soldiers in the American Civil War:

The romantic prototype of the Female Warrior Bold was introduced to Sarah Emma Edmonds as a child, when she read the fictional adventure novel *Fanny Campbell, the Female Pirate Captain: A Tale of the Revolution!* That story inspired her to dress as a man in order to escape her overbearing father and his plans to marry her off to an older man (42)³

Such examples encouraged the occupation of a liminal gender embodiment through cross-dressing, transreading and vicariously experiencing cultural androgyny. Cross-dressing in particular opened up myriad possibility for androgyny for the female subjectivity. As Victoria Flanagan notes:

For females, the cross-dressing experience is liberatory. It exposes the artifice of gender constructions, permitting the female cross-dresser to construct for herself a unique gendered niche which is not grounded within a single gender category, but incorporates elements of both (79).

This kind of deconstructivist attitude to gender binarism and its oppressive hierarchies has long been the object of the study of posthumanism. Biological and technological determinism pose vexed problems to posthumanist thought that prize rationale and logic over the gendered limitations of the body. It values the will and desire of human capacity that engineers the transformation of the body. The posthuman body is, in a sense, therefore a representation of anthropocentrism but goes beyond the confines of it to transcend the borders into the non-human. The posthuman child in such a world, may be conceived as an embodiment of this deconstruction of bodily, gendered and technological limits. Two prime examples of this deconstruction of gendered binaries in the *Artemis Fowl* series that speaks to the idea of countergendering are that of Opal Koboi and Captain Holly Short.

One of the important characters who embodies these challenges to gender and physical normativity is the pixie villainess Opal Koboi. First seen as a supporting antagonist in the second book of the series, *Artemis Fowl: The Arctic Incident*, she squared off against Artemis in the fourth, sixth and eighth books and her reputation grew to become that of his arch nemesis. She is introduced as a character of unparalleled brilliance, a ruthless, cunning and “insane, power mad pixie” (*Artemis Fowl* 133). She is quite in contradiction to the traditional depiction of pixies and their gendered dispositions that have been previously encountered in well-loved children’s literature texts such as *Peter Pan*.

Eoin Colfer’s creation of Opal contributed to his idea that fairies can fight as well as and dirtier than humans. Contrary to the popular notion of pixies as being friendly to humans and benign, mischievous creatures, Opal is described as a megalomaniac genius who is prone to violent mood swings and ferocious temper tantrums. Eoin Colfer echoes some of the conventional pixie characteristics in his depictions such as the fact that they possess juvenile features but he adds that they have large, vulnerable brains owing to thin cranial mass. This makes them more prone to headaches as well and explains their higher capacity for intelligence and ingenuity. Opal Koboi is portrayed as exhibiting most of these features and is driven by a hunger for genetic and body modification that would enable her to gain supremacy over the human species. She surgically alters her pointy pixie ears to resemble human ears and installs a pituitary gland in her brain to incite the secretion of the growth hormone.

During the climax of the second book, Opal falls into live plasma tubes during a fight and is incapacitated, however, she is powerful enough to trigger a self-induced coma in order to mastermind a prison escape. She awakens from her pretended coma and escapes the fairy psychiatric facility in the guise of a human child. Koboi’s plan is to bring the Fairy People in contact with humans, “who until now have been completely ignorant of their existence below the surface of the earth, but by their nature manage to ruin everything they touch.” (*The Arctic Incident* 120)

In contrast to Opal’s brilliance and hunger for a technically enhanced, posthumanist approach toward self-transformation that would better equip her to bring about an inevitable species war, Holly possesses a deep reservation against such bioengineered modifications, especially chimeras (crossing the species). Such posthumanist methods are banned in the novels of Colfer and seen as revolutionary. As Holly Short mentions:

‘The body sensors are nice’, she said. ‘Very intuitive’.

‘It’s as close as it gets to being a bird’, said Foaly. ‘Unless you want to integrate?’

‘No thank you’, said Holly vehemently. She loved flying, but not enough to have an LEP surgeon sew a few implants into her cerebellum. (25)

It is peculiar to note that the aspiration to transcend to a posthumanist state is seen as transgressive in a world where all magic, make believe and fairy phenomenon can be explained by advanced fairy technology. In a universe featuring a 12 year old criminal mastermind genius with a nefarious henchman like Mulch Diggums who kidnaps, cheats and manipulates the Fairy People to get his hands on the Fairy Gold and the Book of the People, genetic and physical enhancements to create a mechanically enhanced superior self is considered taboo. I argue that it is here that we see the transgressive potential of Opal Kobi in her pursuit of the issues of gender destabilization, physical identity and as a metaphor for the rebellious and dangerous adolescent teenage girl in the young adults’ fantasy novel genre.

Patricia Kenon in her essay entitled “‘Little Girls are Even More Perfect When They Bleed’: Monstrosity, Violence, and the Female Body in Kristin Cashore’s *Graceling Trilogy*”, discusses the role of monstrosity, humanity and female agency in Kristin Cashore’s *Graceling* trilogy of fantasy novels for young adults. She observes that the teenage heroines of *Graceling* (2008), *Fire* (2009) and *Bitterblue* (2012) attempt to challenge the systems of bias and violence in their societies and to destabilize the hegemonic divides separating the “human” from the “unnatural.” She sees Cashore’s novels as problematizing the confluence of identity, agency and teenage female body and probing the limits of the young adult fantasy to re-conceptualize the conventionally gendered networks of shame, violence, power and prejudice.

In the *Graceling* universe, Gracelings such as Katsa, a child assassin and heroine of the first novel, has differently colored eyes and possesses “a particular skill far surpassing the capability of a normal human being” (*Fire* 6). Consequently they are mistrusted and shunned throughout the Seven Kingdoms. In the neighboring kingdom of the Dells, monstrous brightly colored beasts exist that are regarded both as threat and commodity. In Cashore’s third novel, *Bitterblue*, the protagonist is a hybrid child with a Graceling father and human mother. Kenon mentions that while the citizens of Graceling perceive these “monster-humans” with curiosity and concern, “the perception of difference as pathologically threatening and simultaneously fascinating is particularly intense around the representation and mediation of the young female body” (55).

Katsa’s misleadingly youthful, apparently vulnerable and “innocent” body is a site for the combination of masculinity and femininity in a threatening yet alluring portrayal of monstrous power which decenters the world around her. Kenon also notes the common trope of the child as monster, which enacts the

ominous threat of the youth's "harmless" body. Sabine Bussing in her article "Aliens in the Home: The Child in Horror Fiction" ruminates on the ironic innocence of the child, "the child's traditional image as pure, innocent creature also means an advantage in those cases when it acts as a monstrous killer" (xvi). Kenon further emphasizes upon the diabolical threat posed by the horror of the female child as killer.

Opal Koboï is a ruthless, deranged, power hungry pixie whose childlike features coupled with her far superior intelligence and penchant for genetic and body transformations pose a similar case of a posthumanist monster in the world of *Artemis Fowl*. Her intense desire to decenter the hegemonic gender as well as species binaries where pixies are considered lesser than fairies and the more adult-like elves positions her as a perfect metaphor for the female teenager who is positioned on the boundaries of hegemonic gendered systems and is perceived as a monster/ other because of it.

Her countergenderism is more embodied in her villainy and her superhuman intellect, which is considered to be higher than even Artemis'. Opal shares many of Artemis' traits. Both are arrogant young geniuses who have an antagonistic relationship with a rival species and both are especially concerned with money and power though much more so in Opal's case. She could be thought of as a dark mirror image of Artemis himself. This enhances her potential to be considered as immasculated. In *The Resisting Reader*, Judith Fetterley argues that the necessity of transreading for power "immasculates" girl readers: "Intellectually male, sexually female, one is in effect no one, nowhere, immasculated." In embodying this "nowhereness" Opal echoes the "secondary lack" that plagues the construction of childhood as much as gender i.e. a child is not an adult and a female is not male.

Opal's depiction as a countergendered magical creature stands in sharp contrast to the only other female magical character in the *Artemis Fowl* universe, that of Captain Holly Short. Short is a diminutive, sarcastic elf who is the first and only female captain of the LEPrecon or the Lower Elements Police Reconnaissance Division. Holly is three feet tall and slender, with nut-brown skin and crew-cut style auburn hair. She has helped Artemis save the world on countless occasions, and is one of Artemis's only friends. Holly will defy the orders of superiors and disobey rules if she believes that she can be of more help that way, and has gotten into trouble multiple times for defying a direct command. However, In *The Artemis Fowl Files*, she notes that she eventually earns the respect of her male colleagues.

Captain Holly Short speaks to the idea of countergenderism because of her diminutive size and her physical embodiment as a fairy who are supposed to be asexual creatures. She enables the transreading of the female child reader by locating a male identity in the female body. By taking on the role of a militarized, warrior fairy who proves herself capable in the masculine world of LEPrecon agents Holly's

childlike, asexual appearance enables the liminal gendered potentiality of the female child reader through vicarious androgyny and cross-dressing.

Thus, both the primary female characters are aware of the constructed nature of gender. They actively attempt to subvert through the embodiment of gender neutrality and body modifications such as cross-dressing or human surgeries.

Conclusion

Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* series poses a new conception of Susan Honeyman's idea of the neuter child of the postmodern era in whom she sees the potential for delaying adulthood and a gendering of the human. In the posthuman child, I see a similar potential as embodied in the characters of the *Artemis Fowl* series, as it employs current posthumanist and transhumanist trends to present to the child or teenaged reader, free discursive spaces in which to construct resistances to the onset of gendered binarism and its accompanying oppressive hegemonies. The series is doing this with the aid of the discourses of the human, magic and technology to indicate possibilities of translocation and boundary crossing that can only be the harbinger for newer possibilities for the conception of the child as a genderless site of power.

Notes

¹ The romantic legacy of idealized youth which is known for its tendency to obfuscate sexed and gendered binarisms.

² Jon Spiro appears only in *Artemis Fowl: The Eternity Code* in which he serves as the main antagonist. He is a notorious Chicago businessman who owns the communications company Fission Chips. Spiro is a power-hungry megalomaniac. Artemis Fowl arranges a meeting with Spiro at a renowned London seafood restaurant, En Fin, to discuss his invention called the C Cube. During the meeting, however, Spiro outwits Artemis by disguising assassins in the restaurant where they have lunch. He steals the C Cube and leaves his bodyguard Arno Blunt to kill Artemis and Butler. He is eventually set up by Artemis Fowl and arrested by a SWAT team.

³ Fanny Campbell is a novel by Maturin Murray Ballou that was first published in 1845.

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