

How to be girl:
How the historic juvenilia and
contemporary creative
writing of young girls can
facilitate discussions about
what it means to be girl

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Abstract

This research looks at how historic juvenilia can be used in contemporary creative writing workshops with girls of a similar age to the author of said juvenilia, and how the conversation between these texts can facilitate discussions about what it means to be girl. The research questions were: “how do girls creatively (re)write girls and girlhoods?”, “how do girls creatively respond to written portrayals of girlhoods?” and “how can creative writing by girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?” Qualitative data was gathered through a series of creative writing workshops and follow-up semi-structured interviews with eleven girls aged between seven and eleven years old. Due to the impact of COVID-19, participants were recruited through virtual snowball sampling with their interviews and workshops being held remotely and on a one-to-one basis. The workshops centred upon a story called *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* which was written by a young author called Bridget Shevlin in 1949. At point of writing, Bridget was a pupil in the upper second at the Bar Convent School in York and these contextual clues suggested that she was approximately ten or eleven years old at time of writing. After discussing *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* and their ideas about the author, the participants were asked to write their own story in response. Both stories, along with the data from their workshop and interview, were then analysed using grounded theory and thematic coding. The findings showed that being girl was the navigation of a series of complex and often hostile paradoxes, rather than a preoccupation with gender; that historic juvenilia offers a rich and under-utilised resource for creative writing education and discussions about identity; and that working with historic juvenilia can productively destabilise heroic models of girlhood by centring attention upon the more everyday experiences of being girl.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author.

This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University.

All sources are acknowledged as References.

1 Introduction

“Dear fellow ghosts, to-day I visited my old school, the Bar Convent, York. My goodness! How things have changed since I was there fifty years ago!”

(From *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* by Bridget Shevlin, 1949)

In the autumn and winter of 2020, I asked eleven young girls to write a story in response to a story called *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949). This prompt text was written in the mid-twentieth century by a young girl called Bridget Shevlin. Bridget was a pupil at the single-sex Bar Convent School in York, North Yorkshire and contextual clues suggested that she was approximately ten years old at time of writing. Her story sees a ghost return back to the Bar Convent to see how it has changed after their death. They experiences a day at the school before returning to share the news of these changes with her “fellow ghosts” (Shevlin, 1949).

I hypothesised that using Shevlin’s story in a creative writing workshop with present-day young writers of a similar age and gender would facilitate an exploration about what it meant to “be girl”. To test this theory, I held a series of creative writing workshops with a range of young authors who were aged between seven and eleven years old. These workshops were originally planned to be held in schools and in person, but the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic led to them being delivered virtually and on an individual basis. In the workshop, the participant and I read and discussed Bridget’s story together, before talking about the participant’s own experience of a typical school day. The last part of the workshop saw me ask the participant to write a story. This could draw on the things that we had discussed or, if they so wished, could be about something else entirely.

I then conducted a follow-up interview with each participant on a separate date. These were semi-structured interviews held on an individual basis and, due to the continued impact of COVID-19, conducted virtually. In the interview, I asked the participants about the story that they had written alongside other topics such as their reading habits, and their experience of creative writing education. The data from this interview and the workshop was then analysed with grounded theory and thematic coding.

The findings of this project make a key contribution to knowledge about creative writing, identity, and the juvenilia of young girls. They show that “being girl” requires the individual to navigate a series of complex and often hostile paradoxes about their performance of identity. They also show that juvenilia is a rich and under-utilised resource for educators: both historical and present-day material authored by young people can facilitate productive discussions about identity and identity performance for young writers. Finally, the findings offer new knowledge about the intersections between historic juvenilia and girlhood. They show how juvenilia can productively destabilise heroic models of girlhood within girlhood studies and children’s literature theory by centring attention upon everyday experiences of being girl.

In what follows, I introduce the key elements of this project. I begin by outlining the research questions and discuss how they were reached. I then briefly outline some of the key terms of this project before moving onto an outline of the thesis and its chapters. After this, I share my motive for studying the creative writing of young girls before concluding with the significance of this project.

1.1 Research questions

There are three research questions in this study.

1. How do girls creatively (re)write girls and girlhoods?
2. How do girls creatively respond to written portrayals of girlhoods?
3. How can creative writing by girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?

These questions reveal certain theoretical influences on my role as researcher. I pluralise girlhood, for example, to suggest it as an intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) phenomenon which can manifest itself in an infinite number of forms, material and pluralities. I am also influenced in this pluralisation by Donna Haraway who reminds us that the act of naming a phenomenon can exclude those who do not conform (2016, p.6) and that, rather than repeating and enforcing these ontologies, scholars should take “...*pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and ... *responsibility* in their construction” (2016, p.7).

The phrasing of these questions, and their concern for qualitative rather than quantitative data, was also influenced by my own personal experience of girlhood. I grew up in a rural village in North Yorkshire which had one bus an hour (and none on Sundays) and spent my formative years wrestling with the impact of Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME). This was a long-term physical condition which saw me miss a substantial amount of my formal education in school. My girlhood was one of substantial difference to my peers and one which now, as a researcher, reminds me to allow options for diverse experiences of childhood to become manifest in my work.

Finally these research questions indicated my hope that this research would create “social change” (Reinharz, 1992, p.241). This is one of the criteria that Reinharz purposes for feminist research, namely something which has a positive impact in a social context. I am a feminist scholar and also one interested in girlhood. I am concerned with generating knowledge that can be used to benefit or improve the understanding of the lives of girls and

young people. In asking “how can creative writing by girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods”, I was looking towards the practical applications of this thesis. I extend this angle of discussion further in my methodology chapter.

1.2 Defining key terms

In this section, I define some of the key terms used within this project. I go into further depth in the subsequent chapters but offer a brief introduction here for the purposes of clarity.

Juvenilia is a “body of literature defined by who writes it” (Chung et. al., 1998, p.289). In this case, it is written “by children” (Brocklebank, 2006, p.86) and thus comprises material created before the authors reach adulthood (see also Alexander, 2020). Although the limits of age rarely present themselves, scholars have put forward “up to and including the age of twenty” as a useful boundary (Alexander, 2020, p. 17). In practical terms, I use juvenilia in this thesis along with other terms such as “child authored” or “the writing of young people” to refer to the creative work of young people. I acknowledge some tension in the adoption of “child authored”, in that adult authors are rarely referred to in terms of their adulthood, but it holds value here in terms of specificity. A thesis concerned with the creative writing of young people which also refers to the writing of adult authors needs some way of distinguishing between the two. A useful demonstration of this approach in practice can be found in Anna Redcay’s thesis (2001).

I use the term **girl** to refer to a gendered performance of identity by an individual, human or otherwise (Butler, 1990). I naturally extend this discussion in the literature review but offer some initial grounding here for context. My ideas about the girl are influenced primarily by Simone de Beauvoir’s famous proclamation in *The Second Sex* that “One is not

born, but rather becomes a woman.” (Beauvoir, 1949, p.30). Here Beauvoir argues for girlhood as a stage of transition rather than destination which sees the girl looking forward to adulthood: “...the present is for her only a transition; she sees no valid ends in it, only occupations. In a more or less disguised way, her youth is consumed by waiting” (p352). Yet as Elspeth Mitchell rightfully points out, questions remain to be asked about how one becomes girl in order to understand how one becomes woman (2019, p.271) and it is in such a theoretical space that this thesis locates itself.

This thesis is also concerned with the idea of **girlhood**, namely the experience of being a girl within the world. Girlhood is a cultural, historical and social construct which “changes over time” (Helgren & Vasconcellos, 2010, p.2). It can be examined through perspectives such as “international and transnational” ones (p.5) alongside more local and intimate approaches. In terms of this project, girlhood is understood specifically in relationship to the cultural outputs of the girls themselves, namely their creative work. Finally, I also refer to girlhood in both the singular form: **girlhood** and the plural: **girlhoods**. This is not for rhetorical flourish but rather to recognise how the findings of this thesis work to disrupt potentially monolithic and singular readings of the phenomena. I elaborate upon these decisions further in the subsequent literature review.

1.3 Thesis outline

1.3.1 Chapter One: Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the study. I begin by outlining the project in its broadest terms before discussing the research questions and key terms. I then consider the motivations

behind this study in terms of my personal and professional background. I conclude by recognising the significance of this study.

1.3.2 Chapter Two: Literature Review

I introduce the key theoretical touchstones for this study which are creative writing education, girlhood studies, juvenilia and children's literature. I organise my review about the concepts of the girl, the child author, creative writing education, and begin by defining my understanding of the girl herself. I outline what I mean by "being girl" and how I use this phrase throughout the study. I then review the literature about child authors and the child authored text, focusing in particular upon those texts and authors who connect to the themes of this study, before considering *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949) in depth. Finally I look at creative writing education in the classroom and in particular, its treatment of juvenilia and the experience of Key Stage Two students.

1.3.3 Chapter Three: Methodology

In this chapter, I outline the research design of the project. I begin by defining my approach as a feminist researcher before discussing the seismic impact of COVID-19 upon the project. I discuss the necessity of continuing to research and the practicalities of how to do so in such extraordinary circumstances. Following this, I outline the project as delivered and any modifications made due to the pandemic. I conclude by discussing my approach towards coding, data analysis and the decisions taken about how to represent the data.

1.3.4 Chapter Four: Findings

Here I share the findings of the project. I structure the chapter about the three research questions. I begin with “How girls creatively (re)write girlhood” and discuss how the participants connected to *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949). I discuss the links between literacy practices and emotional intelligence, the impact of alternative education, and how young writers use both their creative work and the act of writing to explore the political landscape about them. I then move onto a discussion of the relationship between child-author and adult-author. Following this, I look at how the creative writing of young people can be used to explore and understand social relationships and issues of power and gender. I finally summarise this section and recognise its contribution to knowledge.

I then address the second research question: “How the creative writing of young girls responds to the creative writing of girls of a similar age”. I begin by discussing a recurrent question in the data about idea generation. I contextualise this in terms of the participant’s experiences of creative writing in the classroom and wider literary culture. As part of this discussion, I touch upon the participant’s own reading habits and analyse how they read and related to self-authored work. I conclude with a summary of the section and note its contributions to knowledge.

Finally, I consider the third research question: “How the creative writing of young girls facilitates thinking about girlhoods.” I begin by discussing the narrative decisions made by the participants in their creative writing before moving onto a consideration of content, specifically COVID-19. I look at how the pandemic was represented in their creative writing or otherwise and link this towards a discussion of the child-author and their relationship towards the text. Finally, I summarise this section and highlight its contribution to knowledge.

1.3.5 Chapter Five: Implications

In this chapter, I consider the implications of the study and situate them in a wider theoretical context. I split this section into three areas of interest: the treatment of creative-writing in education and the role that juvenilia can play within the process; the implications of this study upon girlhood studies and theories about the girl; before finally considering the implications for archival studies.

1.3.6 Chapter Six: Conclusion

In this chapter, I recap the key findings from the study and its contribution to knowledge. I begin by noting the impact of COVID-19 and how this contributes to limited replicability of the study. I discuss how the design of the study may have minimised discussions about gender on the part of the participants, and offer some thoughts for future researchers on how to ameliorate this. Following this, I highlight the limits of creative methods and their potential exclusionary force. I offer suggestions for future researchers in how to counter these. Finally, I give concluding remarks on the thesis as a whole.

1.4 Motive for study

In this section, I discuss my motivation for carrying out this study. I begin by outlining my personal motivations, before moving onto discuss my professional motivations.

Finally, I consider how my academic experience and previous research has impacted upon this project.

1.4.1 Personal background

As a child, I read anything that I could get my hands on and rapidly exhausted my local library. I then began to comb the local second-hand bookshop for titles that I could spend my pocket money on. At some point, I came across the girls' boarding school story and it was there that my interests in the intersections between children's literature and girlhood began.

My entry point into the genre was most likely one of the *Malory Towers* or *St Clare's* books by Enid Blyton (1897-1968), but I found my literary feet with the *Chalet School* books by Elinor M. Brent-Dyer (1894-1969). The series was published between 1925 and 1963 and followed the adventures of the titular school. At first, the Chalet School was located in Austria before the rise of Nazism saw it relocate back to the United Kingdom. Several moves later, and the rise of a more stable political climate in the real world, saw the school settle Switzerland where the series eventually ended. The natural result of such machinations was a lengthy series of over sixty titles. This was literary catnip to a young and voracious reader such as myself. These stories, and the work of similar authors such as Angela Brazil (1868-1947) and Elsie J. Oxenham (1880-1960), considered girls who were like me (albeit a lot more prone to being caught in snow-storms and avalanches and life-threatening incidents). They did not have hidden talents for magic nor the ability to calm a wild horse (or even the access to a wild horse *to* calm). Their adventures were immediate and despite their heightened circumstances, felt like an everyday possibility. Midnight feasts. Camping. Playing games instead of doing their homework.

Alongside this, I also began to collect information books for girls which had been published between the early and mid-twentieth century. These were books which told girls the apparently important things that they needed to know such as how to wash their belly button and how to watch your male friends and relatives play sport (*The Years of Grace*, Streatfeild, 1950). I was fascinated in how these books seemed to be specifically for girls (I rarely came across the male equivalent) and approached their topic in exhaustive detail. Being a girl seemed to be something that a lot of adults had opinions on. The opinions of the girls themselves remained unerringly absent.

Other absences persisted. The girls I read about were invariably middle or upper class and came from privileged backgrounds. If they did experience poverty, it would be of a fleeting and deeply genteel nature and they would be restored to their rightful place within society by the time that the book had ended. Girls from a working class or lower background were treated with some suspicion, and authors such as Enid Blyton did so with marked brutality¹. The stories I read undoubtedly celebrated girlhood but did under a very specific set of monolithic circumstances. They were also stories which were written solely by adults. I was rarely, if ever, able to read stories which were written by somebody of my own age. As somebody who wrote my own stories and wanted to be an author, this was an absence I felt deeply. It felt as if children's literature was literature written for me by others, and those others were always adults. The voices of the young writers were rarely present.

¹ One example of this approach is in *Claudine at St Clares* (Blyton, 1944) which introduces two working class girls, Pauline and Eileen. Pauline lies about her background and, upon the unexpected arrival of her mother at the school, has her deception unmasked. Eileen, the daughter of the new matron, must support her mother's employment by working alongside her but ends up stealing from her mother to support her brother when he is made unexpectedly redundant. Neither child is able to confess to their mother. Eventually everything is discovered and Eileen and her mother end up leaving the school. Eileen writes a letter to one of her schoolmates at the end of the story to tell her that she is now working in an office.

1.4.2 Professional background

I am a published author of children's literature and have written two children's books set at a fictional boarding school. *How To Be Brave* (Johnson, 2021) sees Calla North experience a lively first term at the School of the Good Sisters, a boarding school which is run by a group of very unique nuns. *How To Be True* (Johnson, 2022) shifts attention to one of Calla's best friends, Edie Berger, and a school trip to Paris. Both stories are middle-grade publications, a term adopted from the US which means that they are intended for a reader aged somewhere between eight and twelve years old.

I believe that my writing exists in a conversation with the texts and authors which have come before it. Both *How To Be True* and *How To Be Brave* see characters speak of other stories and authors and these are often relevant to their current circumstances; the school trip to Paris in *How To Be True* (2022), for example, sees one character reference a series of books set in Paris, and later the girls find inspiration in their favourite reading about how to solve a mystery. I also use literary references and in-jokes throughout the books to pay tribute to the books that made me a writer and to provide ideas for further reading. In making these structures of literary knowledge visible, I became increasingly aware of how my knowledge of children's literature was built on female and adult voices. This was a conversation with clear gaps, and I began to wonder what it might sound like if the voices of young writers was more involved in it.

As an author and academic, I also teach creative writing on a regular basis. This can involve lessons as varied as "what would happen if all the cars turned to ice-cream" with primary school students through to more formal discussions of genre and aesthetic with adults. Having both taught and experienced creative writing workshops for some years from a wide range of industry professionals, academics and established authors, I had come to

recognise some of their typical features. For example, if students were asked to produce writing on a particular theme within a workshop, the workshop leaders tended to provide a prompt text which modelled some of those themes in practice. A workshop on sonnets, for example, would have sonnets for the participants to study, and their content and form and themes would be then discussed within the workshop. I had attended good workshops and bad workshops, but I was particularly aware that I had never attended a workshop which utilised juvenilia as prompt material. It was a striking absence and one which only became more pronounced the more I specialised in children's literature. The voices of young writers were, it seemed, nowhere to be found.

1.5 Significance of Study

This study is significant because it seeks to redress the marginalisation of the juvenilia of young girls in the areas of creative writing education, children's literature, and girlhood studies. It offers firstly a transhistorical model of girlhood which theorises the present-day girl as being in kinship to her historical predecessors. This approach centres on the cultural output of girls, namely their creative writing, and uses said material to provoke discussions about identity. This is significant because it positions juvenilia as a source of legitimate academic interest, and specifically the juvenilia of the everyday girl. In doing so, it questions readings of juvenilia that centre on the adult's subsequent success or notoriety whilst also disrupting heroic models of the girl and girlhood.

Secondly, this study considers texts which have been previously unknown or otherwise marginalised in an academic context. The prompt text used within the creative writing workshop is *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949) and this study, to the best of my knowledge, marks its debut in scholarly literature. Similarly, the child authored texts referenced in the literature review have light scholarly footprints with certain titles such as *Bramshill, being the memoirs of Joan Elizabeth Cope* (Cope, 1938) being almost completely absent from the literature. This study is significant in how it asserts the academic value of these marginalised works and in how it offers a model for other researchers to work with similar texts.

Finally, this study is significant in how it also documents the writing of a group of young female authors during a pandemic. This was a period of unprecedented crisis for young people which saw the majority move towards home-based, remote and isolated education. As the findings will show, many of the participants moved away from discussing the pandemic in their work and instead wrote stories about their normal experiences of

school. This study therefore offers interest to educators who find themselves working in similar points of crisis and their potential expectations of students at this time. Furthermore, this study also offers significance in how it documents the process of researching during a pandemic. It shows how the traditional methods of data collection within educational studies can be disrupted and how access to participants can cease. It also illustrates some of the ethical discussions required on the part of the researcher.

2 Literature Review

“Our story starts hundreds of years ago...”

(Extract from Dolly Daydream’s story, written 19th September 2020).

In this chapter, I establish the critical points of reference for this study by reviewing the relevant literature. I begin with a discussion of what it means to “be girl”, namely an aged and gendered performance of identity. Although the participants of this project are also experiencing the physiological life stage of being girl, the definition that I propose is deliberately intersectional and should be understood as being applicable beyond these particular circumstances. Accordingly I argue here not for the singular act of “being *a* girl”, but rather “being girl”, a position which exists in a multitude of possibilities and subjectivities and, indeed, intersections. I situate this discussion in the fields of girlhood studies, children’s literature, and also new materialism.

Following this, I then consider what it means to be a “young girl who writes”. I consider the relevant scholarly literature along with a selective review of child authored texts. My selection of the latter includes well-known titles along with those of a less visible nature and published in more unconventional circumstances. Much of the child authored material of this section is yet to be explored satisfactorily, if indeed at all, within an academic context. By positioning them within this chapter as objects of legitimate scholarly interest, I seek to redress that absence.

The final part of this chapter looks at creative writing education within the classroom and how that intersects with identity work. I begin by reviewing the scholarly literature contemporaneous to *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949), and focus in particular upon material concerned with children of a similar age to Shevlin, before moving to more

present-day literature. Here, I discuss the entanglements between creative writing and theories of identity and how these can impact upon the identity-making performances of the students themselves.

Throughout this chapter and the thesis, I integrate quotes and extracts from the participant's workshops and interviews. I do this not only to reaffirm my commitments to the participants and their voice, but also to explore the resonance that their words have across the research as a whole. I opened this chapter with a quote from Dolly Daydream's story because it asks us to consider where a story has come from as much as where it may be going. In this literature review, I undertake a similar journey.

2.1 Defining the girl

“Many other ~~children~~ girls all ghosts ~~leapt out~~ materialized”

(Extract from Flying Fox's story, written 5th October 2020)

In this section, I define the girl and my understanding of being girl. I work primarily with material from girlhood studies and gender studies whilst also drawing upon the wider fields of children's literature, feminist theory and new materialism. I do not provide a singular analysis of these fields but rather position this thesis in something of a critical intersection between them.

The quotation that opens this section is taken from Flying Fox's² story. As indicated by the strikethrough text here, Flying Fox wrote and then edited her own work before sharing her story with me. I see her edits as indicative of her ability as a writer: not only is Flying Fox

²As will be discussed in the methodology chapter, participants picked their own pseudonyms at the start of the workshop.

able to critically assess her own work, she is able to nuance her meaning and move away from potentially generic expressions. “Children” is swapped for the more specific “Girls”, whilst her choice of “materialized” rather than “leap out” serves to underscore the supernatural qualities of her character. These are the edits of somebody with an eye for vocabulary and style.

Flying Fox’s edits also hint at an awareness of context. She was participating in a study which had explicit interests in the creative writing of young girls and by the time of writing the story, namely the conclusion of the workshop, would have been more than aware of this. In amending “children” for “girls, Flying Fox can also be read as changing her work to both accord with the aims of the study and deliver what was expected of her. This would accord to a key trend in the literature which shows that young girls write that which is expected of them, whilst also illustrating how the identity performance of a young writer must negotiate directly with the constitutive forces located about it.

2.1.1 Locating the “girl” in girlhood studies

Simone de Beauvoir writes that: “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.” (1949, p.30). This is the encapsulation of her argument, as proposed in *The Second Sex*, that an individual is not born a woman but rather becomes a woman in response to the constitutive forces located about them. In terms of girlhood, Beauvoir sees the girl as a transitory stage in this process of becoming: the girl’s body possesses a “fateful quality” (p.353) and her “youth is consumed by waiting. She is waiting for man” (p.352). For Judith Butler, Beauvoir’s arguments about gender identity pivot on a key axis: “‘being’ female and ‘being’ a woman”

are “two very different sorts of being” (1986, p.35). Butler continues to explore this axis in their own work, most notably in *Gender Trouble* (1990), where they argue that:

Gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. (p.191).

These acts, Butler writes, can include conscious or unconscious “bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds” (p.191) which come to “constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (p.191). The emphasis on repetition is important: the performance of gender is a “reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (p.191). Here Butler also highlights how recursive the performance of gender can be because in practicing the “already socially established” meaning (p.191), the actor comes to then affirm and legitimise that meaning.

In a later work, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (2011), Butler embraces the bodily turn within theory. The bodily turn is an effort by scholars to investigate the links between theory and the “body” (Price and Shildrick, 1999) and to ultimately question the phenomenon of the body itself. Under this lens, the body is “no longer considered a timeless biological entity,” but rather as something “historically variable and shaped by culture, language and ideology” (Clever and Ruberg, 2014, p.547). Butler’s work proves foundational here: the body is seen as a site of “construction” (Butler, 1993, p.xx), a “process of materialization” which “stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface...” (1993, p.xviii). Here Butler comes to theorise the body as something which is enacted by the discourse located about it. This “constitutive outside” (p.6) can involve a range of interpellations, a term used by Louis Althusser to describe how “ideology

“acts” or “functions”” (1977, p.86). Interpellation recognises how the mechanisms embedded within society can define the individual. Althusser offers a useful example of this in practice:

...that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: “Hey, you there!” Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was “really” addressed to him, and that “it was really him who was hailed” (and not someone else). (p.86)

In understanding that the address is directed to them, and accepting the meaning-making of that address by responding to it, the identity of both individuals is impacted. Butler recognises this in their writing on medical interpellations: “Consider the medical interpellation which ... shifts an infant from an “it” to a “she” or a “he”, and in that naming, the girl is “girled”” (Butler, 1993, p.xvii). Here Butler shows how medical interpellations can function as acts of identity-making. In doing so, Butler and her peers understand how “doing gender” is formed through “socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micro political activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine “natures”” (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p.126). Gender is not a “set of traits, not a variable, nor a role” (p.129) but rather the “product of social doings ... constituted through interaction” (p. 129).

2.1.2 Intersectional approaches to being girl.

The process of identity-making has been of direct concern to girlhood studies since the field's inception in the late twentieth century (see Cherland, 1994 and Earles, 2017 amongst others). This was when girlhood studies shifted from being a subset of women's studies into a field of its own right, concerned with exploring the world of girls and their experiences of "being" and "doing girl" (Currie et al., 2009).

An early and influential factor for scholars of girlhood was the approach of intersectionality. This term originates in Kimberlé Crenshaw's *Mapping the Margins* (1991) and sees Crenshaw argue that the factors which form an individual's identity are not applied in isolation but rather intersect with each other to form new points of meaning. If these intersections are ignored, then this can contribute towards the marginalisation and disenfranchisement of the individual. Crenshaw picks out the experiences of women of colour in her paper as one such example: "Because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both" (p. 1244).

Adopting intersectionality proved productive for scholars of girlhood (Johnson and Ginsberg, 2015, p.3; O'Shaughnessy and Krogman, 2011) because it enabled an understanding of the forces which intersected upon the individual. A useful example here is Meredith Rogers Cherland who uses intersectionality to recognise the locally and culturally specific nature of being a reader. Cherland carried out a year-long study of the reading habits of seven young girls in a Canadian school (1994). Her participants were aged between eleven and twelve and asked to keep a diary of the books they read, along with their reasons for reading them. The participants and their parents were also interviewed on a regular basis. The findings from this project showed how the reading habits of young girls were directly impacted by the "prevailing power structures" (p.124) about them and how these structures

taught the girls how life was “supposed to go” (p.97). Yet Cherland is able to recognise the locality of this (p.14) and conclude that:

The reading of fiction provided the girls with access to textual constructions of gender and these constructions were also positioning the girls to grow into certain kinds of women. (p.96).

For Linda Christian-Smith, the editor of *Texts of Desire: Essays on Fiction, Femininity and Schooling* (1993), these constructions of gender would be part of a “grid”. As she writes: “multiple institutions of popular, community and educational culture together constitute a ‘grid’ for that initiation of girls and boys into gendered literate practices and with them, gendered subjectivities and social relations” (Christian-Smith, p.x). Not only does this describe the impact of a grid upon the individual, it also hints at how those grids come loaded with a legacy of meaning. This is something similar to what Jo-Ann Wallace argues when she writes about how schools can be understood as “a primary site of the kind of ‘technology of power’ that calls ‘the child’ into being” (1995, p.291). Whether “grid” (Christian-Smith, p.x.) or “technology of power” (Wallace, p.291), certain places and certain practices call certain identities into being.

In a year-long ethnographic study of two friendship groups in a high school in North America, Margaret Finders shows how the participants used their literacy practices to “make [their] allegiances visible, [and] to construct boundaries around friendship circles” (1996, p.96). The participants performed the identities that they had been socially initiated and accepted into, whilst simultaneously initiating others into those practices and rejecting those who did not conform. As Carol Lloyd recognises, such entanglements between literacy and identity performance raise “compelling issues about ownership and choice” in “reading and

writing workshops and whether or not choice [is] always a good thing” (1998, p.134). The intent here was not to restrict children from choosing their own texts to read but rather to ask which texts were made available to them to choose from and, in turn, what ways of being those texts promoted.

Researchers added a further layer to these discussions by considering the influence of context upon identity. Bronwyn Williams, for example, writes about how girls shaped their identity to their environments and its associated discourse (2006). Using a literacy class as an example, she argues that girls give “teachers what they [are] looking for in assignments in literary classes – character-driven, nonviolent, open and reflective interpretations of reading and writing” (31). Here Williams shows how girls read the contextual and practical cues in their immediate environment and perform their identity in response to these cues. It also shows the psychological effort which can be required of a girl in order to deliver that identity in the “nexus of subjectivities” (Walkerdine, 1990, p.3) which are available to her. Girls must simultaneously inhabit positions of power and disenfranchisement (p.3) as they navigate that which Walkerdine dubs with acuity, the “impossible fiction” (p.119) of being girl.

For Barbara Read, time is an important influence on identity-making. In her study of how popular role models impact upon the identity of young children, she shows how there are points in a child’s life where certain categories of role model “have more social power than others, becoming socially dominant, while other ‘alternative’ meanings work to resist and challenge their dominance” (2011, p.3). The role models discussed in her study included fictional characters alongside the more expected figures from entertainment, media and sport. This showed how the “grids” of initiation (Christian-Smith, 1993) can consist of real-world elements alongside fictional ones. Furthermore, Read’s study shows how the nature of such grids can shift and change over time, whilst their parts can inhabit multitudinous and occasionally contradictory spaces within them.

Contradictions and paradoxes are also explored by Natalie Adams in her study of cheerleading. Adams argues that the sport allows girls to try on “womanly (i.e., sexualized) identity in a school-sanctioned space” (2003, p.86). She goes on to argue that educational environments hold certain expectations about identity performance and, by enacting a “womanly” and “sexualized” identity, cheerleaders divert from that narrative. The cheerleader must also wrestle with the “material practices and understandings of ideal girlhood” (p.76) and understand the binds this places upon their performance of identity. The point here is one of negotiation between individual and discourse: girls must understand how “far they can go in displaying femininity and masculinity, in what contexts such displays are appropriate and to what degree” (p.88). In cheerleading, girls regularly diverge from that practice.

Such negotiations about identity are also present in social media. In her study of TikTok, a video-sharing app, Melanie Kennedy notes how the app promotes a restrictive idea of identity for teenage girls. She describes that identity as a “narrow set of gendered, racialized, classed and sexualized ideals” (2020, p.1072) and notes that the users who do not conform to this criteria have their posts suppressed due to an automated algorithm (p.1072). Not only does this effectively silence girls who chose non-normative identities, but it also offers a reward of visibility to those who conform to the programmed ideal. In terms of negotiation, this is a negotiation with a hostile *other* with a hidden agenda.

Jennifer Earles asks what might happen if these negotiations about identity are disrupted. In her year-long study of story time for pre-school children, Earles swapped the gender of male and female protagonists in the stories that they read together and documented the responses of her participants. Earles theorised that power was “discursively written on the male body” (2017, p.370), and her findings showed how talking about these stories with young children could “give rise to new meanings about bodies and characters” (370). A

caveat remained: such discussions could also work to privilege “masculine tales over feminine ones” for if female bodies were allowed to participate within these narratives, it was conditional and at the patriarchal behest (p.370). Earles’ study also demonstrates some of the “local fundamentals” of being girl (Paechter, 2006, p.375). These are the factors present within the immediate environment of an individual which can form a “powerfully hegemonic femininity” (p.375). Any attempt by an individual to resist this femininity can be risky (p.375) and, to paraphrase the Borg, perhaps even futile. Paechter looks towards adults to help young people explore non-normative and alternative identities. Adults must make “resistance less risky and more worthwhile” (p.375).

There is an “imperative” for researchers to pursue the “conundrums” of gender and sex (Francis, 2006, p.15). Such conundrums can be found not just in the research content produced but also in the researcher’s presentation of their own gender and their associated gendering practices (p.15). Yet historically the issue of gender has been rendered as something of a tick-box exercise for researchers concerned with reading and writing (Patterson, 1995). In a review of papers submitted to Reading Research Methodology between 1989 and 1993, Patterson wrote that gender had been treated more as a cursory tick box rather than an area of interest in its own right. The terms “*gender* or *sex*” were some of the “most overused and undervalued terms in reading research” (1995, p.290). This section has shown how scholars have sought to reassert the value of gender-based theoretical research in the years since. The future trajectory of the girl and her entanglements with gender and identity require, then, not just an “examination” of what the girl both is and may be, but also “tools that can help adults create conversations *with* girls and *between* girls” (Mililo, 2016, p.529). In this study, I hope to deliver both.

2.1.3 Summary

I began this section by considering Simone de Beauvoir's quote that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman." (Beauvoir, 1937, p.30) and traced the impact of this statement upon subsequent ideas of gender identity. I recognised the influence of interpellations (Althusser, 1977), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1998) and how these could form "grids" of initiation into girlhood (Christian-Smith, 1993). I concluded that future studies into the girl required tools which enabled conversations both with and between girls (Mililo, 2016).

2.1.4 Impact on study

The scholars discussed in this section influence my reading of girlhood as a performative and intersectional act which shifts depending on the circumstances of encounter and actor. In terms of data, this section enables my findings to be understood as indicative of the identity that the participant wished to perform at that point. The identity that the participants presented after they had concluded the workshop or interview and exited the call would be different. I consider this angle further in the findings and implications chapter.

Finally, the historic tendency of literary and reading studies to see gender as a tick-box exercise, as revealed in this section, led me to pick a text written by a young girl for contemporary young girls to work with and thus, deliberately centre gender as a primary area of interest within the study. As will be shown in my analysis, this positioning of gender as a pertinent and pressing variable was not echoed by the participants. I offer some ideas at the relevant moment as to why this may have been so.

2.2 Locating the “girl” in children’s literature

As with their colleagues in girlhood studies, scholars of children’s literature have grappled with how best to understand and relate to the child at the heart of the field. This concern about how to read the child and her literature becomes pronounced in Jacqueline Rose’s argument for the “impossibility” of children’s fiction (1984). In a study of J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, Rose argues for children’s literature as an “impossible” thing which reflects not the concerns of children but rather the aching desires of adults. This cultural dominance of adults resulted in a body of literature which, Rose suggests, erases and denies the very child it seeks to serve and represent. A noticeable omission from Rose’s argument and one that is of particular relevance to this thesis is the child authored text (Wesseling, 2019). Children’s literature was theorised as an adult concern which privileged the needs of adults and featured adult-authored texts.

Peter Hollindale offers a response to this foundational argument about the child in *Signs of Childness in Children’s Books* (1997). He argues that whilst children’s literature may not theoretically exist, it can still be enacted in the dynamic transactions which occur between reader and text. He acknowledges that whilst these transaction differ depending on whether an adult or child read the text in question, there still remains a quality of “childness”. For Hollindale, this childness is activated by reading, most specifically that of a child. It is noticeable that he does not tie this identity of “child” to age: “Children’s literature is ... activated as children’s literature by a reading event: that of being read by a child. A child is someone who believes on good grounds that his or her condition of childhood is not yet over” (p.30). A child is then not a biological life stage but rather an identity which can be

performed by both adult and child. There are caveats to this model, however. Hollindale acknowledges that: “retaining the child in yourself is not the same thing as being a child” (p.32) and so describes how the negotiations about text and reader can create parallels between adult and child whilst also re-inscribing differences between them. In many ways these negotiations pre-empt Marah Gubar’s ideas of “kinship theory” (2016) which I discuss later in this chapter.

Hollindale also considers the role of child authors in children’s literature and how they are treated. As he writes:

[it is] only in very informal ways do children write stories for other children, and publication, if it happens at all, is usually local - school magazines, wall displays, or in scurrilous instances a furtive passing round the desks. The dignity of print and access to an unknown, conjectural audience is a rare event.” (p.11).

Juvenilia is characterised as something of an informal practice here. The writing of young children is to be primarily read by people of their own age or by people who have some connection to them, rather than being allowed the “dignity” (p.11) of an unknown, and implicitly objective, audience. If juvenilia is to be formally published, that is to say in a method approved by adults, then it will be done so in a local and immediate context. The school walls. A school magazine. The mode of circulation for these texts, then, is limited and quantifiable. It is read by those who have access to the school environment or who can read the relevant publication. If published in more informal circumstances, then the fate of the work is more precarious still. It may be, as Hollindale suggests, read by “scurrilous” and “furtive” networks of readers (p.11) who circulate the text amongst themselves.

Contrasting this to Hollindale's writing about the adult author is productive. He argues that an adult writes children's literature

... in part, from memory because the author's childhood is over. The author must construct childhood from an amalgam of personal retrospect, acquaintance with contemporary children, and an acquired system of beliefs as to what children are, and should be like..." (p.12).

This is writing as *bricolage*, a term introduced by Levi-Strauss in *The Savage Mind* (1972). Levi-Strauss argues that *bricolage* is the formulation of new knowledge through the rearrangement of that which is already known. For Hollindale, the adult author is a *bricoleur* who is able to draw together the various elements of their experiences whilst also benefitting from their adulthood and the perspective that it provides upon their own childhood. The adult author writes with distance, rather than locality.

2.2.1 Écriture Féminine and Écriture Enfantine

In *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976), Hélène Cixous introduces the concept of *écriture féminine*. This is the argument that language is "marked" by a predominantly masculine society and that the reproduction of this discourse privileges those power structures whilst disempowering the voices of others: women (p.879). Rather than writing in the service of the male economy, Cixous argues that woman should instead write herself "into the text – as into the world and into history by her own movement" (p.875). This process is described by Cixous as *écriture féminine*. It is a way of writing which brings forth the experiences and

knowledge of women into their work and denies the authority of the masculine: “for once she blazes *her* trail in the symbolic” (888). *Écriture féminine* is a deliberately indefinable practice (p.883) and yet one with some common characteristics: it asks women to “inscribe the breath of the whole woman” (p.880) in their work and to embrace more experimental aesthetics: “Break out of the circles; don’t remain within the psychoanalytic closure. Take a look around, then cut through!” (p.892).

Responding to the idea of *écriture féminine*, Clémentine Beauvais argues for *écriture enfantine*. *Écriture enfantine* offers a new dimension to *écriture féminine* by applying it to the writing of child authors and understanding it as:

...characteristic of the presence of the child in the world, expressed through a language which does not so much *signify* as *point at*; which does not so much appropriate and rearrange the world as *present it* [emphases in the original] (2019, p.64).

In proposing *écriture enfantine*, Beauvais draws attention to the meanings embedded within the text and its mode of representation but also the meanings that are brought to the text by readers and, in particular, the meanings brought by adults. When reading juvenilia, an adult reader is “affected by the presence in the world of children’s voice. They engage in reverent anticipation, circumscription, paraphrasing of the child’s words” (p.73). Adults wish for child authored texts to create meaning which can be “aligned with the phenomenological experiences of childhood” (p.74). Unpacking this relationship can allow a “nuancing of the Rosean model in the definition and theorisation of child-authored texts” (p.73) and instead, a movement towards multiplicities of meaning, interpretation and signification.

A forerunner to *écriture enfantine* and a similar theoretical approach can be found in the writing of Carolyn Steedman. Steedman is a feminist historian of both education and gender (Maslen, 2017) and one of the few scholars to produce a few full-length academic considerations of the writing of young girls. In *The Tidy House* (1982) Steedman analysed a story of the same name written by three young working-class students in her classroom during the summer of 1976. The authors, Carla, Lindie and Melissa, were eight years old at the time of writing and their story explores a number of social issues: sexual relationships, the difficulties of parenthood, the problems of motherhood, and the difficulties about being an adult.

In her review of *The Tidy House*, and her wider look at the writings of young girls, Steedman argues that such texts are not taken seriously within academic literature. She suggests that this due to a discomfort about how they centre the experiences of girls whilst being authored by young girls. The result of this is to marginalise the work of child authors and remove them from critical attention. Steedman had previously touched upon this idea in her “simultaneously theoretical and autobiographical” (Brunell Forman and Paris, 2011, p.5) *Landscape for a Good Woman* (Steedman, 1986). Here Steedman argues that the writing of young girls hold a common focus and intent because they are written *by* young girls. This comes to suggest that child authors have a distinct voice and stylistic intent of their own and that this is different from the work of adult authors.

James Greenhalgh’s study of young writers argues for something similar (2014). He considers a group of creative essays which had been written by girls aged between ten and twelve years old, at the behest of their teacher during the Second World War, and suggests that these essays demonstrate an “act of composure” (p.170) against the cultural impact of the war. The girls used their writing as an opportunity to develop their “appropriate gender roles against the expectations of civilian contribution to the war effort” (p.180). The result is that

their work draws together the composite elements of their selfhood (p.170-171) in a performance of patriotic identity. Greenhalgh is careful to emphasise the limitations of his argument due to the lack of comparative material (p.180), a familiar issue for scholars of juvenilia, and yet still convincingly demonstrates how the girls use their writing to affiliate themselves with the Home Front.

A key respondent to Steedman, and indeed to Jacqueline Rose, is Beverly Lyons Clark who expresses discomfort about feminist enquiry into children's literature. She writes about the "profound ambivalence" that many "mainstream feminists have about children's literature" (1993, p.171) and argues that this stems from seeing children's literature as something of an adult "paracanon" (p.174). If children's literature is a paracanon to the literature of adults then this means that it is a space which conceptually privileges the needs of those adults. If children's literature enforces an adult normativity to the exclusion of the child, and promotes ideas such as expected motherhood and heteronormativity then it also marginalises the needs of those who do not conform. Not only was this argument an early precursor to "aetonormativity" (Nikolajeva, 2009), it also highlighted the pronounced difficulties of reconciling feminist ways of thinking with the established normatives of then-children's literature.

Attention towards the role of feminist research in children's literature was also being paid by Perry Nodelman (1998). In an introduction to a special issue of the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Nodelman notes that the articles collectively propose the "intriguing idea that children's literature as a whole is actually a kind of women's writing" (p.32). His argument for this is not just due to the dominance of women in the field but also in how

...children's books that have been written by males have more in common with other children's books than with other sorts of writing by men. (p.32).

Here Nodelman makes some assumptions about the state of children's literature: that it "does possess generic characteristics" (p.32) and that those characteristics are influenced by a primarily female authorship who write about "traditionally female matters such as the care and education of children" (p.32). Yet as Jean Perrot writes, Nodelman sidesteps the influence of his own body and how this marks his "own writing and language" (1989, p.139). Rather than collapsing and converging critical readings of children's literature, Perrot asks instead for tools and methods which can help to bridge these metaphorical gaps (p.140).

One of the most productive theoretical tools developed within this period and in response to some of these concerns, was the influential metaphor of "windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors" by Rudine Sims Bishop (1990). The context for this was a concern for representation within children's literature. Bishop argues that if a child does not find themselves "reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in society" (p.ix). By thinking in windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors, the representation in children's literature can be theorised as something to witness, an image to reflect upon, or an opportunity to engage in new ideas. This was a recognition that, as Cixous had theorised previously, text came into the world marked with meaning. Bishop's metaphor of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors allowed an opportunity for the reader to disrupt and question that meaning. It also allowed the reader to reflect deliberately upon themselves.

2.2.2 The rise of kinship theory

Scholars of children's literature were also concerned with the dynamics between the adult and child and how best to theorise this relationship. Maria Nikolajeva developed the term "aetonormativity", literally the normativity of age, to describe how children's literature privileges an adult normative and cultural dominance (2010). A key part of this discussion, for the purposes of this thesis, is how aetonormativity comes to impact upon juvenilia. As Nikolajeva argues, children's literature privileges an adult normative not just in terms of content and theme but also in terms of authorship: "maybe the term children's literature will one day be reserved for literature by children, just as children's culture today includes children's own stories, drawings and play" (5). The child author, then, is somewhat removed from ideas of children's literature.

In response to theories about the adult and child, Marah Gubar offers kinship theory. This is a "hermeneutics of recuperation" (2016) which argues for readings of kinship between adult and child rather than those of "difference and deficit" (Beauvais, 2017, p.267). Rather than seeing what divides and separates the two, researchers can seek to find points of mutuality. The child, for example, can be seen as "an other of the adult's own making" (Hunter, 2019, p.39) rather than as something distant and unknowable. This allows a movement away from readings of enclosure and secularity about the child and instead readings of "kindness" (Beauvais, 2017) which are "amenable, [and] open-ended" (Gubar, 6th May 2020).

A persuasive reading of the child and childhood which hybridises kinship theory with the increased theoretical interest in the material and the "body" (Nikolajeva, 2016) comes from Syros Spyrou (2017). Spyrou argues that the idea of childhood might be more productively understood if it is "decentered" (433) and instead the "processes by which entities ... come into being" (433) are called to attention. Spyrou elaborates: scholars should "ask questions about the relational encounters and the emerging entanglements of children

with the world at last (433). It is by thinking in a deliberately wider context and even to the extent of going “beyond childhood” (434) that the theory about the child can be better expressed both now and in the future (437). There is a necessity to find theoretical frameworks which reflect that way of thinking: to survive in this brave new world, theory about the child must reflect the ambiguities and disconnections (Wallace, 1998) about the child, childhood, and also of theory itself.

2.2.3 Summary

In this section, I discussed how scholars have theorised the child and the adult within children’s literature. I began with Jacqueline Rose’s foundational argument that children’s literature was an “impossible” thing (1984) before moving onto a discussion of Peter Hollindale’s theories on “childness” (1997). I considered the impact of *écriture féminine* (Cixous, 1976) and *écriture enfantine* (Beauvais, 2017) and showed how these were productive ways to theorise the role of the child author. I then discussed the impact of an adult normative upon theories of children’s literature and the role of “kinship theory” (Gubar, 2016) in understanding the relationship between adult and child. Finally I considered the potential future of the child within theory by looking towards “decentered” approaches (2017). I concluded that there was a need to create new theoretical frameworks which embraced not just the ambiguities of the child but also of theory itself.

2.2.4 Impact on Study

The most immediate impact of this section was the discovery of *The Tidy House* by Carolyn Steedman (1982) which was one of the first academic texts I came across in my literature review. *The Tidy House* sensitively demonstrated a method of how to understand and write about young girls and their writing in a scholarly sense. It also provided some ideas about how writing could happen within an educational setting; Steedman is careful to note, for example, that how *The Tidy House* was an unplanned and undirected piece of writing which was independently planned and executed by the authors. I took the principles of this into my research design and when I asked participants to write a story about the topics that we had been discussing, I also offered them the opportunity to write about anything else that they wished instead.

Steedman also writes about the value of literacy rich environments. The authors of *The Tidy House* were “read to a great deal” (p.11) and had a “long exposure to a particular type of literature and to the idea of authorship” (p.11). It was because of this clear link between literature and writing that I decided to include questions about the participant’s reading habits in my interview. The specific questions were: “*What are your favourite stories about?*”; “*Can you describe your ideal character to read about?*” and “*Do you like reading stories about girls in particular?*” (*If yes - why / if no - why not...*)”

2.3 Understanding the child author

“As I went to lie down in my grave, I heard a whistle. I turned my head sharply but then realised it was just the wind. Or was it?”

(Extract from Rainbow’s story, written 22nd October 2020)

In this section, I review some of the literature written by young authors and consider how these texts and the authors are understood in a critical context. I begin my review in the early twentieth century with a look at the creative writing of the “new girl” (Mitchell, 1995) and end it in the mid-twentieth century with the writing of *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949). I then recognise how certain themes and experiences for child authors continue to persist up to the present day. Throughout this section, I focus on texts which depict relevant themes of interest to this study or typify the wider critical reception of juvenilia.

The extract which opens this section is the final three sentences of Rainbow’s story. It is an evocative piece of writing which indicates both her confident style as a writer and her familiarity with the trappings of genre. Her story ends on a cliff-hanger which asks the reader to question all which has gone before. It is a familiar technique to readers of gothic or supernatural literature and shows Rainbow’s understanding of literary convention and her ability to using this in her own work. In the following, I show how such literary acuity may be read in a wider critical context.

2.3.1 A brief history of child authored texts

: “the girl speaks to her notebook the way she used to speak to her dolls, as a friend, a confidante, and addresses it as it were a person” (Simone de Beauvoir, 1949, p.363).

As part of her consideration of gender and identity in *The Second Sex*, as previously discussed in this chapter, Simone de Beauvoir also considers the creative writing of young girls. She picks out Marie Bashkirtseff’s diary as a particular example and refers to it as a “model of the genre” (p.363). These were diaries which Bashkirtseff wrote from the age of

fourteen up to her death at twenty-five years old, and were posthumously published by her mother. Later research showed that the diaries had been heavily “manipulated” by her mother, a “shrewd impresario”, who, amongst other decisions, had changed Marie’s age from fourteen years to twelve to emphasise her childish precocity (Molloy, 1997, p. 13). Writing prior to these discoveries, Beauvoir argues that Bashkirtseff’s diary and others like it represented a space for young girls to find “secrecy”, “solitude” and a space to “dream” (1949, p.363). This was the start of Beauvoir’s concern with “young girls’ experiences” (Beauvais, 2014, p.330) and her slow unpacking of the “fundamental *ambiguity* of childhood” (p.331). Beauvais writes about how Beauvoir came to understand the young writer as somebody who can “*sense* their ontological freedom” (p.333) and thus childhood as a space where one can “learn to negotiate this ambiguity, to accept it, indeed to *relish* it” (p.343).

The early twentieth century heralded a unique period of visibility for the writing of young girls where much of an author’s journey towards “ontological freedom” and indeed, their “relishing” of such, was played out in the public sheets of a periodical. Much of this freedom was due to the wide-ranging educational and social reforms of the previous century which, along with the associated activities of first wave feminism, had resulted in the “new girl” (Mitchell, 1995). The “new girl” was somebody who “occupied a provisional free space” and could practice “new ways of being, new modes of behaviour, and new attitudes that were not yet acceptable for adult women” (p3). They could perform a culture of their own and, furthermore, recognise “its discord with adult expectations” (p.3). As part of this cultural practice, the new girl was also able to read stories about girls her own age and in many senses, have these stories written by people of a similar age and gender.

Such stories were often collected and published in a series of popular periodicals (Rodgers, 2016). As Lois Burke writes in *Adolescent Writing and Victorian Literary Culture in Girls’*

Manuscript Magazines (2019), these publications were a space where young authors could “[adapt] and [subvert] literary and print traditions as part of a creative and culturally participative adolescence” (p.720). In sending their work into the periodical, a young author could gain peer support and feedback on their writing (p.719) whilst readers would often emulate these efforts by developing and circulating their own publications. Kathryn Gleadle illustrates how easily such communities could be formed: a reader could place, for an example, an advertisement in a periodical such as *Aunt Judy’s Magazine* to say that they had “three vacancies for ‘girls under 17 years of age’ for an English Essay Society” (2019, p.1175) and potential contributors could then respond. Young authors could also place advertisements for themselves as potential contributors: “Miss B. Duff from Ellie in Fife, hoped to join an essay society for those aged 12 years and older...Adelaide Everest from Clapham wished to contribute to an amateur magazine” (p.1175). These literary networks and their creative outputs were spaces for “constituting, and contesting contemporary models of girlhood” (p1179). Young writers could collectively debate and construct what it meant to be a girl within the world and to do so on their own terms; despite being “on the margins of a literary tradition” (Burke, 2019, p.741), they had formed “their own tradition” (p.741) and were thriving upon it.

Nevertheless, the curatorial presence and editorial interference of adults was never far behind the work of these young writers. Both Burke and Gleadle note how the journal: *The Barnacle* (1859-1871) was run by Charlotte M. Yonge who was thirty-six upon its debut, whilst Elizabeth Fox writes about how “a girl named Louisa” asked the *Girls’ Own Paper* “at what age are you at liberty to do exactly as you like” to only be told she was “utterly incompetent ... to be her own guide and mistress” (2018, p. 48). The editors, and by implication adults in general, knew best. This is something that Sue Chen and Kristine Moruzi also recognise in their review of letters written by young readers to the *Boy’s Own*

Paper and *Girl's Own Paper* (2019). The editorial team selected those letters that they wished to answer and which allowed them to share certain themes and topics. Letters were directly but selectively quoted (p.30); those which asked for personal replies were discarded (p.35) and girls who sought “information and guidance about their futures as adult women and as homemakers were actively encouraged to contribute” (p.36). These often paradoxical editorial practices, which sought to both “reprove” and yet “endorse” the lives of young readers (Fox, 2018, p.48), were in many senses an assertion of control over the increasingly “separate culture” that “working-class and middle-class girls” had begun to occupy around the turn of the century (Mitchell, 1995, p.3). Gleadle underscores this “important argument” (p.1178), similarly Burke who writes that the “youthful appropriation of periodical genres ...” affected “...the boundaries of girlhood in the late-nineteenth century” (p.748). Young writers, and indeed young people in general, were moving out of the control of adulthood. Yet this was no new phenomenon: as Kathleen Keown writes in her review of eighteenth-century women’s poetry, young women had been writing for some time and to great effect. The predominantly patriarchal literary cultures of the time had, however, understood their writing “as an accomplishment – and therefore as amateur and feminine –”. This reading was a way of “curbing the time and effort that she invested in it, and could lead to her compositions being patronized and dismissed” (2021, p.16). Women could write, it seemed, but just a little, as a treat.

The early twentieth century saw several notable child authored texts escape “local” publication (Hollindale, 1997, p.11) to be published in more mainstream and conventional settings. One key example of this was *The Young Visitors* [sic] by Daisy Ashford (1919). Written in 1890, when the author was nine years old, and published in 1919, this story was popular not just for its considerable wit and nuanced eye upon social matters but also for its

genuine humour.³ In the foreword, J. M Barrie writes that “It seems to me to be a remarkable work for a child” (Ashford, 1919, this ed. 1984, p.13) and describes Ashford as having “a careless power” to her work (7). Barrie also describes the journey of *The Young Visitors* towards publication: it has “lain, in lavender as it were, in the dumpy note book, waiting for a publisher to ride that way and rescue it” (7). This lengthy and effusive foreword illustrates the reception that adults can give the child authored text and how that reception can overlay and erase the text in question. Barrie is clearly surprised at the age of Ashford and her abilities as an author. As Anna Redcay writes in her study of child authored texts between 1858 and 1939, adult “reviews of juvenilia construct notions of the child author’s (un)consciousness, they also construct a reader wise or jaded enough to comprehend juvenilia’s profound or humorous missteps.” (2012, p.100). Such exertions can both “circumscribe the real child’s capabilities” whilst also offering a guidance as to the expected “narrative perspective” that a reader should adopt to the text. (p.100).

As evidenced in Barrie’s purple prose⁴, adult readers work to understand the child author themselves as much as they do their text. David Sadler argues that adult readers of juvenilia seek a particular quality of innocence in juvenilia (1992, p.25). Whilst he cautions against an exaggerated history of “deliberate exploitation by publishers and by the press” of child authors, there remains “a tendency to see the freshness and innocence of the child and their writings as a commodity demanded by their elders” (p.29). Some of this discourse inevitably marks itself upon the text. One such example can be found in Ashford’s *The Young Visitors* itself (1919). Christine Alexander notes how Ashford had spelling errors standardised in her work by the “initial editor” (2005, p88) meaning that any words which had been spelt

³In demonstration of its popularity, this is perhaps the most ‘visible’ piece of juvenilia I have come across. I regularly see copies of it in local second hand bookshops and, most unusually for juvenilia, it is often accompanied with copies of Ashford’s other titles.

⁴ It might be noted here that Barrie is not alone in his style here: the introduction to *The Far-Distant Oxus* by Katherine Hull and Pamela Whitlock (1937) sees Arthur Ransome embrace a very similar approach; similarly G. K Chesterton’s preface to *The Little Wings: Poems and Essays* by Vivienne Dayrell (1921).

correctly by Ashford were changed by the editor to confirm with her misspellings elsewhere. This is acutely described by Alexander as a moment where “textual fidelity” gave “way to marketing strategy” (p. 88) and similarly Anna Redcay describes it as an act of “strategic marketing” (p. 111). Sadler notes the ultimate and often detrimental impact of such marketing upon the author: “the prized innocence of the child authors was diminished, if not destroyed, by being purveyed to the adult world” (p.29).⁵

A notable demonstration of such diminishment occurs in *Bramshill, being the memoirs of Joan Elizabeth Cope* (1938)⁶. When Joan Cope was twelve years old and faced with the loss of her home, a Jacobean house which had been in her family for centuries, she took the decision to write her memoirs. These were subsequently published and received notable popular success. A. G. MacDonell described it as one of the “most extraordinary books I have ever seen” (1938, p.7); Hilary Carpenter wrote that *Bramshill...* was “an amazing book” (1939, p.62); and Edith Olivier, writing in *Country Life*, noted “a unique quality about” Cope’s work (1938, p.614). Cope went onto write another book as a child, a ghost story titled *Bygone Flowers*, where the foreword emphasises both her prior publications and her age.

An editorial preoccupation with age marks *Bramshill...*, and perhaps most notably in the foreword to the text. The publishers write “Not a thing has been altered” (n.p), a phrase used directly by Cope herself in a later chapter when she writes about a Mummers play at Bramshill:

⁵ It might be also noted that even royalty can experience similar editorial intervention. *The Adventures of Alice Laselles by Alexandrina Victoria aged 10 and ¾* (Alexandrina Victoria, 2015) has a different ending to that in the original manuscript. The original text sees an older Alice continue her adventures at the school before it peters away. The ending in the published book, however, is at a point several pages prior.

⁶ *Bramshill...* was something I found only by chance in a local charity bookshop and even then, only because it stood out from the other books on the shelf. It had lost its dustjacket a long time ago and the book bore little identifying data save a small label on the front of it, reminiscent of an exercise book. The intent of such a binding was clear: this was the artefact of a child and my eyes were irrevocably drawn towards it.

Not a thing has been altered, - and this is copied [sic] from the original manuscript written by the Mummers themselves, and the spelling is the same.” (p.33)

The publishers decide to follow this “excellent precedent” in their treatment of Bramshill... and yet, there is a caveat: “...the spelling (and, we would add, the punctuation) are the same” (n.p). At its most immediate level, this approach spoke to those readers who might think that Bramshill... was “too sophisticated, too knowledgeable, too good ... to be the work of a child” (McMaster 47) by offering them proof of its failings. Yet this was, as with the editorial decision about Daisy Ashford’s spellings, also an exercise in marketing and in foregrounding the presence of the child-author for the reader. It called attention to the unique qualities of Cope’s manuscript. Unlike Eugénie de Guérin’s diaries which were written from the age of twelve, the “first by a woman to be published in Europe ... [subsequently] a model for all diary-writing by women in the nineteenth century” (Raoul, 2001. p145), and subjected to “assertive editing” and “mutilation” (p.146); the diary of eight year old Marjory Fleming which was not published until fifty years after her death; and the journal of Emily Pepys which was written between 1844 and 1845 and published almost one hundred and fifty years later in 1984, *Bramshill...* was published in its entirety whilst the author was alive and, furthermore, still a child. The publisher’s decisions about Cope’s memoirs were no simple exercises in textual fidelity but rather in underscoring these facts for their audience.

As Beth Rodgers notes, a young author required a certain level of privilege not only practically but also socially in order to write in the first place. This was only underscored by “essay competitions” in publications such as *Girls’ Own* which asked “girls to write from an assumed position of superiority to their subjects” (p.67). Yet despite Joan Cope being from a similar background to the other diarists referenced here, and writing about similar themes as Ashford, the critical footprint of her work is much less pronounced. Some of this may be

perhaps ascribed to the impact of space and place. In comparison to Ashford's *The Young Visitors* (1919), a "sexually laden" and "racy narrative" dominated by adult society (McMaster, 1998, p.304), Cope's *Bramshill* is dominated by the titular estate. She begins by writing about how Bramshill was "perhaps the most perfect and beautiful Elizabethan [sic] house of it's [sic] kind in England" (1938, p.1) and ends with her imagined death on its doorstep. Prior to the following quote, it is useful to note that the em dashes and ellipses are characteristic marks of Cope's style and do not indicate any partial quotations or editing on my part.

Let us now pretend I never did leave my home, - and leave me there, - more than a year and six months ago, - caressing the ancient cold stone of the walls that enclosed my ancestors for nearly two hundred [sic] & fifty years. . . . And now I float, - ever onwards into the blue grey mist of the dim unknown. . . . (p.149).

Rather than writing of her new life beyond Bramshill, Cope instead inters her body within the estate. Not only does this suggest both an ending to her girlhood and it also serves to reinforce a theme of the entombed feminine throughout her memoirs. There is nothing beyond Bramshill, all dies beyond the boundary of the estate, and women die more than most.

Joan Cope was not the only young author to be published in a mainstream context prior to World War Two although she was, perhaps, one of the more prominent in terms of non-fiction. In terms of fiction, the work of Pamela Brown is of interest. Brown wrote *The Swish of the Curtain* (1941)⁷ which was "a novel by a juvenile, and for juveniles... [and]

⁷ At time of writing, this had been recently republished in 2018 by Pushkin Press and I came across several high street bookshops stocking this edition. Copies of historic reprints were also easily available online.

about them” (McMaster, 2018, p.48⁸). It tells the story of a group of children who set up the Blue Door Theatre in their local town. They are a talented group with strengths in acting, music, dance, costume, and set design, and put on several plays throughout the story. A subplot involves the tension between their obvious talents and the more traditional careers envisaged for them by their parents. This tension is resolved when the children win a local amateur dramatics competition and prove their abilities, thus unlocking the future of their dreams:

‘We’ve won!’

‘We go to dramatic school!’

‘We go on the stage!’

‘We make the Blue Doors professional!’

‘We build a theatre for Fenchester!’

‘We’ve realised our ambitions!’ (Brown, 1998, p.285)

Not only was this a deeply mature ending for the novel which both recognised the inevitable impact of adulthood upon the children and their ambitions⁹, it was also one that symbolised something of Brown’s intent for the text. The story of the Blue Door Theatre Company would

⁸It is useful to note that McMaster’s phrasing here is influenced by the slogan of two other young authors, Katherine Hull and Pamela Whitlock. As Arthur Ransome writes in the introduction to *The Far-Distant Oxus* (1937), Brown and Whitlock’s “slogan” was “By children, about children, for children” (12). Ransome goes on to reflect with some pained honesty that they could have added “Do without the grown-up author altogether” (p13).

⁹ When I read *The Swish of the Curtain* I was reminded very much of KM Peyton’s *Sabre, the Horse from the Sea* (1948). This was written when Peyton was fifteen years old and published under her maiden name of Herald. It tells the story of a young girl who, one day, discovers a horse emerging from the sea. The subject matter is vastly different from Brown’s and yet tonally, the texts are very similar and both authors write with a palpable confidence. It is perhaps unsurprising that both Brown and Peyton’s authorial careers persisted with some success into their adulthood.

be a series and indeed, Brown wrote several sequels as she entered adulthood: *Maddy Alone* (1945), *Golden Pavements* (1947), *Blue Door Venture* (1949) and *Maddy Again* (1956).

One of the key figures within *The Swish of the Curtain* is the Bishop of Fenchester who, after attending one of the children's performances, becomes friends with them. He takes the whole group to a local Shakespeare festival and, when the children discuss a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, interjects with his own opinion:

Here the bishop interposed, more sternly than they had ever heard him speak before.

'As neither of you knows anything about love, or how Shakespeare meant his plays to be acted, don't you consider this argument rather futile?' (p.159).

Despite the children's theatrical experience and the "vivid faithfulness" in which Brown recounts their adventures (Watson, p.60), the bishop sees their knowledge about *Romeo and Juliet* as illegitimate. Adulthood's the thing here: despite carrying out "furtive acts of cultural appropriation" and "raids on adult knowledge" (McMaster, 1998, p.307), the bishop argues that a true understanding of *Romeo and Juliet* is impossible without the accompanying real world experience. This boundary about knowledge is no new thing to juvenilia, and even moreso when it comes to issues of love and romance. Juliet McMaster writes, for example, that "sexuality is adult territory, and we guard it and representations of it, jealously." (1998, p.300). Authors such as Daisy Ashford and their explicit consideration of romance were a conundrum: it was "impossible to know where, or whether the young author's insouciance ever shades into a self-conscious archness" (Watson, 2000, p.55) and some reactions were markedly cruel: "After Daisy Ashford's brothers laughed at the story that she considered her masterpiece, she wrote no more" (McMaster, 1998, p. 300). Young authors needed to tread their realms of knowledge with care and make sure that they did not move into any territory

that “adults have declared out of bounds to “nice” children” (p.307). It is no surprise then that when the bishop makes his remarks in *The Swish of the Curtain*, he is offered a swift capitulation:

‘Sorry, Bishop’ smiled Lyn. ‘We didn’t mean to be ungrateful. It’s been the most perfect day of my life’ (p.159).

Whilst this seems to be an affirmation of adult authority, it is one of a temporary nature. The children’s next performance is at a charity fete and comprises of various scenes from Shakespeare. Two children perform the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* and in the audience, sits the bishop.

The bishop sighed contentedly. For the first time in his life he was seeing *Romeo and Juliet* at their correct ages, and he knew that by taking them to the Shakespeare Festival he had been instrumental in bringing this about” (p.199).

Here *The Swish of the Curtain* proposes a kinship between adult and child where knowledge no longer becomes the rigidly enforced province of one to the exclusion of the other but rather a mutually shared endeavour. This is a sophisticated and deeply mature piece of writing.

The Swish of the Curtain and its subsequent adaptations proved so popular that they helped to fund Brown’s education at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) (McMaster, 2019, p.53) and also inspired others towards a career in the arts such as the actress Maggie Smith and the comedian Victoria Wood (Brandwood, 2011, p.34). For Brown, her later career as a radio and television producer had a parallel with that of Lyn in

The Swish of the Curtain and her childhood writing came to influence adult projects of her own (McMaster, 2019, p.56). For McMaster, this was not “Life worked into writing” but rather “Writing worked into life” (2019, p.53). As she writes:

We might call *The Swish of the Curtain* the castle in the air that Brown, through the course of her career, managed to turn solid (2019, p.60).

2.3.2 A Ghost Visits Her Old School by Bridget Shevlin

Eight years after the original publication of *The Swish of the Curtain* (Brown, 1941), a girl called Bridget Shevlin wrote a short story called: *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (1949). Her story sees a ghost experience a day at their old boarding school and reflect upon how it has changed since their own schooldays. Just over sixty years later, I would find it in the archive of a local convent, and former single-sex boarding school, and decide to make it the central text in my PhD study about the creative writing of young girls.

In many senses, this sounds more straightforward than it was. Finding *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* required protracted effort. I searched a wide range of archival holdings in the local area to find a story which was written by a young girl and dealt with themes of identity and gender. I cast a broad net with these searches and yet on the rare occasions that I did find juvenilia, it was often too thematically slender or brief to sustain a full length academic study let alone depict any of the themes that I was interested in. I eventually found *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* in the archives of the Bar Convent, York and this study marks the first appearance of it in an academic context. The archive at the Bar Convent is open by arrangement and holds ecumenical material relating to the convent such as its congregational affiliations to the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (commonly abbreviated as IBVM), the

Reverend Mother's correspondence with notable religious figures and the other houses in their order, alongside more personal, lived detail about everyday life at the convent such as bills for building alterations, household accounts and other financial papers. It may seem like an unusual collection to target but I was also aware that the convent had functioned as a girls' school for a substantial part of its history. Items in the archives such as the logbooks of the day school (1891-1924), the school diary (1907-1945) and copies of the school magazine suggested that I might find some creative writing written by a young person and for that to also have some potentially familiar themes for contemporary young people to read about.

A Ghost Visits Her Old School was published in the Christmas 1949 issue of the Bar Convent school magazine alongside creative work from other students. Bridget's story takes up one page and, as with the other pieces, includes her name and form. Although her age was not explicitly mentioned, there were contextual clues towards how old she may be, not in the least her membership of Upper II – one of the youngest forms at a then well-established grammar school. There did exist the slim possibility that 'Bridget Shevlin' may have been a pseudonym for an adult author parodying a younger style, but I felt confident in ruling this out due to the piece being published in the Christmas 1949 issue of the school magazine and labelled with the author's name and form details. Additionally, as Stephanie Spencer reminds us, school magazines were often heavily curated spaces to reflect the best of the school's output (2000); this was not an obvious space for parody. In light of these clues, I approximated Bridget's age range as being somewhere around ten or eleven years old. I was conscious that she may be slightly older or younger than this but felt it was a realistic point to begin with.

The publication of *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* coincided with some of the post-war sense of realism in children's literature. This period saw an "aesthetic of transformation" (Reynolds, 2016, p.9) where children's literature begin to explore its potential to make

change upon society and move away from the Rosean ideas of it being a “cultural safe-house” (p.5). The impact of the Second World War had shown that such a cultural safe-house no longer existed or, if it did, then it was about to be remade. *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* captures this sense of transformation and remaking in how it juxtaposes the familiar and historic experience of the ghost with that of a new generation of pupils. The girls drink “wonderful little bottles of milk” (Shevlin, 1949) in their break, an authorial nod to the impact of the Provision of Free Milk Regulations (1946), while policewomen direct the traffic on the street outside of the convent.

A Ghost Visits Her Old School also hints at the impact of the feminine middlebrow (Humble, 2001) upon literary culture. The feminine middlebrow is a cross-genre literary movement (p.4) which plays “a significant role in the negotiation of new class and gender identities” (p.5). It is concerned with domesticity, interiority and with the lived trivia of women’s lives (p.6) and uses this detail to challenge and question a woman’s identity and role within society. These discussions often centred about the middle class women who wrote and read these titles. Much of the feminine middlebrow can be found in Shevlin’s writing, not in the least her concern for the detail of female lives. The girls go to “jim” [sic], and police “WOMEN” [sic] work outside. The overall impression is of a narrator working to understand their position within the world and of an author engaged in a similar endeavour.

2.3.3 Summary

In this section, I offered a brief history of young girls who write. This history focused on the authors and texts that held a particular relevance to this study. I began in the early twentieth century by considering the impact of the “new girl” (Mitchell, 1995) upon children’s literature before discussing the experience of other young authors published in and

about this period. I argued that JM Barrie’s foreword to *The Young Visitors* [Ashford, 1919] demonstrated how adults could react to and perpetuate meaning upon juvenilia. I then considered *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949), a central text in this study, and contextualized it within the wider literary trends of the feminine middlebrow (Humble, 2001). I concluded that many of the trends discussed within this section continued to impact the experience of young authors today.

2.4 Creative Writing Education

“... well the teacher's usually written an example which he shows us or he shows us a powerpoint on - yeah - how to write it.”

(Lines 25-26, interview with Rey, 4th November 2020)

In this section, I review the literature about creative writing education in the primary school classroom. Although circumstances led to this study taking place outside of the classroom, the participants spoke at length about their experience of creative writing within school and how this had influenced their practice. Furthermore the National Curriculum picks out writing as a specific target for the Key Stage Two age group: pupils must continue to develop “their facility as writers,” and “taught to enhance the effectiveness of their writing as well as their competence” (Department for Education, 2013, p. 21). This review looks to examine, then, how creative writing is taught to young students and the role that juvenilia plays within that process.

I begin this section at the time that Bridget Shevlin wrote *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (1949) before moving towards more contemporary material. I show how juvenilia was briefly considered as exemplar material for students within the classroom before considering the intersections between creative writing and feminism. A key part of my discussion here looks at how to reconcile a feminist methodology with research in practice. I then discuss the literature about the tools and methods of teaching creative writing and the inclusions and exclusions that they bring to the classroom, before finally discussing the experience of contemporary Key Stage Two students.

The quote which opens this section comes from Rey's interview. We had been speaking about how creative writing was taught in her school and I had asked her to elaborate on this. I was interested as to how she was taught and the methods that the teachers used. Rey's response illustrated the paradoxical demands of creative writing within the classroom, namely how the discipline can ask for creativity on the part of the student whilst also directing them towards something of an expected and controllable response. This tension between autonomy and freedom, particularly for the Key Stage Two student, is something that this section picks up on and that my findings and analysis subsequently support.

2.4.1 Creative writing within the classroom

In 1964 AB Clegg, the Chief Educational Officer of the West Riding of Yorkshire, published a book of best practice for young writers. *The Excitement of Writing* contained creative work written by pupils that Clegg had come across in his career and was intended to provide inspiration to other young writers. This was a rare example of child authored work being positioned as a source of legitimate critical interest for both other pupils and educators. Clegg was careful, however, to add a caveat. This was not work for students to simply copy

and claim as their own; students were meant to see techniques and methods in practice for them to subsequently adopt in their own work. As my literature review continued, I came to realise just how radical a treatment this was for juvenilia within the classroom.

An Approach to Creative Writing in the Primary School (Lane and Kemp, 1967) demonstrates a much more common approach towards juvenilia. Here the work of young authors is something which can be displayed within the educational environment but not used as exemplar material nor understood in a literary sense. Lane and Kemp acknowledge that children's writing must be shown and displayed so that they can "feel a sense of achievement" (p.113) but, when it comes to literature to use within the lesson itself, their recommendation is "our traditional heritage of rhymes and stories" (p.52). They continue: students must go "beach-combing on Tom Tiddler's ground" (p.52), a phrase drawn from Walter de la Mare and Charles Dickens amongst others, and learn how to recognise "really worthwhile" literature. This idea of worthwhile literature is something that Meredith Rogers Cherland also addresses in her later study of the reading habits of Canadian girls. She writes about how "impossible it is to establish and compare the 'worth' of different fictional works" (p.199) and how the idea of worth is simply the reproduction of "prevailing power structures" (p.199). For Lane and Kemp, traditional and "worthwhile" literature is that which is written by white adult males, predominantly from a Western background, and already familiar to the reader.

Both *The Excitement of Writing* and *An Approach To Creative Writing* indicate some of the differing approaches towards creative writing and juvenilia in the classroom in the 1960s. Robert Protherough argues that this decade saw an emphasis on binaries. Creative writing education was orientated towards the "creative or factual" (1983, p.55), with teachers focusing on one or the other. The seventies then saw the "the rejection of the notion that any

one model could be universally applicable” (p.57). Teaching in the eighties required a different approach:

Perhaps instead of asking “Can writing be taught?” we should be asking “Can teachers help children to become writers?” (p.16)

Protherough does not see juvenilia as part of this equation. He acknowledges that “We could perhaps make more use than we do of children’s work for modelling” (p.109) but moves instead towards more adult-authored and conventional material as stimulus (p.125). He also acknowledges one of the key themes in this literature review, which is that students write “what they imagine the *teacher* required of them” (p.107) rather than what they, themselves, wish to produce.

More contemporary educators of creative writing return to or reify many of the themes that have been already discussed in this chapter. Jane Considine argues that young writers must read the “best books as models” in order to be successful in their writing (p.38). Here Considine directs teachers towards “good, significant and classic authors” (p.38) and argues that it is

our duty as teachers to assure these authors that we invest time in their work and care about their craft, their artistry and the importance of their themes.

I would suggest that a key omission from this statement is the idea of age. It is clear that Considine’s interest focuses upon adult authors and indeed, the majority of authors that she references in terms of prompt material and lesson planning are adult and established presences within the world of children’s literature. Yet the writing of young people does

feature elsewhere in Considine's work. She argues that "big displays" of writing shows students that their work is valued (p.39) but caveats that the content of such a display must also meet "the writing criteria" (2016, p.40). She then shows how the writing of young people can illustrate the success of particular teaching methods and includes several sample pieces in her argument. This work "depicts the progress" of the relevant pupils (p.330) and illustrates how students can write at a "higher level" due to her proposed teaching methods (p.336). This is juvenilia referenced in a manner similar to Barrs and Cork (2002) where, in many senses, the identity of the authors or their experience as authors becomes effaced. What matters here is not the author's identity as a young person but rather how their work matches up to an educational rubric.

2.4.2 Creative writing education and feminist theory

Feminist scholars of creative writing found interest in the dynamic between student and teacher and began to ask what would happen if an educator promoted non-normative texts in their teaching. Helen Harper felt that there was an opportunity to "offer young women an alternative means of connection to literary culture, with different constructs and identificatory moments" (1992, p.221). If a student accessed these alternative cultures then they would have the opportunity to question and disrupt the established norms about them. Harper's study saw her select a range of feminist texts "written by women for women" (p.222) which she then shared with a group of high-school students. The reaction of the participants was complex, and as Lane and Kemp might have it "catholic" (1967, p.52): "the young women read the work and the approach as 'radically' feminist, and this was simply unpalatable [for them]" (Harper, 1992, p.222). Rather than using the lesson as an opportunity to explore their "'dangerous' desires" (p.227), namely those feelings and desires that do not

accord to the school's established ways of thinking, the participants rejected both the texts and the associated teaching. As Harper notes, the participants made "strong efforts to avoid naming or referencing gender even when it seemed appropriate to do so" (p.222). Harper argues that this reaction was directly connected to their idea of identity. The feminist texts of her study had "exposed and threatened [their] intellectual and affective investments in particular understandings of the self" (p.222).

In a later book-length study on the project: *High School Girls and Feminist Avant-Garde Writing*, Harper goes so far to refer to her study as a "failure" (2000). She writes that the participants' refusal to engage with the feminist literature was an effort to reinforce the heteronormative discourse about them. Harper's work indicates how a creative writing project may use feminist literature and methodology within an educational context and how such a project may fail. I talk further on failure in my methodology chapter, but dwell here on how it is characterised within Harper's study. I would suggest that rather than being a failure, her research generated notable engagement and activity. In some senses, it could also be argued that the participant's responses were radical acts of resistance because they disrupted and questioned the power structures being proposed to them.

In Leigh Hall's study of struggling readers, silence and detachment were adopted by the students as an act of resistance (2007). Hall worked with three students who were recognised as having difficulties with their reading and were placed in remedial literacy classes as a result. The student's silence and lack of engagement in these classes was an act of control and self-protection about their identity. Engagement would "compromise the identity that [the students were] trying to protect or promote" (p.138) and result in them visibly accepting the identity of being a "poor" reader.

Silence can also be enforced upon students when educators do not use representative literature. Tanya Manning-Lewis' study of the Caribbean English classroom shows how the

voices of young male writers are silenced due to a lack of representation in their reading (2019). In the evocatively named *I Hate Writing ...*, she argues that graphic novels which accurately depict the language and vocabulary of the students, rather than the heightened and formal rhetoric of the classroom, may fill this gap. S.R. Toliver similarly recognises that silence can be enforced upon students due to a culture which does not value nor represent their voices. Young girls of colour who write must grapple with a world which “consistently reiterates that Black stories, hopes, and dreams are meaningless” (2021, p.106). Toliver argues that educators must make “space for Black girls to excavate their pasts and presents and write about possible futures” (p.104).

For Donna Haraway, creative writing can be most productively understood as a “freedom project” (qtd. in Olson, 1995, p.2). This is a process which she comes to describe as “cyborg writing” (p.5). Cyborg writing foregrounds the

...apparatus of the production of its own authority, even while it's doing it. It's not eschewing authority, but it's insisting on a kind of double move, a foregrounding of the apparatus of the production of bodies, powers, meanings. (qtd. in Olson, 1996, p.5).

Building on the practice of Cixous’ *écriture féminine*, as previously discussed in this chapter, Haraway argues that writing should understand both its context of production but also the power structures that impacted upon that context (Olson, 1996, p.1). By making these authorities and the knowledge structures that they bring with them (Haraway, qtd. in Olson, 1996, p.14), writing, and in particular the work of women writers, can then repurpose the “tools that marked them as other” (p.5) to use them to tell a “truly new story” (p.10). This new story creates new knowledge and power structures by focusing on the dynamics and

inter-relationships between women. It refuses to conceptually inherit “the name of the father again and again and again” (p.10).

Scholars of creative writing have responded to the political legacies of creative writing in a number of ways, most notably by questioning the knowledge and political motivations behind the subject (Adsit, 2018). The teaching apparatus of creative writing can make notable assumptions about the students that it supports and those it does not (see Toliver, 2021; Moje, 2000; Ginn, 2021; Smitherman and Thompson, 2002 amongst others). Participating in a creative writing workshop, for example, requires certain forms of knowledge. Students must be able to reflect critically upon creative work with peers, to express that critique to others and to receive similar feedback themselves. Students without these skills or confidence can be excluded and silenced (Praitis, 2006; Diners, 1996). Similarly the “just-do-it” bent of the creative writing handbook can ask for an unrealistic passivity and docility amongst students which runs contrary to the idea of creative writing itself (Westbrook, 2004). Students who perform a “counterscript” within the classroom (Gutierrez et.al., 1995), namely an identity which diverges from the established normatives of behaviour and communication therein, are further disenfranchised (Toliver, 2021, p.96; Moje, 2000; Ginn, 2021).

Yet it is striking that certain models of teaching creative writing persist and in turn, help to influence new ones. One such example is the creative writing workshop which gave rise to the idea of an educator and student *workshopping* a text. This is an intimate and collaborative effort which aims to highlight potential edits and improvements to the student’s creative work. Marion Crowhurst dubs these discussions writing conferences (1993, p.59) and offers some principles for educators to adopt therein. They should ask open-ended questions, be prepared to listen and reflect back the student’s concerns, and recognise the impossibility of discussing everything in one session (p.61). Nancie Atwell argues that

conferencing helps students to handle their developing knowledge of the subject but also in developing the related skills of peer review and critical thought (2015, p.245).

Conferencing can benefit the educator as much as the student, provided that the former is able and willing to perform a new identity within an educational context. In his discussion of poets teaching within the classroom, Daniel Xerri argues that teachers should “position themselves as teacher-poets” (2017, p.132) in order to maximise learning. Teacher-poets are teachers who are also students, learning to write poetry as much as their peers are. The teacher-poet is able to receive feedback and conference their own work with others and in doing so demonstrate a positive representation of creativity within their classroom (p.134). Ross Young and Felicity Ferguson argue for something similar in their idea of “writer-teachers” (2021, p.23). Here, being a writer-teacher requires teachers to share their writing with others and show “apprentice” writers (p.16) how to address any creative problems or hiccups encountered.

Tom Dobson and Lisa Stephenson explore the connections between identity and communities of creative practice in their work. They argue that “as actors in figured worlds, we take on the roles that are available to us” (2017, p.162) and that a student’s identity “might undergo change as a result of engagement in creative writing” (p.138). In one study, they delivered a creative writing program to twenty-five primary school students from lower-socio economic backgrounds. The program lasted for two weeks, was held on a university campus, and centred on *The Savage* (Almond, 2008). This is an illustrated text concerned with otherness and wilderness and centres upon the experiences of a bereaved young boy. Dobson and Stephenson suggested that by being in a group of writers and understood as performing the identity of writers (p.162), the students of their study were able to “harness” their identity as writers (p.163). This is a theme which Dobson returns to elsewhere, most specifically in his work with Year 6 boys (2015). Here he argues for creative writing as

“identity work” and that it allows “the possibility of different participations within different figured worlds and different identities to perform” (p.51).

The impetus to explore these new worlds should rest with the writer. Young and Ferguson argue that children should be allowed to write about “the things they are interested in” (2021, p.25) because if educators do not “let children write for themselves, we miss out on knowing them as writers” (p.75). This connects to an earlier point within the literature by Anne Haas Dyson who argues that children not only construct ideas about what they know but also “with” what they know (1999, p.253). Young writers can use their writing as an opportunity for “reconfiguring, rearranging, rearticulating, and collaboratively constructing new contexts for actions” (p.354). The writer is able to then use this “frame of reference” to reflect upon “salient aspects of old practices” (p.362). By asking young authors to not write about the things that interest them, these students are denied the chance to share these interests with an audience and also the opportunity for self-reflexive and critically productive writing.

2.4.3 The influence of the classroom environment

Myranda Jenkins argues that the literacy rich classroom should “empower readers and writers” and develop “supportive teacher-child relationships” (p.56). Students should be able to access a wide range of texts in this space that they can then use to explore, discuss, and “try on” new approaches (p.57). The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education report on *Writing in Primary Schools: What We Know Works* (2018) argues for something similar: children must have a breadth of texts both visual and digital within the classroom, the chance to share their writing with readers, and the opportunity to read quality texts that are rich in

vocabulary and allow young readers to comprehend something which is “beyond their own reading fluency level” (2018).

A positive and constructive literary environment can also be established through temporary interventions across the school. Big Writing proposes a collective session of school-wide writing in an atmosphere that “supports both concentration and creativity” (Andrell, n.d). In one school I attended prior to this study, the educators lit candles within the classroom and had classical music playing throughout the building. Although the students carried out their work independently in their own classroom, the program created a recognizable and communal moment of writing throughout the school.

Yet despite these efforts, there remains something of a crisis about creative writing in primary education. Both boys and girls can express an “indifference to writing in Years 5/6” (Grainger et al., 2003, p.2), writing in Key Stages One and Two is “currently the subject with the worst performance compared to reading, maths and science” (Considine, 2016, p.6), a pronounced gender gap continues to make itself felt in terms of results: girls were “more likely to consider themselves as good writers in comparison to boys” (Department for Education, 2012, p.5), and students from disadvantaged backgrounds are “20% less likely than their peers to reach the expected standards in reading, writing and maths...” (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021, p.4). A research gap also exists about creative writing within the Key Stage Two classroom: there is little “evidence on specific interventions to help pupils with writing” (Department for Education, 2012, p.6) and a general lack of scholarly attention paid to writing in general (p.7) although more modern scholars such as Ross Young and Felicity Ferguson (2021) offer something of a counter to that narrative.

One reason for the indifference of Key Stage Two students towards writing may be ascribed to their desire for autonomy (Grainger et al, 2003, p.2). Although Grainger’s study identified this as a factor across both boys and girls, other scholars have explored the issue of

agency from a gender perspective. In her multi-year study of *The Pink Voice*, an online journal published between 2002 and 2006, Sarah Jane Twomey considers how the writers approached the “experiences of being a ‘girl’ subject” (2011, p.795). She created three categories for her data: connections, difficult knowledge, and becoming girl. Twomey argues for “girlhood as connection” (p.799) and shows how the participants found value in navigating the “tensions between the concept of autonomy and relationality” (p.799). By arguing for these writers as agentic individuals, able to work through “difficult knowledge” (p.803) at their own pace whilst being able to access collective knowledge and support, Twomey charts a movement between independence and collectivism. The findings of this study illustrate something of a similar movement.

2.4.4 Summary

In this section, I reviewed the literature concerned with teaching creative writing in the classroom. I began with a selection of texts that were indicative of the educational approach that students like Bridget Shevlin would have experienced at the time before moving towards the present day. I argued that as much as contemporary educators sought to include students, they could also exclude and minoritise others. I then discussed how scholars had begun to unpack the power structures and politics behind creative writing and in particular, how feminist scholars had sought to disrupt these normatives. I concluded by arguing that despite such efforts towards inclusion, creative writing for Key Stage Two students was experiencing something of a crisis in terms of participation and enjoyment. I suggested that one of the reasons for this may be the increased search for autonomy on the part of students and recognised that this study showed something similar.

2.4.5 Impact on study

This section of the literature review illustrated how rarely child authored work is used as a point of reference within the creative writing curriculum, let alone found value in as a literary object, and I sought to address that by positioning it as central to my study. In doing this, I hoped to counter the absence of juvenilia from the literature about creative writing and offer a new contribution to knowledge. This section also hinted at one of the key findings of this study, namely the desire for autonomy for Key Stage Two students.

2.5 Chapter Summary

“I thought about all of the things I saw and pieced them together.”

(Extract from Pink Paw’s story, written 16th October 2020)

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature as it applies towards the three key strands of this project: the child, the child-as author, and creative writing education within the primary school classroom. I looked at scholarly literature from girlhood studies, children’s literature and feminist theory whilst also using ideas from new materialism. I adopted this approach in order to recognize not only the interdisciplinary nature of this project but also the interdisciplinary state of creative writing itself.

One of the most pronounced themes to emerge from this chapter was the search for theoretical tools which could move away from restrictive binaries, calcified politics and heteronormative ways of thinking. Irrespective of discipline and period, researchers have used these new tools to understand the girl not as monolith but rather as a culturally and temporally specific many-voiced phenomenon.

A second theme of this chapter centred on literary culture. Often historically denied a position at the high literary table of adulthood, young writers have created their own literary counter-cultures with their own networks of circulation and readership and done so with some notable success. More contemporary scholarship has sought to question this division between adult and child, often enforced by the former, by proposing readings of mutuality and kinship.

The third was one of identity. The relationship between creative writing as identity work is well-established and scholars have paid comprehensive attention to understanding which identities are featured in this relationship and those which are not. Part of this process has involved questioning the methods in how creative writing is taught, the implicit assumptions that they make of their student, and their ability to silence and disenfranchise those who do not conform. In the next chapter, I continue this discussion by turning towards the issue of methodology and research design.

3 Methodology and Research Design

“... So far I'm on chapter six? Seven? Fifteen thousand? I don't know.”

(Line 83, Ruby Redfort's interview).

In this chapter, I discuss how my methodology was realised and then subsequently adapted due to the impact of COVID-19. I begin by defining my approach as a feminist researcher and outline the practical and theoretical implications of working under that lens. I then describe the impact of COVID-19 upon the project and show how this required a series of modifications alongside a consideration of the project's potential failure and indeed what failure might mean in this context. I show how the flexible and innovative framework of feminist research supported this project to adapt under extraordinary circumstances and understand what it meant to research within a pandemic.

After this, I outline the project as delivered. I begin with the processes of finding and selecting a child authored text to use as a prompt text before then discussing my experience of using virtual snowball sampling on social media to recruit participants. I offer a stage by stage review of the creative writing workshop before then reviewing the follow up semi-structured interview. As part of this discussion, I integrate the experiences of three participants who experienced anxiety and discomfort at various points within the process and offer some explanation as to why this may have occurred. Finally, I recognise the impact of COVID-19 and note the modifications it required throughout.

The quote which opens this chapter comes from Ruby Redfort's interview. We were discussing some of the books she had read and she spoke about a title by Lauren Child, part of the series from which she had taken her pseudonym from, and how she had begun to read it but was not sure where she was. I use it here to indicate something similar in the research

design: it had begun but, due to the impact of COVID-19, experienced a period of substantial doubt.

3.1 Summary of research

This is a qualitative study comprising of two key stages: a creative writing workshop and a follow up semi-structured interview. I adopt a constructivist approach throughout, that is to say I understand the knowledge represented here and within the data as a constructed act which draws upon and responds to the experiences of the individual. This knowledge is subjective, rather than objective, and can be potentially fallible in nature. I also consider this study as a piece of feminist research, namely a piece of work which adopts a feminist methodology in how it represents and discusses the experience of young girls and how it hopes for its knowledge to create positive social outcomes.

3.2 Defining Feminist Research

I begin by discussing my definition of this project as a feminist piece of research. I instinctively characterised it as feminist despite it seeming somewhat tautological to do so. I was, after all, concerned with the writing of young girls and how that represented their experience of girlhood and whether their writing could provide an opportunity to reconsider the idea of girlhood itself, be led in that understanding by the girls themselves. I was also interested in what the creative writing of young girls could teach others about the experience of being girl. I was an author of children's literature whose novels specifically focused upon

the lives and learning of young girls, and a collector of children's literature who had a specific interest in girl's boarding school stories. I had a longstanding interest in both the representation and experience of being girl within children's literature and an increasing concern for the experience of the female author, so often marginalised in the books that I collected. Under such circumstances, how could this research project be considered as anything other than feminist?

By adopting this reflexive starting point which worked to understand where I was coming from as much as where I was going, I was adhering to Shulamit Reinharz's thinking about feminist research. I had thought about my own political and ideological stances and considered how that perspective may influence that research (1992, p.6). I had recognised my standpoint as a white, western woman and the limitations of that perspective. My positioning within society meant that I also had a level of privilege in using the term of feminist and in applying it to my research.

However, the assertion that this piece of research is feminist does not necessarily make it so. Donna Haraway reminds us that the naming of experience is a "totalizing and imperialist" totality (2016, p.52) which works to erase differences and multi-vocality. Haraway asks for researchers to take responsibility in the language that they use within their work and to take "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and ... responsibility in their construction" (2016, p.7). This is not "theory-building in the traditional sense, but world imploding and diffraction" (Grebowicz and Merrick, 2013, p.15). Haraway asks scholars to consider the loaded implications of the terms that they use and to consider the role that meaning plays within their work.

An additional factor for feminist researchers is academia itself and specifically the impact of systems such as the Research Excellent Framework (REF). The REF assigns a value to the research output of academics and loads those published in certain journals with

better marks than others. Under the rubric of the REF, and indeed the other rubrics of the neoliberal university, academic journals which describe themselves as feminist and who actively look for feminist material may not be considered as “top tier” (Dankosi, 2000, p.7) spaces to publish in. Researchers who require more points may choose or be required to publish their research elsewhere. Feminist research can also be found in spaces which do not explicitly label themselves as feminist, whilst the researcher themselves may be unable or unwilling to claim for their work as feminist.

Shulamit Reinharz acknowledges this when defining the criteria for feminist research. She argues that it can construct alternative ways of knowing which exist outside of established theoretical hobbles and labels (1992). Mary Dankosi proposes some useful additions to these criteria: an interrogation of research questions, the theoretical context of the study, the methodology applied, the ethical considerations, and finally the “importance or significance of the results for advancing a feminist agenda” (Dankosi, 2000, p.7). Here Dankosi argues for a type of feminist approach which looks to question “power balances not based solely on gender, but also on sexuality, race, class, and therapist/client relationships” (2000, p.17).

As a feminist researcher, I look to safely facilitate the stories of my participants whilst also enabling those participants to shape and construct their stories in the ways that they consider necessary and relevant. Furthermore, I also work to enable that process of construction to occur without judgement or censure and within a safe space. Accordingly, I adopt the criteria that Dankosi proposes and thus understand my research as feminist because it looks to question and interrogate the systems of power about the young girl who writes whilst also exposing the paradoxical demands that those systems place upon her body.

3.2.1 Practical applications of Feminist Research

In this section, I outline some of the more visible signs of my feminist approach throughout this thesis, ranging from terminology through to personal choices in vocabulary and referencing. I use people's full names upon their initial mention (Reinharz, 1992, p.16) before using their surname in subsequent mentions. Adopting this convention not only allows a level of visibility for the sources cited in this research but also the opportunity to interrogate the gender representation in the structures of knowledge I refer to. The naming of references can also position the marginalised voice as an active and vital part of the research process (Dankosi, 2000, p.17). Whilst some of this is already standard practice, I find value in making my decisions explicit here.

In addition to naming my references in full, I also refer to the girls who participated in this study as participants (Leavy and Harris, 2019). Referring to them as participants reflects not only my urge to recognise and thank them for their collaboration but also my attempts to resist and challenge the power structures embedded within research. As Vanessa Joosen notes, such positions of power are easily assumed. She writes about one study where she, the adult, “handed out the prompts, asked the questions and sometimes also gave some background information ... [to] some extent, this put the children in a subordinate role” (p.3). (It is also useful to note here that Joosen writes about “children” rather than “participants”). Some of these issues were removed with the digital pivot and describing the girls who took part in this study as participants felt like a productive movement towards questioning some of the issues which remained. In addition to this, I was conscious that I had not asked the participants to refer to myself as an adult. Indeed, I had not introduced myself as anything other than my forename. Referring to them as children would have been an expression of

unearned and unwarranted authority and a movement away from the mutuality and kinship I had sought to establish throughout the study.

Confirmation of consent was sought from both the participants and their responsible adults at the start of the project and on an ongoing basis throughout (Kirsch, 2005, p.2168). The participants were told that they could back out at any point without prejudice. I also sought permission to record and provided both participant and adult with tailored information sheets prior to their enrolment. At any point of emotional distress for the participants, a phenomenon I consider later in this chapter, confirmation of consent was also looked for before continuing. Whilst these acts may simply be indicative of general ethical research practice, I see them as feminist here due to their cumulative intent to empower the participant.

Creating information sheets for the participants required a consideration for language because, as Patti Lather writes, the politics of accessible language can bring something of a “violence of clarity” (1996, p.529). Here Lather considers the differences between academic and non-academic language and asks what it takes to write a “tidy” text which “maps easily into our usual ways of making sense” (p.529). She argues that this search for clarity and accessibility can, conversely, reinforce a “binary between so-called “plain speaking” and complex writing” (p.528). In scripting the information sheets, I decided to retain academic vocabulary but pair these moments with a clarifying sentence or further context. In describing what “data” was, for example, I wrote that:

“...this means the things we will talk about and the story you will write”.

Similarly, in describing what may happen to the participant’s data, I wrote:

“The data that I collect [photographs of work produced, audio interviews and video recordings] will be used in an anonymous [sic] format in my research in a potential of different ways. This means that I could quote part of your story or something that you said in my thesis, a conference paper, an academic article, and / or in an oral presentation, but there will be no information that will let people know who said or wrote it.”

It will be noted here that I speak of using data in the singular, i.e.: “a conference paper, an academic article...” etc., rather than the plural, i.e.: “conference papers, academic articles...”. This was a deliberate decision and one which related to my efforts to simultaneously occupy and resist the position of researcher. I was conscious that I would be working with this material for some time and in depth and yet wished to build in limitations and checks upon that usage. I wanted to think very particularly about each time I used this data and about whether it was appropriate or indeed necessary to do so at the point of usage. Such checks were all part of my attempt to simultaneously resist and occupy an evaluative position and all of its associated dynamics of power.

I also took advantage of the customisation options that the video-conferencing software provided and built in several moments for the participants to assume positions of power. When it came to writing their story they could decide whether to switch their camera off, turn their microphone off, apply a filter of their choice, or log off the call entirely and call back when they were ready. One participant took the opportunity here to write for several hours, a situation unthinkable within a classroom context, and ended up calling me back in the evening of the same day. All but one participant had free choice in this area and this was only due to technological issues. My unstable internet connection with Pink Paw made me ask her to write in private and then send me a message when she was done. The digital shift

allowed the participants to craft a writing environment to suit them, rather than face the potentially daunting endeavour of writing in the classroom with an in-person supervisor.

After the completion of the interview, I transcribed the interview and returned a copy of this to the participants. I asked them to read and check what I had written. I told them that they were welcome to reword, delete or edit anything in the transcript that they wished to change or amend. As Gesa Kirsch writes “Participants may forget - or repress - the knowledge that what they are sharing is being recorded and will later be analysed and published in some form or another” (2005, p.2164). Returning the transcripts to the participants allowed an opportunity for them to regain control over their words and thoughts and to indeed, amend them or rework them if they felt happier in doing so. This was another point in the research to reinforce my commitment to Marah Gubar’s kinship model. As she writes, when a researcher puts this model into practice they “emphasize that children, like adults, are human beings.” (2013, p.453). She continues:

It is dehumanizing and potentially disabling to say that a human being has no voice, or no agency. This model therefore holds that we should not regard even the tiniest infant as entirely voiceless or non-agential (p.453).

The participants in my study were individual, smart and unique people. Some of them spoke more than others, some asked questions directly of me during our time together whilst others mentioned them at one session and not another, and others still sent questions through their adults for me to answer via email. Factoring in moments within my research design to ensure that the participant’s agency was respected and to recognise the “privilege of asking them about their lives” (Watts, 2006, p.387) seemed vital. Not only did it allow the participants to tell me what they wanted to tell me in the way they wanted it to be told, but they were also

able to retract anything they needed to retract or reword it in an appropriate manner. Finally this was again a valuable opportunity to gain informed consent once more from the participants. It is useful to note that all the parents talked through the transcripts with their children, and that no transcripts were requested to be altered.

3.2.2 Potential Problems of Feminist Research

Adopting a feminist research method is not without its pitfalls. Gaby Weiner argues that feminist approaches can often “presume that others will share similar understanding and situations to the extent of replicating or applying strategy and analysis” (2006, p.87), whilst Gesa Kirsch highlights how easily feminist scholars can compromise “friendship, confidentiality, and trust” (2005, p.2166) in their efforts to work collaboratively with participants. Furthermore, working under a feminist lens can lead to the silencing of other theoretical attitudes. Sara O'Shaughnessy and Naomi T. Krogman reviewed eight hundred and ninety-six qualitative articles published over ten years in journals that “consider gender a key variable and are open to feminist research” (2011, p.503). Their conclusions highlighted a near-systematic erasure of a “researcher's epistemological position on the generation and possession of knowledge and the role of subjectivity in shaping the research process” (p.510).

In an aim to ameliorate some of these pitfalls, I adopted a grounded approach throughout my research design. I looked to collect data from those experiencing the phenomenon in question, namely young girls who wrote, and to position the process of analysis and review as an opportunity for emergent ideas to form. I elaborate later in this chapter on my coding and analysis process but mention it here to emphasise my efforts to seek data which did not replicate my own experience. I also sought opportunities for the participants to assert a level of control and privacy throughout the process. These

opportunities included selecting their own pseudonyms, being able to amend their transcripts, and taking control of the video-conferencing software when I asked them to write their story.

I was concerned that if I was a feminist researcher, comfortable with that positioning, then my inadvertent “search of heroines” (Davis and Gremmen, 1998) could quite easily “stand in the way of doing feminist research” (p.149). I therefore emphasised that I was not seeking for participants to write explicitly feminist content, nor was my research intended to elicit feminist responses; I was concerned with researching in a feminist manner. The outcomes could be, and indeed would be, anything that the participants wished to give me.

3.2.3 Feminist Research and Participatory Approaches

There is a natural crossover between the methods of this study and participatory research methods. For Gervais et al., participatory approaches can be split into four key areas namely: action research, collaborative research, participatory research, and participatory feminist action research. (2018, p.3). Action research is research with “local actors” to “solve a particular problem” and can be carried out “with or without a feminist perspective” (p.3). Collaborative research seeks to “document and co-construct knowledge with participants” (p.3). Participatory research “aims to emancipate participants by empowering them through research” and participatory feminist action research uses “collective inquiry with targeted girls and women to generate knowledge and take actions” which directly impact or “promote change to their individual and collective conditions” (p.3). A common theme throughout all of these approaches is researching “**with**” rather than “**for** girls and women” (p.2, my emphasis) and giving “participants a central role in data collection and analysis” (p.2). The participant becomes a co-researcher (p.2) and plays an “active role in the production of knowledge and in the analysis and dissemination of results” (p.2).

The connections between this and my approach were clear. I similarly sought to use gender as a “distinct analytical dimension” (p.5); my study embraced qualitative methods (p.5). Alongside this, I wished to work reflexively (p.7), to highlight the “plurality of girls’ and women’s voices” (p.7), to “decolonize relationships between researchers and participants” (p.7), and to give a “voice to participants” (p.7). Furthermore, as Cornwall and Jewkes note, participatory methods is “both personal and political” (1995, p.1667), orientated towards “issues of agency, representation and power” (p.1667) and, as Rachel Pain and Peter Francis write, “aim[s] to effect change for and with research participants” (2003, p.46). The commonalities between participatory approaches and feminist research methods here are inescapable.

Participatory approaches also have a particular resonance for scholars of children’s literature, not in the least in how they empower young people. Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak writes about how participatory methods directly involve children and their knowledge in the research process (2016, p.217). The child, a co-researcher at this point, can then “guide adult researchers in their explorations of children’s books” whilst also having their knowledge understood as “valuable in its own right” (Deszcz-Tryhubczak & García-González, 2020 p.7). Yet as Deszcz-Tryhubczak also notes, participatory methods have been “broadly implemented in childhood studies but [remain] unexplored in children’s literature studies” (p.142). This means that there is a lack of

...spaces in which children and adults interact as equal partners and use cultural resources available to them to struggle both for their present and for their future (p.143)

Due to the impact of COVID-19 I was, however, unable to respond to this clarion call. Participatory approaches require the participant to become something of a “peer researcher” (p.142) where they work alongside the researcher in order to enquire into a problem, generate insights and carry out analysis in their own right. This process and the success of it “relies heavily on the close bonds and collaboration between researcher and participant” (Hall et al, 2021, p.1). Setting up this relationship from scratch in socially distanced circumstances with no idea about how those circumstances might develop and impact upon that relationship would have been difficult at best. Were I revisiting this project in non-pandemic times, I would have pursued a much more participatory approach.

3.3 The impact of COVID–19 upon the research

The first cases of COVID-19, an acute viral respiratory form of coronavirus, were logged in the United Kingdom in January 2020. By March, the United Kingdom had entered lockdown with schools and businesses closing across the country in an attempt to reduce the spread of the virus (BBC, 18 March 2020). Education shifted then to a primarily virtual model with only vulnerable children and the children of key workers attending the school in person. Upon the end of this lockdown, the government introduced a tier system whereby a local authority was placed within a particular framework of rules and restrictions. Schools remained open in all tiers albeit with limited attendance and subject to the strict segregation of classroom / year-groups. By the summer of 2020, much of the country seemed to have reasserted some sense of normality and that careful and responsible research within schools from September may be a realistic aim. Accordingly, I wrote to forty local schools and asked for permission to visit. I asked for permission to work with a maximum of five girls from Key Stage Two and emphasised that I was willing to work within any social-distancing and

hygiene parameters that they required. I attached a brief introduction sheet, details of my ethical clearance. It is useful to note that these were schools that I had no prior connection to as a researcher.

The overwhelming response to my approach was a flat refusal with many schools citing the risk of having external visitors into the school during a pandemic. Caroline Wanat reminds us that qualitative research within a school requires an understanding of the values and fears held by the individuals who work there, in order to gain both access and cooperation (2018, p.191). The refusal by the schools to allow researcher access during the pandemic was a logical and understandable assertion of control in a deeply challenging educational climate. It also indicated how researchers needed to understand the values and fears (p.207) of the context that they wished to work within. In terms of this study and the long classroom-based tradition of educational research (Baker and Lee, 2011, p.1435), it showed that researching during the “biggest pandemic of our lifetime” (Li, Ghosh and Nachmias, 2020, p.330) would require a different approach.

Underscoring the trials of establishing access to participants was the increased need for such access. Although the privations of life with COVID-19 are yet to be fully understood at time of writing, it was immediately clear that children had become exposed to “large amounts of information and high levels of stress and anxiety in the adults around them” (Dalton, Rapa and Stein, 2020). Scholars have also already highlighted the likelihood of increased inequalities both social (Andrews et al, 2020; van Lancker and Parolin, 2020) and gendered (Mitchell and Smith, 2020; Aristovnik et al, 2020); whilst researchers at the United Nations highlighted the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 upon girls and women, particularly those of colour and from marginalised backgrounds (United Nations, 2020). Finally Save The Children recognised the potential negative impacts on full time education, writing that “as many as 10 million children might never return to school ... most of those

being girls” (Cousins, 2020). The gendered impacts of COVID-19 were pressing: girls were asked to be stay at home and yet be publically visible via video-conferencing software, connected and yet lonely (Ellis, Dumas and Forbers, 2020). The girl was being asked to participate in a seismic collective cultural experience and in many senses, to do so by herself.

For many researchers, a digital pivot under such circumstances was vital and instinctive. Helen Kara warned, however, to not simply pivot but to rather ask whether that study still needs “doing - or does it need doing now, in the middle of a global collective trauma?” (Kara, 2020, para.6). Adopting a similarly reflexive tone, An Ansoms discussed the emotional toil of the pandemic and argued that it showed how researchers needed to be trained on the emotionally challenging aspects of research as much as on the practical day to day elements themselves (2020). It was clear that COVID-19 required researchers to both understand their position as researchers but also their position within a specific moment (Mills, 2014, p.241).

I felt that the stories that girls told about their experience of being girl were important, and that this importance would only become more marked during a period of social distancing and separation. During a global pandemic where powerlessness became acutely felt, and decisions were being made by distant institutional bodies, the intersections between knowledge, power and young people had become particularly visible. Their stories were still being written, the necessity of hearing them was pronounced.

It must also be noted that I was not alone in navigating these complex times. Other researchers, particularly in the areas of participatory approaches, were also having to adapt their studies due to the impact of the pandemic (Hall, Gaved and Sargent, 2021). These already established studies faced additional problems: stopping might “have a negative impact upon those already involved” (p.10) and that the data collection was often time or context sensitive (p.10). Methods such as “social media” and “cross-platform messaging

applications” (Hall, Gaved and Sargent, 2021, p.4) were adopted alongside text-based focus groups or telephone interviews (p.8). Other researchers resorted to sending their participants “material packs” to continue their participation in their own space whilst simultaneously noting that pandemic restrictions around deliveries meant that participants also had to “suffice with their own materials” (p.4). Many of these solutions had their appeal and yet I felt they were unsuitable for my study. The students that I wanted to work with were too young to be officially on social media or messaging apps whilst telephone interviews precluded any sense of face-to-face contact. My ultimate adoption of video-conferencing, and in particular the usage of a programme which was institutionally supported and offered substantial options in terms of customisation and security provided a solution to many of these issues.

3.4 Research design

In this section, I offer a breakdown of the research itself over its constituent phases. I begin by considering my planning process and discuss how I selected the prompt text to be used within the workshop. I then walk through the specific phases of the workshop as delivered, highlighting the key elements and decisions before considering the semi-structured interview. I show how the interviews fitted into the overall research design, before discussing the ethical issues of my project. As part of this ethical review, I discuss several episodes of anxiety expressed by the participants. I place these at the relevant moment within this section and outline the nature of the incidents whilst offering some potential explanation about why they occurred. I conclude by discussing the coding and analysis process and detail the steps of my approach.

3.4.1 Planning: “Prompt” texts

A prompt text is a familiar idea within creative writing education (Barrs and Cork, 2001; Dobson, 2005; Young and Ferguson, 2021, amongst others) and sees a text be taught to students as part of a lesson to inspire their subsequent creative writing. The teaching may pick up on grammatical or aesthetic devices within the prompt text or a wider range of the topics that it presents. The writing of the students then demonstrates their understanding of the taught topic.

I find it productive to think of texts both as prompts, that is to say something which generates a piece of further creative work through its presence, but also as “scaffolds” (see Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976). Scaffolding is a “process” where the teacher supports the “elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner’s capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence” (p.90). Theorising texts as scaffolds allows writers to “build” new knowledge with what they know (Haas Dyson, 2000, p.354) and using the text to support that process. I am not alone in adopting this approach. Myra Barrs and Valerie Cork also refer to scaffolding in their study of creative writing. They worked with a group of children from Year 5 and asked them to re-enact themes, shifts and movements of more complicated texts in their own work (2001). Notably all of the texts that they used within their study were from adult authors.

3.4.1.1 Planning: Selecting an appropriate prompt text

The usage of child authored texts as prompt texts within creative writing education is an under-explored topic. As the literature review showed, there was historical precedent in

using juvenilia as exemplar material yet this was an uncommon approach. Students predominantly learn to write and represent their experience of childhood with the help of adult authored texts. This contributes towards the minoritization of child authors within the classroom and from “the genealogy of knowledge” (Sanchez-Eppler, 2013, p.233) represented there. Rather than contribute further to this imbalance, I decided to use a child authored text within my study. Not only would this facilitate an exploration of juvenilia within creative writing education, it would also allow the participants to see the value I placed upon child authored material.

As Nell Musgrove et. al. write, childhood scholars have exerted considerable effort to “...understand the perspectives of children in the past and not just the adults who so often defined and constrained the parameters of youthful lives (2019, p.2) and yet, locating a piece of historic juvenilia suitable to use within this research was no straightforward act. Some of this was due to the complex position that juvenilia holds within libraries and archives and the discourse about them. Yet, as Karen Sanchez-Eppler reminds us, “...archives hold what has been thought worth collecting” (2013, p.220); similarly Emily Murphy: “If an author is being collected, we presume that he or she is being collected for a reason, and it is our job to determine what makes his or her work so valuable” (p.175). This focus on value is important; Murphy recognises that it can be both economical and emotional (2016, p.173) and also laid upon a collection by visitors:

...the nostalgia and desire that is associated with children’s literature collections is a central aspect of the way these special collections are understood by both professional and non-professional visitors (p.173).

The archive collects that which has been deemed to have value and that value "... is a political process" (p.175). For juvenilia, one such value can be the subsequent fame or status of the child author themselves. A useful example here would be *The Adventures of Alice Lascelles by Alexandrina Victoria aged 10 ¾* (2015). Written in 1829 and published almost two hundred years later, this text gained recognition, and indeed its subsequent publication, due to the identity of the author: the young Queen Victoria. Other factors that impact on the collectable value of a child authored text include mainstream publication and its literary associations. For example, I recently picked up a copy of *The Far-Distant Oxus* by Katherine Hull and Pamela Whitlock (1937) at a well-heeled book fair and noted how the book made much of the authors' connections to Arthur Ransome.

This discourse around juvenilia, with its layers of marginalisation and visibility, requires the researcher of child authored texts to embrace serendipity in their efforts (Kidd et al., 2016). I knew that I was interested in finding a piece of juvenilia to use in this study which was written by a girl and dealt with the experience of "being girl". I did not know what that text would look like nor where it might be found. Nevertheless some initial parameters for my search could still be established: I theorised that local schools with long-established presences at the same location were likely to have generated relevant material. I focused my interest upon those schools which were single-sex and taught Key Stage Two aged students. I also considered schools which had historically provided single-sex education and were now closed or had been amalgamated into other schools. Local knowledge was clearly beneficial here, as was my background as a trained librarian.

Much of the material that I found was catalogued with little detail about the specific contents held within let alone the age of the author. Some of this absence of detail can be ascribed towards data protection regulations and the need for safeguarding. "Writing" or "Creative Writing" proved to be a rare keyword and so I worked tangentially to find material

that might include a child authored text without it necessarily being catalogued as such. An obvious candidate were school magazines yet these items are subject to their own particularities of curation prior to entering the archive. As Stephanie Spencer reminds us, a school magazine is rarely the space for the radical nor “outspoken” (2000, p.87). The articles which are printed there have been dubbed acceptable and will be clearly complimentary to the school’s educational approach. Furthermore, however inclusive an educational establishment may wish their publications to be, they cannot publish everything their pupils create. Any text found within a school magazine has already been subject to substantial adult curation.

As I explored the material, I began to find ghost stories by young authors as a promising area of interest. The ghost story is a perennially popular topic within children’s literature where the ghost functions as devices of “exploration and enlightenment” (Armstrong, 1978), an idea I explore further in the subsequent chapters. The popularity of the ghost story hinted at something similar for the popularity of the form within the creative writing classroom and as I checked the dates, I began to realise that many of these stories were written during the Autumn and Winter of their respective years. These were stories which drew on festivals such as Halloween but also on the imaginative potential that shorter days and longer nights provide young writers. The first story I selected as a potential prompt was a ghost story, written by a young pupil at a local single-sex boarding school. It was part of a collection of ghost stories set within the school and referenced its history in depth. It was a clear potential for the workshop but one that I ultimately discarded due to its brevity.

The text I decided to use within the workshop turned out to also be a ghost story. It was written by Bridget Shevlin who was a pupil in II Upper at the Bar Convent boarding school in York. Although her age was not mentioned, these contextual clues helped me estimate that she was approximately ten or eleven years old at point of writing. I had come

across the Bar Convent library and archives on a prior visit to the museum at the convent and, knowing of their history as a single-sex boarding school, had marked them down as a potential resource. *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* was published in the Christmas 1949 issue of the school magazine. I quote it here in full.

A Ghost Visits Her Old School

Dear fellow ghosts, to-day I visited my old school, the Bar Convent, York. My goodness! How things have changed since I was there fifty years ago! Only the nuns remain the same.

At the Bar Convent there are day girls now. In the morning the children get on big monsters which put them down at the gate. They are called "Buses" and they make an awful noise.

The girls were not wearing long dresses such as we had. They seemed to have shrunk.

Instead of laced boots they had shoes in all kinds of styles. They had funny little round things on their heads which they called "Berets". Most of them had short hair whereas we always had it very long.

Inside school, if it was dark they tapped the wall, and as if by magic a light came where it had been dark. The girls had a room called a "Cloakroom", where they hung their coats and hats. They spoke in strange language, using words like "wizard" and "smashing", etc.

The girls talked about something that sounded like "Jim Slip" which they evidently wore, and of a place called "The Jim". Out of curiosity, I actually went to a lesson called "Jim."

In the middle of the morning they have a playtime called “The Break”. Then they have free, wonderful little bottles of milk, one for each girl. They have little tubes stuck in each bottle so that the girls can drink their milk; these they called “Straws.”

At dinner-time I saw them dash out of school instead of walking sedately. There were Police WOMEN too, to help the children across the road. That traffic! I nearly got my ghostly toes crushed by one of those hooting monsters. I am glad that I am back from the noisy world. (Shevlin, 1949).

This is a story which sees a ghost visit her old school. She reflects upon a day in the life of the current pupils both within and without the confines of the school environment before returning to her own world with some relief. Not only does the reader witness the change in the language used by the girls but also the shifting status of girls and women within the context of the educational, political and professional world about the school. The Bar Convent, for example, remains a single-sex school but now accepts day pupils alongside the boarders, the children have “free, wonderful little bottles of milk”, and police women help the children to cross the road.

I selected *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* because of its focus on girls and girlhood. It documents the experience of being a girl and was written by an author who I estimated as being somewhere between ten and twelve years old. It is written with style and competency and shows Bridget Shevlin’s acute ability as a writer. I also found interest in how this story was a demonstration of the epistolary form in action. Epistolary writing, namely the “fiction of the letter”, is a space for “authenticity and intimacy” (Gilroy and Verhoeven, 2000, p.1) between reader and writer, and these qualities have led to the form often being read as feminine in nature (p. 10). Not only did this connect to wider discussions on women’s writing

(see Beauvoir, 1949, Cixous 1976) it also offered an interesting decision for the participants in the workshop. Would they mimic the form presented here and, in a sense, write back to Bridget?

I was also interested in the structure of *A Ghost Visits Her Old School*. Shevlin uses the school day as a framing device for her story; we start in the morning and end in the evening when the pupils go home. I felt that this was a replicable structure for the present day participants to emulate if they so wished. Furthermore, it was a structure which felt current and accessible: the idea of a school day would be familiar to the participants. I also suspected that *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* would have little to no scholarly footprint and thus be unfamiliar to the participants. I did not want to ask them to work with a story they were already familiar with. Finally, I was also satisfied in how *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* spoke directly to the research questions. It offered a spotlight on mid-twentieth century girlhood from the perspective of a girl whilst also offering the chance to incite present-day discussions about the same. The case for its inclusion was made.

3.4.2 Pre-Session Planning: Recruiting participants

The pandemic required an alternative method of participant recruitment, due to the restriction of classroom based research during COVID-19 but also due to the restrictions about working with participants in person. After a consideration of potential methods for recruitment, I selected snowball sampling as the most appropriate. Snowball sampling is a subset of convenience sampling which sees a participant recruited through their convenience for study and researcher. It requires contact to be made with an initial pool of respondents (Goodman, 1961) and then for that initial pool to recruit others through the exploitation of their own personal networks (Braun and Clarke, 2014, p.57). An additional benefit of

snowball sampling was in how it allowed the chance to speak with “rare” and under-represented groups (Dawood, 2008, p.35). In terms of practical outcomes, this all resulted in a group of eleven participants aged between seven and ten years old with the majority of them being nine years old. Two of the participants identified or were in the process of identifying as neurodivergent. One participant attended a single-sex school, another attended a primary school with a forest school attached, and two participants lived and studied in Wales. Contextual clues gained throughout the workshop and interview hinted that the majority of participants came from a middle class background although this was not formally gathered data. Similarly the majority of the participants were highly literate individuals, both in terms of their reading and writing, and I discuss this further in the findings and analysis.

In order to work effectively, snowball sampling requires a point of connection with the immediate community in question. I utilised my public social media profile and my skills as a blogger in children’s literature to connect online with potential participants. This visibility helped to imbue my request for participants with something of an expression of “trust” (Dawood, 2008; Baltar and Brunet, 2012). I was clearly interested in children’s literature and had an established interest in the representation of girls’ series fiction. Several parents of participants expressed informal confidence in the project and by implication myself due to my public profile.

Snowball sampling allowed an opportunity to affirm feminist intent, namely through the gathering and telling of “counter narratives” (Woodley and Lockard, 2016, p.327). A counter-narrative is that which sits at odds with the dominant hegemonies and often remains silenced or yet to be told due to more formal and exclusionary methodologies. This look towards counter narratives and untold stories recognised the new scholarly ground of this study and, as the Department for Education wrote, how there “is a general agreement in the literature that there is less evidence” (2012, p.7) about pupil’s feelings on creative writing.

Similarly Grainger et. al. point out that “Few studies have collected pupils' views or voices” (2003, abs).

There are, of course, limitations to snowball sampling. One of the most pressing is that the participants become “almost always self-selected” (Braun and Clarke, 2014, p.57). The potential participants assess their own ability to participate within the study and can potentially rule themselves out of the equation. The role of parent or guardian is relevant here as well. Sites such as Twitter and Facebook enforce age restrictions about membership. They also require an adult who is comfortable with using such sites and able to message and respond to information found there. This impacts both potential participants and researcher; one example of this would be how several messages received through Facebook were filtered into spam folders and thus invisible at first glance. Any request for young participants under these circumstances required an additional layer of selection, namely their responsible adults. Inevitably this can lead to a narrowness of field and the absence of those participants whose adults may inadvertently or otherwise self-exclude. This can result in the research having both a lack of diversity and potential bias (Woodley and Lockard, 2016).

The circumstances of the pandemic also play a part. Despite the sudden and swift move to digital learning, COVID-19 threw a spotlight on a digital divide (Holmes and Burgess, 2020). UNICEF pointed out that two-thirds of the world's school aged children did not have access to the internet at home (UNICEF, 2020) and more local research showed that 9% of children within the United Kingdom did not have “home access to a laptop, desktop PC, or tablet” (Baker et al, 2020). This divide was further exacerbated by the closure of many libraries throughout 2020. When they did re-open, they did so with restricted opening hours and limited access (Library Closures, 2021). It was clear that the pandemic had come to function, once more, as something of a selection criteria in its own right.

Despite these caveats, I felt that the positives of snowball sampling outweighed the negatives. If the participants had chosen to participate then they were making an active choice to be involved in the research and had considered their own personal needs and wellbeing in doing so. It was noticeable that many of the participants who chose to participate came from professional and often literary family cultures. Their parents included authors, librarians, information professionals and publishing industry professionals. Alongside this, other parents spoke of their interests in research, their background as teachers, or of their own personal experience of the PhD process. Some of this was to be expected due to my own personal networks leaning towards children's literature, librarianship and academia, but it does also speak to the self-selection criteria as outlined above. Specifically it also illustrates the cultural and social capital necessary for individuals to consider their potential participation in self-selected research.

It is also important to recognise the role of adults in the snowball sampling process. Many of the initial points of contact with the adults saw them talk positively about how their children liked writing and stories. They drew a clear link between this interest and their child's potential participation. Whether those participants agreed or not with this characterisation of them, it nevertheless formed a vital first step in participant recruitment. It is no reach to suggest that the call for participants did not connect with young girls who did not explicitly engage in literary cultures nor openly self-define as writers.

Virtual snowball sampling proved to have substantial benefits towards the project. I was able to work with participants located far beyond the envisaged geographies of the project (Baltar and Brunet, 2012). I had intended to work with a York based school but, due to the digital pivot, ended up with a pool of participants from across England and into Wales. I was also able to work with participants who studied at a wide range of schools - from conventional primary schools with a mixed-gender intake, primary schools with forest school

provision, through to single sex primaries. These schools were located across the United Kingdom and would have taken a substantial amount of time to both negotiate access to and carry out my study, even without the additional factors of the pandemic. In practice, then, the shift towards virtual snowball sampling offered the opportunity to safely, securely and ethically research in extraordinary times. It facilitated the recruitment of participants with a wide range of educational experiences and in terms of geographical location. Future studies which connect with home-schooled students and those in alternative provision would further add to this diversity.

3.4.2.1 Participant Recruitment: Sample Social Media Post and Analytics

The recruitment of participants formally began in September 2020. I placed several posts on my personal Facebook and Twitter account, along with sharing posts to several relevant Facebook groups. A sample tweet is shown below:

Due to *everything*, my field-work for my PhD is proving increasingly problematic so I'm working on alternatives. Do I know anybody with KS2 age girls nearabouts to York, who'd like a socially distanced creative writing workshop (plus 1 x follow up interview) with them? (Johnson, 9th September 2020).

As can be seen from the contents of this tweet, there was still some intent to carry out a version of the originally designed research project by working in person with participants, albeit under socially distanced circumstances and in an appropriately ventilated location. Yet early September saw further COVID-19 rules come into effect. There was a sharp rise in cases and the potential of local snap restrictions. Household mixing in indoor settings became

illegal and gatherings of more than six people became restricted. This provided the final push towards delivering this project entirely online. My later tweets for participants clearly reflect my shift in thinking:

Due to *everything*, my field-work for my PhD is proving increasingly problematic so I'm working on alternatives. Do I know anybody with KS2 age girls nearabouts to York, who'd like a socially distanced creative writing workshop (plus 1 x follow up interview) with them? (Johnson, 28th September 2020).

Twitter Analytics show that these tweets, and the variations thereon, were seen over ten thousand times with over three hundred engagements respectively (Johnson, 2020).

Engagements in this sense refers to those who clicked upon the tweet or interacted with it in some way. This is substantial reach and shows one of the clear benefits of virtual snowball sampling. It allows a movement from the original and potentially quite narrow recruitment pool towards a much wider potential group of potential participants. The caveats of the method do still apply, but at a time where participants were already hard to reach, virtual snowball sampling provided a productive approach for this study to adopt.

3.4.3 Reflections on the pilot study

I carried out a pilot study in September 2020 which delivered the workshop online and as close to the outline that I had originally planned. In terms of practicalities, both calls took place first thing in the morning and the participant attended the interview twenty-four hours after they had attended the workshop due to their availability. As mentioned elsewhere this time between the workshop and interview could vary from as little as twenty-four hours

through to several weeks and depended on the participant and their availability. The participant attended both sessions with their mother at their side. I had made only minor alterations at this point to my study due to the then-current circumstances of the pandemic as this was an attempt to see if the classroom based study would still work remotely and on a one-to-one basis with minimal changes. I was concerned as to whether I could even run an effective creating writing workshop with an individual participant and to have that workshop generate useful data for my research. Furthermore, I was also conscious that I needed time to come to terms with the new technology I was working with and make sure that I was using it in a safe, secure and ethical manner.

My experience of running this pilot was straightforward. It showed me that my research was, in principle, still possible, and that the originally envisaged research questions could still stand. It demonstrated that the participants were able to talk about their writing and reading habits with some confidence to a relative stranger, and were happy to write a story by themselves. Yet it also highlighted a need for me to think about my role as researcher and the identities I adopted throughout the research. I felt that I had come across too firmly at parts and inadvertently established myself in a position of authority over the participant. This was something I had worked to resist throughout the study and had turned towards the literature for guidance: this was a common theme within creative writing education and one which had a number of solutions. Daniel Xerri, for example, emphasises the importance of participating alongside learners to create a flatter learning hierarchy (2017) whilst Ross Young and Felicity Ferguson recognise the value of being a visible “writer-teacher”, that is to say a teacher who models both their writing and process as a writer for students (2021). The results of these two strategies result in something similar: a resistance of authority and a resistance of the associated evaluative discourse of that position. Tom Dobson offers an alternative model which sees the researcher consciously shift personae throughout the process where they can

perform the role of “researcher” at one point and the role of “writer” at another (2015). The value of this is clear, in that the researcher can both embody and resist positions of authority within the same setting. Yet I felt that in practice I would not be able to make this work with any sense of objectivity or consistency. I was also concerned about the replicability of my decisions in future workshops with the participants.

Instead, I found purchase in the work of Kathy Davis and Ine Gremman who recommend researching with both reflection and reflexivity. As they write: “Just as the feminist researcher may have to be sceptical of her informant's accounts, so should she be prepared to be critical of her own” (1998, p.134). I felt that it was more productive to work in this manner and so, following the pilot study, took the opportunity to consider how my research could be improved and where the study design could be modified. One of the most visible points of improvement involved building in opportunities for the participants to participate. I had told participants that they could ask me questions throughout the process and, although this had been emphasised implicitly through prior communication, I felt that there was a chance to make this more emphatic. I therefore wrote a new script for the workshop which told participants at the start of each session that they could ask me any questions they wanted, and also built in an explicit moment within the semi-structured interview for them to do precisely this. This was an opportunity to, as Erica DiMarzio and Ryan Dippre describe it, position the participants in the “driver's seat and see where [they] took the car.” (2011, p.28). I also felt that this would help develop the theme of “autonomy and choice” for the participants, which would then in turn connect to an urge expressed for autonomy by Key Stage Two students in the literature (Grainger et al., 2003, p.3). In practice, however, the majority of questions and interventions came at the conclusion of the sessions and for one participant, after the session itself. There are many potential reasons for this, not in the least in how the quasi-educational rhetoric of the project and the presence of other

adults during the sessions could have intimated certain behaviours were expected from the participants. I also suspect that power dynamics played a part here as well: the participants were more comfortable disrupting and questioning the sessions when they had finished, namely when we had established some level of rapport, rather than at the beginning where we had little to none.

The pilot study also directly impacted upon one key stage in the process. I had originally planned for the participants to write their story independently and send it to me when they were done. I had designed the study in this manner to give the participant the chance to work without the pressure of an adult overlooking them and without feeling that they needed to have it done by a specific time. I adhered to this schedule in the pilot study and yet, after logging off, received a request to call the participant back so they could read me their story. It was clear that this was a valuable moment for the participant to share their story with me and for myself, so that I could thank them for their time and effort. Accordingly, I scheduled such a moment into the workshops from that point on.

3.4.4 Session One: The Creative Writing Workshop

In this section, I discuss the creative writing workshop that I held with the participants. This outline details the workshop as delivered and includes all of the modifications and amendments which were made in light of the continuing pandemic. It also includes the amendments that I made following the pilot study and so reflects not only the digital pivot that the research had taken but also the rapid learning curve experienced by researchers at this time. Alongside this, I also reflect upon the role of the participants and

their adults throughout the workshop, and discuss the impact of the adults throughout the research.

3.4.4.1 Setting up the session and introductions

One of the side-effects of the pandemic was the rapid rise of video-conferencing software. I followed in kind and delivered the workshops on Zoom, a freely downloadable and institutionally supported platform which allowed unlimited time with the participants along with the opportunity to record the sessions for later reference. Zoom also allowed interactivity such as cameras being turned on or off, and filters being applied to the images being broadcast. The parents of the participants were sent a link prior to the session and asked to log in at a mutually agreed time. I theorised that the participants would be familiar with video conferencing, due to their experience of education within a pandemic, and so did not expect any problems with learning how to use the software.

The sessions were scheduled on a one-to-one basis, with the exception of one group session which had been requested by two participants who were part of an established friendship. There was a potential here that the existing relationship between the participants could bring a level of bias towards the study and indeed, also impact upon the creative writing I expected from them (Lensmire, 1998; Vass, 2002). There was also a further risk in terms of safeguarding and issues about confidentiality yet I felt that these latter concerns would have similarly applied in a classroom setting and, due to the group size there, be of a more pronounced issue. In an attempt to ameliorate some of my concerns, I took on a more pronounced role as facilitator in the group workshop and worked to include opinions from both participants on a regular basis and to have those contributions be on an equal footing.

In terms of numbers, one member of the friendship group attended both workshop and interview by herself while the other attended both with an adult in the room. Six other participants attended both sessions with adults who were visible but not directly involved; three sat next to their child and engaged throughout the workshop; and one participant, other than the aforementioned member of the friendship group, logged in and participated independently with no adults present. For clarity, when I analyse the data in later chapters, I detail who was present and the nature of their participation during the sessions. In the interviews, I also specify any interjections by parents or others in square brackets. I am conscious that the differing roles that the parents took within the process may have impacted upon the information the participant had subsequently shared with me. Nevertheless, I felt that if an adult wished to attend then they were making the right decision for them and the participant and similarly, if a participant wished to attend a session with a close friend, then I should respect their decisions and allow them to happen.

At the start of the workshop, I asked for permission to record the session and explained that I was doing so to help me make accurate notes later. This discussion also provided an opportunity to talk further with the participants about the research, what we were going to discuss, and to work towards an informed consent for their participation. Informed consent involves freely volunteered participation on the part of an individual “after being fully informed about the nature of the study and its possible consequences for them” (Anderson, 1998, p.68).

Finally, one of the key decisions I made was to work throughout the study with the information which was volunteered by the participants. Gesa Kirsch talks about the “implicit social contract” of the interview (2005, p.2164) within research and argues that researchers should “establish an ongoing exchange with interviewees ... to the degree of which they wish to interact with us” (p.2169). I wanted to allow the participants to control what information

they shared with me and to decide where and when they did that. This would recognise and respect their personal limits but also allow any ultimate interpretation or theory to be guided by the information that had been given to me. Any conclusions could then be made on the analysis of their data, rather than on the basis of any previous categorisation (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996, p.257). Accordingly, I limited the amount of questions I asked prior to the workshop and focused on those which would simply confirm project eligibility such as their age and year group. I viewed any other information given to me throughout the process as part of their data story.

3.4.4.1.1 The experience of Participant C

One of the somewhat unexpected results of my study was the uncovering of a seam of anxiety and concern amongst the participants. In this section, I recount the experience of Participant C and place this discussion here as it relates specifically to the introductory point of the workshop. I return throughout this chapter to discuss those participants who expressed anxiety and share these at the relevant point that they occurred within the process. It is important to note that ethical considerations were followed acutely at these moments with the participant being wholeheartedly reassured and, where appropriate, being asked if they would like to stop, halt or end the interview or workshop. In all cases discussed, the participants continued their participation and did so with positivity and humour. Should any participants have not seemed positive about their continuation, I would have naturally intervened further and potentially halted the session. Finally, in my discussion here, as with the other participants who experienced anxieties, I redact all identifying data.

Participant C expressed some difficulties when I asked for permission to record the workshop. After seeing that they were upset, I took the time to explain that it would be just

me who would see the recordings and that I would be using them solely for the purpose of taking notes. I also emphasised that they were very welcome to say no to this. After discussion between Participant C and her parent she decided to agree and the workshop continued. Participant C later became frustrated and upset during a question and answer exchange and following discussion with her parent, decided to continue. She rapidly regained her equilibrium and was happy to participate in the follow up interview.

Certain factors are relevant here. The issue of being recorded was clearly difficult for Participant C and it may have been something she did not expect. In addition, the rapid and sudden rise of video-conferencing at this point in the pandemic, coupled with her own experience of educating otherwise, may have contributed to some level of fatigue and discomfort with the experience. Furthermore, her discomfort with the questioning element of the workshop suggests that young girls can seek to give the responses expected of them (see for example Woolley, 2020) and, perhaps, find it difficult to do so in a situation where those perfect responses were not easily visible.

3.4.4.2 Choosing a pseudonym

As we began the workshop, I asked the participants to pick a pseudonym to ensure their anonymity throughout the project. Asking the participants to pick their own pseudonym (Braun and Clarke, 2014, p.63), rather than deciding on it myself, provided them with the chance to affirm their voice at a moment within the research process that can often “remove” it (p.63). Furthermore, it allowed the centring of the participants themselves within the research design by allowing an opportunity for their “voices” and their “self-expression” to be heard (Johnson and Ginsberg, 2015, p.6). The majority of these discussions took place on the day, when I was able to take the time to elaborate upon what a pseudonym was for those

participants who were unfamiliar with the term. I asked the two participants who attended a joint workshop to think about their pseudonyms in advance, primarily to ensure that they were not influenced by each other in their choice. These two participants presented their names on the day to me.

One participant chose a pseudonym that was inspired by their creative writing whilst another adopted a name drawn from their interests in the Pokémon series. Other participants selected pseudonyms inspired by their favourite colours or their favourite books. It was clear that they were taking this as an opportunity to shape their own identity within the research process and valued not only the chance to do so but also the respect given to their choices (Braun and Clarke, 2014, p.62).

3.4.4.3 Reading the prompt text out loud

I began the workshop by reading *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949) and in doing so paid tribute to a well-established tradition within creative writing education. Reading a text aloud can help to generate a sense of community between learners (Cremin et al., 2014) but also perform a practical model in how learners can engage with a text (Barrs and Cork, 2001). Reading a story aloud offers students the chance to establish a familiarity and rapport with a text before being asked direct questions about it.

It is also important to note that accessibility played a part in my decision making process here. I was conscious that I may be working with students with different levels of reading ability and confidence, and so I felt that reading the story aloud allowed the workshop to begin on something of an even keel.

3.4.4.4 *Semi-structured interview*

After the reading of *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949), I conducted a brief semi-structured interview with the participants. Semi-structured interviews are a familiar technique within qualitative research (Mills and Birk, 2014; O’Shaughnessy and Krogman, 2011) and feminist research (Kirsch, 2005; Reinhartz, 1992) yet less so in creative writing studies. I felt that by positioning a semi-structured interview so early in the process, I would be able to align my research project with my research questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016) and start to gather data in specific response to them. I also felt that by asking the participants for their thoughts so early on, I would be able to reinforce my commitment to their voice and “experience” (Braun and Clarke, 2014, p.81).

As can be seen in the following list, the interview questions were open to a range of potential interpretations.

Q1: “What words would you use to describe this story?”

Q2: “What words would you use to describe the ghost?”

Q3: “Would anything be different if this story was about somebody or something else? What sort of things - ?”

Q4: “How old do you think the author was when they wrote it?”

These questions and their answers often led to further discussion. I emphasised throughout that there were no wrong answers to these questions and responded positively to any responses the participants gave me, even if they were closed or negative in nature. At some level this blanket support may seem to blur the lines between researcher and participant, a risk rightfully highlighted by Kirsch (2005), but I felt it was an appropriate decision. I was a

researcher of the stories that young girls told. I needed to respect and listen to the ones they told me in turn

It is also useful to re-emphasise the role and impact of the adult in the workshop at this point. All of the adults that became involved in the research, whether directly or indirectly, were female. Six of these adults, as previously noted, remained present in the room throughout the interview. They stayed within earshot of the online meeting and provided clarifying detail only when the participant looked to them for support. I have noted these moments accordingly within the transcripts. Three adults sat alongside their child throughout the entire process and often worked to fill in the silences of the participant or provide further clarifying questions to them to ensure they understood. At some points, these adults became something of an amanuensis towards the research in their efforts to provide satisfactory data.

With regards to the questions, I began with “*What words would you use to describe this story?*” Here I wanted to give the participants the opportunity to become familiar with the experience of being interviewed and a question that could be answered in a simple and straightforward manner. It was also an opportunity to deliver something of a statement of intent: by responding positively to their answers, irrespective of the nature of them, I was able to show that I would not censure nor critique negative responses. The value of this approach was perhaps best embodied in one participant who happily told me that *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* was “boring”.

The second question, “*What words would you use to describe the ghost?*” asked the participants to move away from describing the story to instead describing the key character. Here I was interested in engaging with the participants as authors, seeing how they would employ their critical vocabulary in describing a key element of the story. Similarly the third question: “*Would anything be different if this story was about somebody or something else? What sort of things - ?*” Here, I was also looking to see whether the participant had connected

to the story and if so, what elements they saw as changing if the story had been about a different topic or character.

The final question: “*How old do you think the author was when they wrote it?*” was impacted, in practice, by the prior information I had given to the adults. At the initial point of contact, I had sent them an information sheet which talked about my interest in how young girls reacted to the creative writing of girls of a similar age. Some adults had shared this information with their child and at this point in the interview, one participant – and indeed the adult themselves – told me that they already knew of Shevlin’s age. I discuss the impact of this in Section 3.4.4.6: Revealing The Author’s Identity.

3.4.4.5 The experience of Participant B

Participant B experienced difficulties during the workshop and became visibly emotional as she struggled to answer questions. At this point both her parent, who had remained present during the interview, and myself offered reassurance and support. I halted the session and after some discussion with her parent, Participant B decided to continue. She rapidly regained her equilibrium and was visibly happy to participate in the rest of the session and in the follow up interview. As with the other participants who experienced anxiety or difficulty, I was very concerned that she did not feel pressured to continue and so would have intervened if she had shown reluctance or expressed any further discomfort.

Some of Participant B’s reaction may have stemmed from trying to provide the right answer to my questions and not knowing what this right answer was. As the literature review showed, and indeed the findings of the study came to reinforce, young girls exert considerable emotional labour to provide what is expected of them. There were no clear answers in this situation and this could have been potentially destabilising. It is also

worthwhile to consider Participant B's age. She was one of the younger participants and so her age, coupled with the intimidating experience of talking to a stranger and the pressures of an unknown scenario, could have also been a factor in her reaction. Finally, it is useful to note that I was advised after the session that Participant B was neurodivergent and this could also have impacted upon her reaction here.

3.4.4.6 Revealing the Author's Identity

Once the semi-structured interview and any associated discussion had been completed, I formally told the participants that the author's name was Bridget Shevlin and that she was around ten years old when she wrote her story. I also told the participants that Bridget wrote her story in 1949 and that she was in a form called II (Upper). I contextualised this last reference by linking it to Year Five / Six in modern terms, so that the participants had some clear awareness of the parallels in age and experience between them and her.

Scripting a formal moment to reveal Bridget's approximate age and identity within the workshop allowed me to underscore the importance of that information. Even though some participants were already aware of her name and identity, as previously discussed, this moment meant that all of the participants were definitively aware of it at an early point within the workshop. I also scripted in a moment to work out how many years ago 1949 was with the participant. I felt that doing it in the workshop, rather than providing them with the data, allowed the participant to become directly involved in the research process. They had an opportunity to chime in at this point, as indeed did Rainbow who reflected on Shevlin being the same age as their grandmother, whilst others were able to bear witness to my haphazard mathematics.

I had originally conceived of the reveal of Shevlin's identity as something of a revelatory moment within the research. This drew upon Clémentine Beauvais (2019) and Anna Redcay (2012) who underscore that knowing an author is a child influences the reader's reaction to that text. I had however come to realise that I was very comfortable with participants potentially knowing who Bridget Shevlin was in advance of the reveal. Two participants confessed that they had already read the story and knew that Shevlin was of a similar age to themselves with several of the parents expressed similar and intriguingly apologetic comments. Whilst this could be characterised as a flaw of the research design because I had allowed participants the chance to become familiar with the author's identity prior to my intervention, and indeed specified it openly on the information sheets, I read it as something of a benefit. I was a guest in the participant's home during a remarkable period of social upheaval, and I was a guest with very particular needs and demands. If the parent felt it necessary or useful to share the story with the participant in advance of my call so that the participant was prepared and felt able to take part in the study, then I felt that was a call that they should be allowed to make. Future studies, conducted outside of the peculiar stresses and strains of COVID-19, would offer an opportunity to address this angle of the research design by scripting a more formal and uniform 'reveal' across all of the participants.

3.4.4.7 Rereading the story and semi-structured interview

After the discussion about the author's identity wound to a natural halt, I told the participants that I was going to read *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* to them one more time. I asked them to think about how they felt now that they knew who the author was and that she was of a similar age to them. At this point in the study, I was interested to find out whether their understanding of Bridget Shevlin as a child author made the participants relate

differently to either her or her story. I was also interested as to whether their own experiences of authorship would come to the fore. Once I had finished reading *A Ghost Visits Her Old School*, I carried out a further semi-structured interview with the participants. As with the prior semi-structured interview, this was intended to re-affirm my commitment towards hearing what the participants had to say whilst also centring their voices and experience within the study. I again reassured them that they could say anything they wished and I followed the conversational leads that they presented.

The first question I asked was: “*How does it make you feel that you know who Bridget was?*” This was a straightforward question which had nevertheless seen some key revisions in light of the pilot study and also my further thinking. I had originally scripted this question to read: “*How does it make you feel now that you know who the author was?*” and in doing so, had inadvertently come to erase Bridget Shevlin’s name and identity from the question. This was something antithetical towards both my research questions and wider theoretical approach, and so the revision was a necessary act.

The second and third questions faced a similar revision. As originally written, they were: “*How does it make you feel now that you know who the author was?*” and “*Do you think the author would have written a different story as a grown-up?*”. The omission is perhaps clear here; I had referred to Bridget Shevlin as “the author” again rather than giving her name. I edited the questions to instead read: “*How does it make you feel now that you know who Bridget was?*” and, after that: “*Do you think Bridget would write a different story as a grown-up? Why? What sort of things would she write about?*”

The final question I asked in this section was: “*What sort of questions would you like to ask Bridget if she were here?*” Questions of this nature are a common theme within creative writing education, particularly from those educators fond of “conferencing” (see Atwell, 2015; Winch et al. 2001, amongst others), and are often used to inspire thinking

about a text from the position of an author. For this study, I was interested to see whether the participants would connect to the “patterns” (Barrs and Cork, 2001) of *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949) and whether they would come to repeat those patterns within their own work. I was also interested in seeing if and how the participants connected to Bridget as an author, or whether they used this question as an opportunity to connect with her in terms of gender.

3.4.4.8 *Discussing the “normal” school day*

I then asked the participant about their normal school day. In doing so, I looked to generate data which could be understood as comparative data to the school day depicted in *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949) but also in response to the story that the participants were about to write in the next stage of the workshop. This question would provide ideas for them to use in that story and hopefully work through any cases of writer’s block.

Asking the participants about their school day was a straightforward question which gained some additional resonance due to the impact of the pandemic. Several participants asked for guidance at this point and wondered whether I wanted to hear about their normal days at school or the modifications due to COVID-19. I guided those participants towards discussing their normal experience at school and, when the discussion allowed, asked how that had changed under the current circumstances. Other participants required little to no guidance in their discussion and would tell me about their experience of home-schooling due to the pandemic, or how their experiences of playtime had changed due to the current government guidance. As the research progressed, it was clear that this question allowed the

participants a useful point to discuss what had changed in their educational experience and to express how they felt about it in a supportive and safe environment.

With regards to scripting this section, I took a deliberately light approach and allowed the participants to take control of the conversation. I began by asking them about their favourite subjects and the ones that they did not like, before asking them to elaborate upon any particularly interesting lines of conversation. The topics covered were varied and could include anything from a reflection on how the participants got to school through to their favourite football team. It often also provided contextual data for earlier moments in the workshop.

3.4.4.9 Writing the story

Once the discussion about their own school day came to something of a natural halt, I asked the participants if they felt able to write me a story based on the things that we had just talked about. This was another opportunity to gain informed consent and so I emphasised that the participants did not have to write a story if they did not wish to. All of the participants responded positively to writing a story. Some of the participants required clarification of whether I wanted it done right there and then or if they were to work on it independently.

Once I had gained their confirmation of consent, I gave them the instructions:

“So I'd like you to write your own version of “A Ghost Visits Her Old Story” - and it's up to you to figure out who the ghost is, which school she's visiting, and what she does when she gets there. You can use the things we discussed previously if you want

[and here, if appropriate, I named some of the examples that the participant had

mentioned in our discussion] *or you can have something different happen, it's entirely up to you.*”

As can be seen here, I was looking to emphasise that the participants had control over the process. They could write a story that built on the things that we had discussed or write something else entirely. Either way, they could write without censure. I was very open to what they brought to the table.

At the end of the session, I discussed with the participant about what the next step in the process would be. I told them that it would be a brief interview where I would ask them some questions about the things we had discussed today and also their wider reading habits and feelings about literature. I felt it valuable to provide the participants with this detail about what to expect so they could come prepared to the session. It also allowed those participants who had experienced difficulties in the initial workshop to feel that they were in some level of control about the process. As with the other steps in the research, this was once more an opportunity to gain informed consent.

At this point, I also asked the participant for a copy of their story. As originally envisaged in the classroom based project, I simply would have gathered these up at the end of the session. The digital pivot required either a photograph of their story or the original file to be emailed directly to me. As a rule this request was made directly to the participant themselves except on one occasion where they had left the room and I was talking to their parent. My request for a copy of the story was made for primarily practical purposes. I was concerned about audio quality and potentially mishearing their words. I also wanted to make sure that I provided an accurate record of their story. It was noticeable that several participants were concerned about the presentation of their work and their spelling. This is something that I discuss further in the next chapter.

3.4.4.9.1 The Experience of Participant A

As the workshop with Participant A came to its conclusion, I requested a copy of their story as I had done with the other participants. Prior to this, I had enjoyed listening to them read their story to me and thanked them for both writing it and their participation in the study. When I received the copy of their story, their parent asked for a note of reassurance. Participant A was worried as to whether or not they had written an appropriate story for my needs. Some of my response can be found in the following reply I sent to Participant A's parent on 15th October 2020. I have redacted any potentially identifying data therein.

...Thank you so much for the story! Please tell [NAME] that she is 1) amazing and 2) a really lovely writer. Her story is perfect for my study (looking at the creative writing of young girls and the stories they tell) and I'm really grateful to her for her time. She is FAB...

As can be seen here, I was concerned with providing immediate and visible support for Participant A. I was conscious that they had not expressed their anxieties during our workshop together and so I wanted my response to be clearly supportive in nature. In expressing her concerns to her parent who had been present throughout the session, rather than to myself, Participant A had also emphasised the value of young people being supported by a known and familiar adult.

It is relevant to note here that I was aware that Participant A was potentially neurodivergent. Their parent had asked me to outline the session in advance knowing that this information would help reduce the anxieties of Participant A and enable them in deciding

whether or not to participate. Accordingly, I emailed on the 2nd October 2020 with an outline of what the sessions would entail and how they would work.

...It's essentially a zoom meeting - I read her a story, ask her a few questions, and then she goes off to write the story. This can either be with me still on the call, or she can log off and then log back in when she's ready (it's very much up to her - I know it can be a bit scary having a stranger watching!). The second session is focused on an interview - I ask her a few questions about her story, the things she likes to read and write about, and that's about it! ... I hope that helps! The only thing she might want to think about in advance is what pseudonym she'd like to use - so we can keep her story totally confidential and nobody knows it's her.

As this is the third and final case of participant anxiety that I discuss, it is useful to offer some concluding thoughts. All of the incidents that I have discussed took place during my first meeting with the participants. My second meeting with them, namely the semi-structured interview, took place without issue.

Yet upon analysis, I came to realise that a subtle undercurrent of anxiety ran throughout the data. Many of the participants struggled to understand what I wanted from them and exerted considerable mental effort to understand what my particular agenda may be. These efforts towards understanding were not restricted to the participants. Similar questions were asked by many of the adults I came into contact with, whether in the pre-planning stages or during the workshop itself.

A further potential reading applies here. The participants in this study were all aged between seven and eleven years old. This placed them into Key Stage Two (KS2), an educational bracket within the United Kingdom which requires students take SATS (Standard

Attainment Tests) when they are seven and again at age eleven. Prior to the 2021-2022 academic year, the results of the SATS were made publically available on the relevant school's website and parents were encouraged to use them as part of their school selection criteria. Several Key Stage Two teachers reflect about the impact of SAT culture upon their teaching in Rachel Cumming's study: "we're training them [the students] for SAT's..." (2008, p.229) and note how the examinations influenced their lesson planning for the year group: "SATs dominated the year, and, as such, guided all their planning for English" (p.237). It is no reach to suggest that the participants of my study and their families were familiar with examination culture and the associated skills of finding the right answer for the right question. It is also no reach to suggest that they might have experienced difficulties in answering a piece of research where no obviously correct answer was available.

I conclude by noting that, at point of writing, the traumatic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced by children and their families is yet to be fully explored within the literature. I suggest that this thesis provides a vital contribution to knowledge about the pandemic by documenting not only the creative writing of young girls but also what it meant to be a young girl during a period of global crisis with unprecedented local impact.

3.4.5 Session Two: the semi-structured interview

The second part of this study was a semi-structured interview. The interview consisted of eight questions along with an opportunity for the participants to ask me some questions. This session was arranged at a mutually convenient time and date with the participants, meaning that the time between the first and second session could vary. Some interviews took place as soon as twenty-four hours after the creative writing workshop, whilst

others were almost three weeks later. In a classroom based study, this second session would have been most like scheduled on a more standardised basis. As detailed here, it represents simply another adaptation to the privations of the pandemic.

The interviews were held on Zoom, as with the workshops, and I sought informed consent from the participants to record. I explained that this would be to help me take accurate notes at a later date. All the participants agreed to being recorded. I also told them about the session itself and emphasised that they could ask for further information about anything that they didn't understand, that they did not have to answer all of the questions, and that they could stop the process at any point. I also told them that they could ask me questions at any point about anything they wished.

I began by asking "*Do you like to write stories at home?*" This question reflected the shift of the study from the classroom to the participant's homes and had originally read: "*Do you like to write stories at school?*" Opening with a closed question ran the risk of one-word answers and so I scripted a follow up that I used as appropriate to provoke further discussion: "*Why / why not / what sort of things do you like to write about?*" Any resulting conversation was then explored until its natural conclusion. My second question was "*What about story writing at school?*" As originally scripted, this read "*What about story writing at home?*" and was amended to reflect the changes in question one. These first two questions looked to generate data about how girls approached their creative writing at home and in school and to provide an answer the first research question: how do girls creatively (re)write girls and girlhoods?

The next question was: "*What are your favourite stories about?*" In this question, I wanted to move from the participants thinking about their own work and instead towards the writing of others. The following questions: "*Can you describe your ideal character to read about?*" and "*Do you like reading stories about girls in particular?*" (If yes - why / if no -

why not...)” ran on a similar theme. I was interested in finding out what the participants enjoyed reading about, and whether they found gender as a relevant variable in their reading habits. It is important to note that this run of questions held something of an overt agenda: at this point, the participants would have understood that I was interested in the creative writing of young girls and the wider issue of representation. They could therefore answer in a manner appropriate to this agenda, or to pursue their own. This was a provocative subtext and one I discuss further in the subsequent chapters.

I then asked the participant about their own story: *“Let's talk about the story you wrote in our sessions. Can you describe it for me in your own words?”* I emphasised that I did not wish them to read the story out loud to me but rather to tell me about what had happened in it in their own words. It was noticeable that this question was often interpreted as a test of memory by some of the participants and their parents. My intent with this question was to discover which elements of the story the participant remembered and to tie these into the first research question: How do girls creatively respond to written portrayals of girlhoods? I also felt that this question would help generate data which could be compared with the early stages of the workshop.

My next question was one of the more complex questions in the interview. I asked: *“Do you think you would have changed anything you wrote if you knew that the author was a different person?”* If they replied in the affirmative, I followed up with the scripted prompt: *“If so, what sort of things would you have written instead?”* I was interested here as to whether the participants saw an author’s identity as a relevant variable to their own work. For some participants, this question required clarification and so I talked about how we had read *A Ghost Visits Her Old School*, that we had talked about how Bridget had been a girl of a similar age to them when she had written it, and how I had asked them to write a story of their own in response to it. I then asked what might have happened to their own story if

Bridget had been somebody or something else. At this point, I also tried to integrate elements from the participant's own life and experience. In one particular interview, prompted by the presence of a particularly persistent cat, I asked the participant what she might have written if we had read a story authored by a cat.

My final question was: "*What do you think a girl from fifty years in the future would say if they read your story?*" with the associated follow up of "*What do you think would be different in their world?*" This question asked the participants to imagine a future where their story might function as an artefact for girls their own age to read. I was interested as to whether they would see their stories as part of such a scenario and whether they would draw any parallels to their own experience with *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949).

I concluded the interview by asking if the participants wanted to ask me any questions. I told them that I had asked them a lot so it was their turn to ask me about absolutely anything that they wanted. Some parents took this as an opportunity to ask me about my research and what I was hoping to do with it. The participants asked questions which ranged from my favourite football team through to asking what I was having for tea. This chat often proved much more relaxed and free-wheeling than the prior interview, and threw up some valuable moments of context and elaboration. It might be noted for the record that I did not have a favourite football team but have, as promised to one of the participants, subsequently adopted Leeds United. After the discussion wound to a natural halt, I began the process of winding up the session. I thanked the participant once more for their time and reinforced how great they had been and how much I had appreciated their time, before saying goodbye and ending the call.

3.4.6 Post Interview

Within two to three weeks of the final session, I transcribed the participant's interview and sent a copy of this to their responsible adult. I was concerned with allowing participants a substantial amount of control over this part of the process in particular, and explicitly gave them the opportunity to edit, amend or delete any part of their answers. No participant amended their transcripts and so these transcripts are included in full in the appendices, ending only where the interview moved onto unrelated discussion. Finally, participants were also sent a £10 Amazon voucher as thanks for their participation. To prevent ethical issues around this and participants participating just for the monetary reward, I did not mention the voucher until this point (Silverman, 2013, p.178).

3.5 Data Analysis

In this section I discuss my data analysis and the presentation of that data. I begin by reviewing creative methods of research and sketch out the connections between them, feminist research, and a qualitative study on creative writing. I conclude with a review of my approach towards coding and analysis.

3.5.1 Creative methods and qualitative research

Creative methods are often seen as approaches which can disrupt established political, personal and social paradigms in research. For Helen Kara, creative methods are best understood as falling into four key areas: arts-based research, technology-based research, mixed-methods studies, and research which seeks to be transformative, such as a feminist study (2015, p.3). Yet as much as feminist research may welcome creative methods, it also

requires an understanding of how these methods can be tempered and limited. Established power, social and cultural capitals along with the dominance of written ways of knowing can work against the transformative impact of creative methods (Cuthbert, 2011). Similarly, Helen Kara points out that creative research methods tend to “resist binary or categorical thinking” (2015, p.15) and so can sit uncomfortably next to more explicit and clearer methods.

Despite these legitimate concerns, wedding a creative approach towards a study on creative writing seemed potentially productive. I became particularly interested in finding theses that had applied creative methods to their data representation to see how this could work in practice. In one particularly relevant example in the literature, Kathryn Fox utilises an “interrupting voice” throughout her thesis on stand-up comedy (2017). Here Fox draws upon Bakhtin’s theories about the heteroglossic to develop two voices in her work: a traditionally academic voice which is repeatedly interrupted by the presence of another, more informal voice. Not only is this a metatextual commentary upon the role of hecklers in stand-up comedy, it also provides Fox with an opportunity to question, doubt and challenge the assertions made by her academic voice.

Haven’t you used that line about how you’re “destroying the Southern media hegemony one flat vowel at a time” numerous times in your stand-up, both in the North and in the South, and in those very cultural spaces and institutions you would see as part of it? (p.55)

Similar interest is also to be found in a thesis by Patrick Robert Reid Stewart which sees Stewart integrate Nisga’a to pay tribute to his own cultural heritage and the Indigenous knowledge at the heart of his study. It also allows Stewart to reinforce “the use of Nisga’a in

the academy” (2015, p.v) and to counter the continued trauma to “indigenous peoples in this province” (xi). His writing embraces what he dubs an “experimental (deconstructionist and decolonizing) style” (xv). Below is one such example in practice:

in fact manymanymany elders / writers / researchers / academics / teachers / thinkers / nations have helped in my personal introspection toward identifying the components of indigeneity / understanding the systemic oppression / racism / colonization inside and outside the education system in this province (p.xvii).

Something similar to this also happens in Camille Owens’ paper on Philippa Schuyler (2021). Schuyler’s parents gathered substantial data upon her as she grew up and this data, despite her achievements as a talented pianist and composer, has led to Schuyler herself being “remembered by another term: as their “breeding experiment”” (English, cited in Owens. p.206). Owens rightfully points out the “ghoulish” qualities of this label (p.205) and offers, instead, a reading of Schuyler which encompasses the meaning-making of this archive about her whilst also recognising “that Philippa charted a vision of her own” (p.208). This is a reading which looks to reorientate the material it works with and see “what appears when it is reframe or anarranged” (p.209). This sees Owens examine items such as a story that the young Philippa wrote and, as part of this, the reproduction of the original manuscript on the page, alongside Schuyler’s artwork and portraits of her by others such as Carl Van Vechten (1880-1964). It is through this rearrangement of the archive, the making these new points of connection, that Owens is able to:

gesture towards the further opening of [Schuyler's] archive, not as closure, and in a way to hold space for many imaginable endings rather than the one already told.” (p.224).

In positioning the established archival material alongside Schuyler's own creative work, and indeed, the creative work of others, Owens creates a disruption full of generative potentialities. It offers the opportunity to question the readings of power and authority already affixed to Schuyler and instead explore an alternative and perhaps yet unheard story.

Finally the work of Sunaina Maira is of relevance here. In writing about the experiences of South Asian Muslim youth in post-9/11 America (2008), she integrates the voices of the young people she works with. The article opens with two lengthy stories from Nusreen and Ismail who reflect on their experience of arriving into America, their lives and how this has changed after the terrorist attacks which took place on September 11, 2001. The subsequent piece then refers back to the stories of Nusreen and Ismail and contextualises them within the wider political climate. The impact of this is to root a complex discussion of citizenship in the experiences of real world individuals. This is no high level story, detached from the individual, but rather one being lived by people.

It was in articles and theses like this that I found some grounding for what my approach might be. I was interested in how a disruption of both form and convention might result in something new and what that new something might be. I wondered what might happen if the words of the participants were threaded throughout the thesis as a whole, rather than being corralled within the findings chapter, and how this might allow their voices to speak to different parts of the research process. This was a study about the stories that young girls told and, in many senses, a story in its own right. Reflecting that at some stylistic or aesthetic level within the content of the thesis itself seemed vital.

3.5.2 Choosing vignettes to represent the data

The method I use to represent my data involves the usage of vignettes. Vignettes are extracts of data which have been drawn from or inspired by the data (Kara, 2015) and are a common theme within transformative arts-themed research (see for example Ivinson and Renold, 2021; Fitzsimmons Frey, 2019). They provide a valuable opportunity to integrate the participant's voices into the final thesis whilst offering the chance to disrupt, challenge and question the assumptions made within that thesis. Practically, these vignettes come from the participant's workshop or interview and I provide a note of context at each point of usage.

My usage of vignettes within the thesis also draws upon the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, specifically his idea of the carnival. The carnival was a period of festivities which created a "second world and a second life outside officialdom" (Iwolsky, 1984, p.6) and for the period of its duration, there was "no other life outside it" (p.7). Upon the carnival's ending, the status quo was reasserted and the temporary liberty of the carnivalesque put aside. I find value in considering the vignettes of something of a carnival in their own right, a temporary assertion of authority and agency upon the formalities of the thesis form. They are brief but no less potent for their brevity.

Vignettes also hold a key connection to children's literature and specifically the issue of aetnormativity. By integrating vignettes throughout this thesis, I offer a disruption to any reading of the adult voice as authoritative and instead ask for this research to be understood as something of an act of mutual creation. Finally, the vignettes also offer useful metatextual commentary upon my approach and I explore these further at the relevant juncture.

3.5.3 Coding and analysing the data

Following confirmation from the participants that their transcripts were accurate, I began the coding and analysis process. I analysed data gathered from the workshop, the interviews, and the stories that the participants wrote. I adopted a grounded approach and moved away from pre-conceived categories. I used inductive coding to look for the themes and topics that the participants choose to share with me. Once these had been identified on a case by case basis, I used thematic analysis to then look for the themes that represented themselves on both an individual and transversal basis. A full breakdown of the coding categories and the criteria for inclusion can be found in Table 1:

Research Question	Coding Category	Criteria for inclusion
Research Question One: How does the creative writing of girls represent 'being' a 'girl'?	References / Direct Address to Bridget.	Talking about Bridget (named/unnamed) or critique / description of the story.
Research Question One: How does the creative writing of girls represent 'being' a 'girl'?	Gender Roles.	Explicit mention of girls / girlhood, or reference to established girl's things from the story (such as skirt-length etc.).
Research Question Two: How does the creative writing of girls respond to the creative writing of girls of a similar age?	Questions for Bridget.	Questions specifically directed to Bridget (either pre-name reveal or post).
Research Question Two: How does the creative writing of girls respond to the creative writing of girls of a similar age?	Reading habits.	Mention of the things they read, or mention of their reading habits
Research Question Two: How does the creative writing of girls respond to the creative writing of girls of a similar age?	Echoing Source Text.	Echoes of sentences / structures / form from Shevlin text in their own work

Research Question Three: How can the creative writing of girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?	Family.	Mention of family or reference to immediate personal situation (home, household etc.).
Research Question Three: How can the creative writing of girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?	Creative writing – self.	Reference to personal creative writing (in school or out) or reference to how creative writing is taught
Research Question Three: How can the creative writing of girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?	Creative writing – others – not Bridget.	Reference to the creative writing of other people (not Bridget).
Research Question Three: How can the creative writing of girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?	In-vivo codes	Phrases or words that are peculiarly distinct to the participant
Research Question One: How does the creative writing of girls represent 'being' a 'girl'? AND Research Question Three: How can the creative writing of girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?	Gender descriptions	Use of pronouns (gendered or otherwise) or reference to specifically gendered things (skirts, etc.) or commentary on gendered behaviours
Research Question One: How does the creative writing of girls represent 'being' a 'girl'? AND Research Question Three: How can the creative writing of girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?	Girls doing – actions.	Mention of girls doing things.

Table 1: Coding Categories and Criteria For Inclusion

As can be seen here, the research questions provided a vital framework for my analysis by gathering it under the relevant research question. For example, implicit or explicit references to Bridget or her story were gathered in the category of “*references / direct address to Bridget*” which then fed into the research question of “How the creative writing of young girls represents being girl”.

A key part of my process also involved the writing of research memos (Silverman, 2014, p.120). These were moments to track my thinking and record the decisions that I had made whilst analysing. These memos were written after the first round of coding, which is to say my review of the workshop, the interview, and the participant's story, and provided a record of my thoughts at that point. Working in this manner allowed not only the opportunity to create initial hypotheses (p.120) but also to challenge myself from "reaching" in my analysis (Harding, 2019). An example of one of these memos can be found below:

Spiderman123 is a passionate player of football and this clearly pervades many of her other interests. She draws direct connections between football, for example, and the value of representation in stories for girls of the sports, and talks about how she likes girls as the main character in Jacqueline Wilson. I do wonder if sometimes she was trying to please me in her responses because she would start talking about things - the point where she was talking about her school day, for example - and be quite passionate before adding things in almost when she'd finish that were connected to the study - so, for example, where she mentions English and also liking books with girls in (after saying "Um, I don't really mind about it" - 52). I would characterise these moments as 'afterthoughts', where her passion has clearly taken her down a particular (often football related) path before she remembers the context of the research.

Spiderman123 was very articulate and passionate about football and used this to illustrate a lot of points in her responses. What I did find interesting was the way she talked about her creative writing at school - it was a very formal 'nuts and bolts' type of description, which seemed to hint towards a kind of commodified / practical (and almost bare boned?) approach to writing.

It is important to note the role of “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) in my approach. Thick description of data is somewhat self-explanatory for it requires simply a thick description of the context and circumstances within which the data was gathered and a description of how the “scene unfolded” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013). As this memo shows, thinking in terms of thick description helped me realise some of the emergent themes in my conversations with the participants.

The above research note also demonstrates an instance of a “corrective” in practice. I had recognised how Spiderman123 had mentioned that she liked reading books about girls after telling me that she did not really mind about it. While this may seem like a confusing and contradictory statement for her to make, I felt that it was rather a moment where she had modulated her initial thoughts to make them accord with the intent of the research. She was not alone in doing: nearly all of the other participants engaged in something similar. I came to dub these moments as correctives and understand them as moments of self-modulation or correction on the part of the participants. They typically involved an initial response which was then revised, often after a short pause for the participant to gather their thoughts, in to an outcome which often accorded with the angle of the workshop – namely gender, identity, and the experience of young girls. I discuss these incidents further at the relevant point of analysis.

3.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I discussed the research design and methodologies utilised in this study and showed how these were impacted and adapted in light of the impact of COVID-19. I began by defining feminist research and how I practically applied this approach within my

study, before then acknowledging its potential risks. I considered what it meant to research within a pandemic and argued for the necessity to continue to do so whilst equally understanding the difficulties of this. I then offered a stage by stage review of the project as delivered and moved from pre-planning through to coding and analysis. I discussed my adoption of vignettes as a method of data representation, before concluding with a discussion of my coding and analysis.

4 Findings

“As I strolled through the empty halls, I began to piece things together.”

(Extract from Pink Paw’s story, written 16th October 2020).

This research began with the premise that the creative writing of young girls could trigger discussions about the experience of being a girl and that juvenilia was worthy of sustained interrogation through a literary lens. In this chapter, I look to provide the first answers to that original hypothesis and where those answers may not be immediately available nor present, I story the responses of the girls and try to provide some texture about the notion of representation itself. I begin by discussing narratives about “being girl” and “girlhood” which ties into the first research question: “How the creative writing of young girls represents the experience of being girl”. I then move towards understanding what it takes to be an author which is connected to the second research question: “How the creative writing of young girls responds to the creative writing of girls of a similar age.” The final strand of this chapter asks: “How the creative writing of young girls can facilitate thinking about girlhood” and considers both conversations about creative writing and the conversations that creative writing can engender.

A key characteristic in this chapter, and one worthy of mention at an early point, is that of contradiction. For example, when I asked Spiderman123 in her interview whether she preferred boys or girls in her reading, her reply was as follows:

Um, I don't really mind about it but I - I do like reading girl's stories ... um 'cause I, like, think that they're like inspirational and stuff... (51/52)

At first sight, this seems something of a contradictory response: Spiderman123 doesn't "really mind about" gender in the stories that she reads before then saying that she does and providing a reason for this. I did not, however, read her reply as contradictory but rather as a corrective. She had expressed an initial response before modulating it so that it gave myself, the researcher, what I was looking for. I felt that both sentiments were true, to some extent, but what felt of more interest was the force which lay behind her correction. As the literature review had shown, young girls who wrote often exerted considerable effort to deliver what was wanted from them in the context of the classroom. It was no reach to suggest that the smart and empathetic participants of this study were experiencing something similar. In what follows, I begin that process of unpacking what lay behind their exertions.

4.1 How girls creatively (re)write girls and girlhoods

In this section, I consider the first research question: "how do girls creatively (re)write girls and girlhoods?" I begin by illustrating how the participants connected to Bridget Shevlin's story through a variety of methods such as their own family history or discussion of age, before moving on to how the participants conceptualised the differences and kinships between adults and children. I then look at the representation of violence and agencies within the participant's stories and link this towards their understandings of themselves as authors. Finally I offer a summary of findings which contextualise each section against the scholarly literature and detail its specific contribution to knowledge.

4.1.1 Literacy practices and emotional intelligence

I like Jacqueline Wilson 'cause, like, she does, like, really nice stories 'cause, like, some of them are adventures and, like, it's about, like, how they live and kind of and like ... it's like ... it's like always fun to, like, imagine what it would be like if you were in one, if you were in one, one of the main characters position.

(Jade's interview, lines 44-47)

For Spiderman123, her own personal interests and her passionate love of football influenced her ideas of “being girl”. As with the other participants, I asked her in the workshop about the activities of her normal school day. The first topic she turned to was football and then tennis, before moving onto the subjects of the lessons themselves. The final subjects she named at the end of a long list of topics were “English and reading” and this was a revealing indication of her personal interests. I also felt that this was a demonstration of a “corrective” in practice. Spiderman123 had spoken at length about her interests at school before adding “English and reading” as a gesture towards her current position in a creative writing workshop and, I suspected, my interests as the adult.

In her interview, we returned to the topic of football and discussed what the best football story in the world might be:

Um, if there were - if there was like - magical goalie gloves or like a magical football or magical football boots. (36-37)

She returned to this theme later in the interview. The following extract is taken after I asked her if she would have written a different story if we had worked with something other than *A Ghost Visits Their Old School*. This question was intended to explore their relationship towards prompt texts and how relevant the participants felt that they were in their creative

practice. For Spiderman123, the focus of interest here was not in a different prompt but rather in how she might have changed her own work.

Spiderman123: Well, I might have written about, like, um, I might have - I'd write about like sort of the - sort of the same uniform stuff but might write about some different sports that girls might not be interested in - for example football.

Researcher: Aah, okay.

Spiderman123: Yeah, that's probably like the same - it's probably like the same thing other than that.

Researcher: Aah, okay. Brilliant answer! So you'd be including things that you thought the girls might not necessarily be interested in maybe

Spiderman123: Yeah. (78-85).

Representation clearly mattered for Spiderman123, not only in terms of reflecting her passionate interest in football but also in how it could increase visibility of the sport for others. I found it notable that she did not refer to a *lack* of female footballers in the world, for but rather emphasised their cultural invisibility: “not many girl footballers get noticed” (55). What mattered here for Spiderman123 was using the opportunity of storytelling to spotlight one of her personal fundamentals of identity to girls who may not have been normally interested in football (79-80). It was noticeable that she was not doing so to counteract a narrative of invisibility, for female footballers quite firmly existed within her world, but rather to open up the potential diversities of being girl for others.

At this point, a turn towards the work of Rudine Sims Bishop is useful. In an influential editorial, Bishop proposed the metaphor of “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors” as a way to interrogate representation within children’s literature (1990). Bishop

suggested that windows allowed readers the opportunity to view “worlds that be real or imagined, familiar or strange”, that these windows might also be “sliding glass doors” where readers “have to only walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author”. The third part of this metaphor comes when the “lighting conditions are just right” to transform a window into a mirror which reflects human experience “back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience” (1990). In her look towards visibility by including female footballers into her story, Spiderman123 creates something of a sliding glass door of her own whereby the recreation of her own world leads to an accessibility and visibility for others.

As the fieldwork progressed, it became clear that some of the key elements of being girl for the participants could be understood through a discussion of their reading habits. Although this was not a study focused solely on the books that young girls read, I had built in opportunities to explore any connections between the creative work that the participants produced and their reading habits. I suspected that there may be some resonance between the two, not in the least in their depiction of gender but also in how they articulated their experience of being girl. There was a clear and well-established justification for this thought process in the literature, not only thanks to the work of Judith Butler (1993) but also due to the historic work of scholars such as Meredith Rogers Cherland. Cherland recognised a connection between the reading habits of young girls and their “enacting” and “doing” of gender (1994) and argued that “Reading fiction is a social practice through which children seek to understand their own places in the world” (1993, p.42), an idea returned to since by numerous scholars.

For Rose Gold, reading was a vital and positive part of her identity and she showed genuine excitement when the topic came up in our discussions. She was particularly

interested in the mystery genre and told me about a number of popular contemporary authors including Sharna Jackson and Katherine Woodfine. She also referenced the classic detective genre with mention of Agatha Christie's *Poirot* and Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*. Her interview coincided with the recent publication of *Death Sets Sail* by Robin Stevens (2020) and as we were both fans of her work, our conversation moved towards a pivotal plot point in this text:

Rose Gold:so what I did I just read the end first.

Researcher: Wow!

Rose Gold: to reassure myself about Daisy -

Researcher: [laughter]

Rose Gold: And then once I've read that, I was like 'okay read [Rose Gold], she's alright' and then [laughter], so then I went back to the beginning and started reading it.
(35-40)

Here Rose Gold exhibits emotional awareness, something typical of the participants as a whole, through her concern for the wellbeing of a beloved fictional character. She is able to recognise the feeling and actively reassure herself, irrespective of potentially spoiling any twist. Emotional concerns were more important than those of narrative.

It is also useful to consider the role of series fiction here: *Death Sets Sail* by Robin Stevens is the finale in a well-established series of bestsellers and as a passionate reader, Rose Gold was clearly familiar with the series. The connection between her and Daisy, one of the lead characters, was a long term relationship which had been built up through Rose Gold's prior experience with the preceding titles. If we accept then that reading is a practice which "[enables] and [precludes] different kinds of identity and power" (Christian-Smith,

1993, p.xii) then Rose Gold's reading of *Death Sets Sail* demonstrates her power as both reader and author. She is able to move through the text in a nonlinear fashion, in order to satisfy her emotional needs, whilst also demonstrating her authorial instincts in how she has considered the other potential fates for Daisy. When she refers to Daisy being "alright", it can be read as relating to her physical wellbeing but also her approval of what happens to the character.

As our interview progressed, Rose Gold spoke further about her reading habits and, in particular, about how a text needed to work to earn her attention:

Rose Gold: ... If it's like - it depends if the story captivates me. If it makes me want to read on then I will read on. If, like, it makes me not want to turn the page then I'll just - I'll just stop. Or I'll just read the - I'll skip like six chapters.

Researcher: Ah right, to see if it gets better later?

Rose Gold: Yeah. (57-61).

Her choice of "captivating" and "makes" were evocative here, painting as they did a picture of a text loaded with enticements for the reader to keep reading. This, along with Rose Gold's comments about "if it makes me want to read" and "if it makes me not want to turn the page" seemed to hint at an understanding of a book as a materially charged object (Gamble et al. 2019) rather than something more passive. For Rose Gold, the reading of that object was an endeavour which required activity from both sides: the book needed to work to catch her attention and reward her emotional investment.

We continued to talk about Rose Gold's love of reading throughout her interview. Following a discussion about her favourite characters to read about, I departed from my scripted questions and instead asked Rose Gold about why she particularly enjoyed detective

stories. My intent here was to explore a seam of clear interest and pleasure for Rose Gold but also to see if she picked up on gender as a relevant variable. I had interviewed several participants at this point and was aware of how little her peers had spoken about gender. In referencing the detective genre, and connecting this to her love for the *Murder Most Unladylike* series which details the adventures of female detectives, I wondered if Rose Gold would foreground issues of gender:

Researcher: So what makes, like, a detective story - say Poirot - like really interesting? Is it the stuff that - how he works it out?

Rose Gold: Yeah, it's the - how their brains work, and how amazing

Researcher: Mmm,

Rose Gold: Like, and how like - how they describe the characters and it's just really, like - their appearance is definitely like...how the authors describe them, like - it's so cool.

Researcher: Ah right, okay. So you're saying there that you don't really mind, like, who the character is - it's more, sort of, the things they do...? So if you could say, have a girl detective, or a boy detective, would that bother you or is it more the fact that they're a detective?

Rose Gold: Yeah, it's the more the fact that they're a detective. (79-88).

I quote this exchange in detail because it is a moment where I diverted from my script to push the conversation towards an explicit discussion of gender. I was already conscious of a reluctance across the participants to actively and directly engage with issues of gender and so, in this instance, was trying to direct the conversation towards a specific enquiry on the nature of gender within the detective story. In doing so, I hoped to directly address some of the

absences that were already making themselves felt within the data about gender and representation. I was concerned as to whether the silence on this topic was due to my approach or something that the participants themselves were bringing to the table. Directing the conversation towards a specific interrogation of gender identity and representation seemed to be a productive act under the circumstances.

In this instance, I was prompted by how Rose Gold had referenced two iconic male detectives rather than some of the female detectives in the books she had read about. Contemporary children's literature does not lack for female representation in the detective genre and I knew that some of the books she had read featured notable female detectives. I was genuinely interested as to why Rose Gold had not chosen them to talk about and so diverted from my script to investigate the topic further. As the exchange here indicates, Rose Gold proved to be more interested in the actions of the detective character and their mental acuity rather than their gender. She uses an ungendered pronoun in her description of the detective and, when I direct the conversation explicitly towards a "boy detective" or a "girl detective", resists picking one or the other.

As discussed elsewhere, this reluctance to engage in discussions about gender was typical to the participants. I suggest some reasons for it throughout this thesis but want to dwell briefly on the influence of the study design itself. I wondered whether its overt interest in issues of gender and identity had come to erase the potential of other discussions from taking place. This was something that I had seen in the literature review where drawing a boundary about "about girls' lives" could come to create "the very exclusions we are attempting to redress" (Aapola et al. 2015, p.3). In other words, the naming and recognising of one form of identity could come to exclude the experience of others who do not conform to this. Donna Haraway writes about this with acuity: "Consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute. Identities seem contradictory, partial, and strategic" (2016, p.16). There was

a possibility that the design of this study and its centring of girls and girlhoods had enabled a “strategic” and selective performance of gender and identity on the part of the participants. This is something I talk about further in the limitations chapter.

4.1.1.1 The impact of alternative education

It is useful to pause here to discuss the atypical educational experience of Rose Gold. She was the only participant within the research who attended a primary school which had a forest school attached to it. Forest schools locate their activities within a natural or woodland environment in order to develop a relationship between the student and the natural world. They are predominantly connected to primary school education and Early Years and Key Stage One in particular, with similar popularity in Key Stage Two, before dropping off almost entirely for elder years (Hemery et. al., 2019, p.2). One reason given for this is the increasingly restricted “timetables and curricula” for older students (p.19).

Rose Gold elaborated upon her experience of Forest Schools during her workshop.

[They are a] child-centred learning process where children learn to be creative. There are many benefits such as better sleep, erm, more alert, and, erm, scientists have concluded that children perform better in the classroom and also [it] teaches some children some skills that may not be possible to teach in the classroom. There's also a holistic approach which means it, like, covers the entire, covers the entire picture and, erm, it is also very good for a child's wellbeing.

This felt like a rote response, yet it was clear that forest schools were important to Rose Gold. She returned them in her story where she wrote about a forest school that has

experienced some neglect. It begins as the narrator walks through “rusty gates that clearly hadn’t been painted for decades” before noticing the “~~*rotten~~ wood that used to be the vegetable plant plots” [sic]. In positioning these encounters at the start of the story and prior to the narrator reaching the school building and meeting any of the current inhabitants, Rose Gold centres the reader’s attention upon the natural world. As with the other participants, she has a nuanced eye for detail in her work and is able to deliver striking imagery.

Rose Gold’s story finishes with the narrator reflecting: “I was gratefull [sic] to see that it was still being maintained but still in a naterul [sic] way”. The narrator has an awareness of how the garden should be due to their prior personal connection with the space and are grateful that it continues to be looked after in a natural way. Yet a subtle theme of neglect is still present within this text: the rusty gates haven’t been painted and the wood is marked with the memory of the plant plot it used to be. Rather than creating a distinction between wild and natural, untamed and domesticated, Rose Gold embraces the ambiguities of what lies between.

4.1.1.2 Using writing to explore the political landscape

Rose Gold was also one of the more overtly political participants within the research. We spoke in her workshop about how she enjoyed what she described as “political” conversations with her friends at lunchtime and in our subsequent interview, she brought up the climate crisis:

Researcher: Alright. What do you think life's going to be like fifty years in the future?

Rose Gold: Well, with climate change, no-one can really know because like, either, with one side, either we - all the David Attenborough people save the planet and it goes well or it's ... goodbye planet Earth. (149-152).

The links between children, the culture they consume, and their political awareness is well established (see for example Mickenberg, 2005; O'Dell, 2010 amongst many others) and Rose Gold's reference to "David Attenborough people" was a startlingly effective piece of shorthand. David Attenborough is an English broadcaster who has foregrounded environmental concerns throughout a media career spanning over seven decades. In describing herself as one of Attenborough's "people", Rose Gold provides an indication of her own political concerns but also uses this study as a moment to spotlight them. Notably she also recognises that these issues will directly, and indeed drastically, impact upon her within her lifetime.

I found the choice of David Attenborough himself significant here rather than somebody of a similar age or gender to Rose Gold. Such a reference would not have been out of the ordinary for the past few years have seen a rise in teenaged activists and in particular of young female activists. The most notable figure here is perhaps Greta Thunberg, an activist who gained worldwide visibility due to her childhood protests against climate change. Thunberg is a "radically different kind of eco-celebrity" (Murphy, 2021, p.203) who did not "leverage a preexisting [sic] status as celebrity to confront a particular environmental problem or align herself with a particular group" (p.196). Rather, she embraced a rhetoric of "confrontational speeches at international summits, sober television studio interviews, or online grappling with critics" (p.196) in order to get her message across. This radicalism sits in contrast with the more establishment figure of David Attenborough who is an influential "celebrity scientist" (Unsworth & Voas, 2021, p.436) and holds particularly high levels of

trust for people who identify as Anglican, Catholic, or Non-Religious (p.442), the most common religious affiliations in the United Kingdom (Office of National Statistics, 2021) and, in contrast to Thunberg, an adult man. In her reference to David Attenborough, Rose Gold harnesses these forces of established power and authority while also yoking herself to them. Further research would be warranted into the impact of young activists upon young people and, as this incident shows, for that research to focus upon the enduring forces of gender, age and patriarchy.

This moment with Rose Gold occurred at a very specific point within the interview. During this session, I asked all of the participants to reflect on what a reader in the future may think of their work. In many ways, I was interested in whether the participants would reflect upon the parallels here with their own experience with *A Ghost Visits Her Old School*. I was also interested as to how the participants would conceptualise that reader of the future and if gender would come into play as a relevant variable. Many participants took this question and the subsequent one as an opportunity to discuss the technological innovations which would have occurred whilst others, such as Rose Gold, took the opportunity to spotlight political issues. For Flying Fox, one of these issues was the impact of plastics:

Researcher: What else do you think would be different about the future?

Flying Fox: Um. There would - The school fields would - would have more astroturf than grass.

Researcher: Ooh that's a good choice. Where do you think all the grass would go then?

Flying Fox: Dead.

Researcher: It'd just die?

Flying Fox: Mmhm. I'm a harbinger. [Mum: A harbinger? A harbinger of what?] Of plastic. [laughter] (65-70).

Not only does Flying Fox demonstrate a well-developed vocabulary here with her metaphor of the “harbinger” (70), a classical portent of the future, she also recognises the impact upon people of her own age by referencing the change in the school’s playing fields. The final part of our interview saw a discussion of other potential differences in the future:

Researcher: Who knows where we're gonna be in fifty years! Do you think anything else would have changed then if we've got a lot of plastic and no grass? What else do you think would be going on?

Flying Fox: I think that there will be way more packed lunches because of - the years before - some years before there were loads of really unhealthy lunch menu options so instead it'll just get healthier and healthier and healthier until people just started bringing in packed lunches all the time. (71-75).

This is a nuanced model of the future which not only draws upon her own experience of “really unhealthy lunch menu options” (74) but also works to juxtapose the dystopian changes in environment against the gains in terms of personal diet and wellbeing. It is important to emphasise here that I do not seek to characterise the responses of the other participants as less sophisticated than this but rather to recognise the nuanced nature of Flying Fox’s response. By describing herself as a harbinger, she had taken the role of witness. She was somebody who was able to foretell the coming of others and to act as witness to their arrival. Both this response, and the previously discussed “David Attenborough people”

moment from Rose Gold, indicate potential models for young writers to take in addressing the political within their creative work.

It is useful to pause here to recognise how the political articulacy of the participants sits within the context of the research process itself. Dawn Currie et al. recognise how girls “try out different ways of being girls in various social settings” (2009, p.xv) and in the context of the workshop and the interview it was easy to see the participants crafting and presenting their identity accordingly. Yet as Karen Cuthbert reminds us, the interview process can also be deeply restrictive (2021, p.3), particularly in the representation of non-normative identities and ways of being. The inevitable question then arises as to whether the fieldwork process here generated certain types of being girl whilst negating and erasing others. On a practical level, the self-selection of the participants and their parents to take part in the study already indicates they possessed a certain type of cultural currency. On a political level, the models demonstrated by Rose Gold and Flying Fox indicate not only an awareness of social and political discourse about the individual, and in particular the impacts of climate change, and show two ways in which young people might express that in their literary practices.

Yet in some senses, it can be argued that this politicisation was expected from the process: this was a piece of socially orientated research which was asking the individual to reflect upon their creative writing and the things that impacted upon that. As I have shown elsewhere within this chapter, most notably in my discussion of Dratini9054 and her “unless you thought so yourself” comment (213), the participants were clearly aware of who I was and had made a decision about my political intent. It is not a reach to see that they may have presented a specific form of their identity in response to this and yet, I would suggest, that the relative isolation of pronounced political commentary within the data seems to indicate that this did not occur.

Political themes are no new thing within the scholarly literature (see for example Lensmire, 1994; Gandolfo, 2008) but wedding this seam of the political with the idea of the “more-than” (Renold, 2017, 2021) is productive here. Drawing on work from Erin Manning (2013), Renold argues for the “more-than” as the imminent and historical resonance from a creative act: “what has mattered, is mattering, and might continue to matter, entangle and intensify in ways that cannot be predicted in advance” (2017, p.443). In one example of understanding what this might look like, Renold writes of the “hesitations, ticks and jitteriness” of the bodies of the young people they worked with in one project and argues these bodily manifestations were the marks and the “made-flesh” of the “inter-generational transmission of trauma” experienced by these young people (2021, p.87).

The marks of this discourse manifest themselves across the constituent elements of the project, and indeed beyond its limits. Renold, Edwards and Huuki argue for this as thinking “imminently”, that is to say an awareness of the “past-present-future potential of what matters and might matter can look, sound, feel like and generate” (2020, p.455). They are writing in this instance about teddy bears which were used in a session with young people and the Welsh government where participants were asked to carry the bears around with them. As objects, those bears came to materially embody meaning gained prior to the event, the event itself, and something yet to be manifested. Furthermore, they came together and worked collectively:

Collectively, they intra-act to realise a human and more-than-human *cwch*¹⁰ - a discursive, affective, material environment forged with an ethico-political 'relational architecture' (p.455).

¹⁰ Welsh for a “cuddle or a hug”

Renold comes to define this approach as an “imminent” methodology (Renolds, 2021, p.102), namely a methodology concerned with what things might materially “do, be and become” (2020, p. 458). In terms of this research then, I argue that the participant’s stories function as something similar to Renolds’ teddy bears, namely objects of imminent meaning. The texts within this study resonate in their immediate context but also hold the impact of prior discourse, political and otherwise, and show how this discourse has marked themselves upon the body of the young author. The “future potential” (p.455) of the stories and their authors is, of course, yet to be known, but it is no long shot to suggest that it may include be a study which, just as this used the writing of Bridget Shevlin, uses the writing of Flying Fox, Rose Gold, and their peers with a new generation of young authors.

4.1.2 Summary and contribution to knowledge

In this section, I discussed how the participants connected with *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949) and suggested that these moments of connection, and indeed rejection, formed part of their identity making process. I recognised how this process indicated something of the paradoxical requirements of performing girl within the world by showing how she must recognise both her own positioning within the world whilst also contending with the layers of expectation placed upon her. The extracts that I discussed in this section connected to several points of the literature; the idea that girls construct an identity that befits the prevalent discourse is well-established (Currie, 2009; Flinders, 1996; Lloyd, 1998; Read, 2011; Walkerdine, 1989; Williams, 2006); similarly established is the idea that girls are given moments of assumed truthful identity through their participation in that discourse (Walkerdine, 1990); that understandings of the girl can be best formed through a model of kinship and affinity (Gubar, 2016; Beauvais, 2017) rather than one of opposition; that writing can be an opportunity for young girls to form and express identities (Guzzetti and

Gamboa, 2004); and that their creative work, in a wider sense, can help young girls articulate feelings about challenging situations (Renold, 2020, 2017).

These findings offer a specific contribution to knowledge in how they detail the “impossible fiction” (Walkerdine, 1990, p.119) of being a child author. Not only do they illustrate how the participants must contend with power hierarchies about their writing, but they also show how their identities can be directly impacted and limited by these discourses. As this is a non-comparative study, further research would be required in order to ascertain whether these restrictions similarly apply to young boys who write. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that whether they are concerned about writing too much or for what an adult may think of their work, young writers are forced to negotiate a series of contradictory and often challenging binaries in order to write.

4.1.3 The relationship between child-author and adult-author

“But if she had - but if she had been a different person, then I'd probably still have written it the ... same... yeah, probably have written it the same. As long as it was the same story. “

(Rey's Interview, Lines 169-170)

In this section, I consider the relationships, both conscious and otherwise, that the participants formed between themselves and the prompt text within the study: *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949). I suggest that a connection between an individual and text can be understood best as something of a dynamic conversation between the two parties and, as with any conversation, the process is one which requires negotiation on both sides. The

primary data for this sections comes from coding the moments in the workshop, interview and story where the participants explicitly referenced Bridget or *A Ghost Visits Her Old School*. An indicative moment of such can be found in the opening quote to this section, which is taken from Rey's interview.

I suggest that these moments of identification with the text and author function as an act of "identity-making" for the participants (Vignoles et al., 2012). These are moments where the participant constructs or modifies their identity in response to the stimulus. Their performance of identity and their choices detail the "impossible fiction" of being girl (Walkerdine, 1990, p.119) by illustrating the paradoxical and often contradictory demands placed upon her. As the literature review showed, not only must girls conceptualise their own identity within the world, but they must contend with the demands of that world upon them.

One of the most visible points of connection for the participants was in thinking about age. They found interest in how old Bridget Shevlin was when she wrote her story and in many senses, this was often a more interesting point of discussion than how she represented issues of gender. Rainbow, for example, was able to make a personal connection between Bridget's age and her own family:

Researcher: It was back in 1949 when she [Shevlin] wrote it.

Rainbow: Mm.

Researcher: So that's a long time ago, right?

[Discussion between Rainbow and Mum. Mum, in response to an inaudible question from Rainbow: "When Granny was born, yes."]

(Workshop, 4:45 minutes+)

At this extract shows, Rainbow connected the time that Bridget wrote the story to her own grandmother's date of birth. Her mother provides confirmation of this to her. Positioning this reading alongside the marginalisation of elder women within popular culture (see Simcock and Lynn, 2006; Sawchuk and Ly, 2022 amongst others) is provocative. By making the familial connection to Bridget and referencing an adult individual already known to her, Rainbow is able to see Bridget as an adult, rather than child. Rainbow also demonstrates knowledge building in this by using her pre-existing knowledge of her grandmother as a way to understand a new area of experience (Haas Dyson, 2000, p.254).

For The Writer, interest was found not in Bridget's age but rather in understanding Bridget as a figure within history. Brunell-Forman and Paris (2011) argue that historians of gender have "traditionally privileged the adult years of the life span without reflecting extensively on the significance of age" (3). As The Writer continued to expand her thoughts, it seemed that she was collapsing the significance of age altogether. In her workshop, The Writer asked if Bridget was writing about: "what she thinks the world is going to be like or is it the world that she knows?" The Writer later extended this idea and began to wonder if Bridget "knew how to do stuff in a certain way, wasn't happy when the people didn't do it that way". Here The Writer portrays Bridget as a figure that is both young and old, and focuses interest on her action and agency.

4.1.3.1 Navigating the child – adult relationship

Several participants began to think about what would happen when Bridget grew up and how this change of perspective would influence her writing style. The consensus was that there would be a change in her work but this was differently articulated by each

participant. In her interview Dratini9054 spoke perceptively about the difference between adults and children:

...adults – as I know – they have had much more learning than children, they know all the good stories, they know what they can write and they know how to write it, so we're just children, we just write stories in our ways. We don't write it like a normal adventure story. (207-210)

This extract became a “spark point” for me, a term I used throughout my coding and analysis to recognise moments of notable provocation or interest within the data. I had come across the adjectival use of spark throughout my literature review: EJ Renold writes of the need for “inventive ways to ethically and creatively craft experience in ways that can spark recognition, imagination and change.” (2017, p.15), whilst Maggie MacLure writes about how one participant's selective mutism within their research “sparked a kind of rage for explanation and meaning” (2013, p.662). My usage of “spark points” then sought to record these moments of possibility within the data and use them as an analytical provocation.

At its very immediate level, this particular extract hinted at a pronounced difference between the creative approaches of children and adults for Dratini9054. It was a demonstration of aetnormativity in action (Nikolajeva, 2010) which came to suggest that the adult was somehow more authoritative and legitimate than the child. Dratini9054's reference to “normal” was particularly interesting here because it implied that children's writing, namely the work of herself and her peers, was somehow abnormal in comparison.

Dratini9054 had spoken previously about the differences between adult and child writing in her workshop. Here she had described how the adult Bridget would know “more about grammar, spelling, punctuation – all the things that you need in writing” and, in doing

so, equating adulthood with a level of creative competency which lacked from children's work. At its most immediate theoretical level, this was a noticeable demonstration of Marah Gubar's deficit model in practice which positioned children as "universal notices who must overcome an across-the-board array of incapacities" (2015, p.455). It must be noted, however, that this is not necessarily an accurate representation of Dratini9054's views. As with the other participants, she had been prone to using correctives in her responses and trying to provide the answers that were expected of her. Although a self-modulation was not particularly visible in this exchange, it was still possible that she had read this situation as requiring something similar.

It was noticeable that Dratini9054's comments were focused in particular upon the practicalities of writing itself, such as grammar and spelling, rather than more conceptual skills and influences upon the author. After talking in her interview about how children "just write stories in our ways" (209), she took a moment to gather her thoughts before continuing:

And we, um, write, erm, that would not be exciting as another story, so it wouldn't be as exciting as, um, the [inaudible], unless you thought so yourself. (212-213).

A normally articulate and verbose participant, this was a rare moment of inaudibility for Dratini9054. Rather than ascribing this inaudibility towards a poor connection or issues with the sound, as I did with her second moment of inaudibility in the interview where she moved away from the camera, I instead chose to read this moment of inaudibility as a strategy of power on Dratini9054's part (Hall, 2007, p.132). As Spyros Spyrou writes, there is a necessity for researchers to "develop methodological tools that allow us, as researchers, *to make silence speak*" (2015, p.10). Silence, in this sense, can include not just the absence of speech but also the moments when voices become "unclear and incoherent" or express "the

perplexing and the contradictory” (p.14). Spyrou argues that such moments can be “veiled and very intentional” and references one instance where a child’s refusal to answer a question was rather a reluctance to discuss potentially taboo topics (p.14). In making part of her speech inaudible before then seeking the approval of myself with a louder comment, Dratini9054 explored a range of power positions. She began in a confident manner which claimed a certain amount of authority before the moment of inaudibility signalled a handing over of this authority towards the adult. This was an enforcement of the aetonormative and, in many senses, something of an effacement of her own skills as an author: unless an adult characterised a child’s creative writing as “exciting” then it would not be so. This was difficult to reconcile with her lively and excitable creative voice.

This exchange also hinted towards another angle of aetonormativity, namely that of the carnival. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin, Nikolajeva argues for the carnival and the carnivalesque as an opportunity to explore the counter-cultural normative – to question and subvert the powers which enforce it. Carnival is fragile, limited both temporally and practically, and ends with the restoration of the status quo. In her emphasis of the aetonormative, Dratini9054 comes to characterise creative writing as something of a carnival in itself. This was a theme she returned to throughout her interview where she told me of how she liked to write stories where “either something goes wrong” (line 11) or “something goes missing” (line 15) and how, whoever solved these problems, would “control the world” (line 16). In relation to ideas, Dratini9054 also expressed how she liked to “think different about all these [sic] stuff” (line 57-58). Whilst this indicates a familiarity with how to craft narrative and an awareness of what makes a story interesting, I also suggest that it also underscores a commitment towards creatively subverting and disrupting the normative, however briefly that normative may last.

4.1.3.2 Using creative writing to explore the social world

For some participants, writing their own story became a useful point of connection to the world about them. They were able to use their stories to interrogate situations that they had experienced and explore alternative ways of being girl. In Dolly Daydream's story, dictated to her mother who scribed the text, the headmistress of a school is imprisoned by two year six boys and dies as a result. She then comes back to haunt the school and gain her revenge by poisoning the school meals and, although the story ends on a questioning note, it seems clear that the threat has not yet been wholly resolved. I have redacted identifying data in the following.

Now Mrs [Name] came back to get her revenge. But the thing is she never got her revenge. There never was a big [School Name] battle. A few years later when she'd been headteacher for five years she left the school. But she wouldn't leave without her revenge, would she? ...

At first read, Dolly Daydream's story may seem to indicate an uncomfortable sidelining of female agency: the sole female character within the story is so disliked that she is imprisoned by two young boys, while the school is left to be run by the liked male teachers. Yet during the data gathering process, I became aware that Dolly Daydream had named the school in her story after her own and later, came to realise that she had also named the headmistress after a previous headmistress at that school. At this point, Dolly Daydream's story gained a new quality: she had used the experience of being an author to challenge and question the established power structures of her environment. In doing so she embraces the carnivalesque, that is to say the temporary overthrow of the establishment and the embrace of

a radical alternative. This adoption of the carnivalesque allows Dolly Daydream to temporarily try a different way of being girl, a way of being imbued with all the power and authority of authorship. She was able to be influenced not only by the environment she found herself within but also the discursive qualities of that environment (Currie et al., 2009; Williams, 2006).

Dolly Daydream was also the only participant to represent both male and female adult teachers in her story and to have these individuals be marked with notable agency. Rose Gold, as indicated by an edit from “Miss” to “Mrs”, referred to a newly married woman within her work, while Flying Fox referenced an “elderly woman”. Both of these characters were ancillary and elderly; the former was the “long lasting school secretary” whilst the latter was “conducting music”. The other participants, if they did refer to teachers, defaulted towards gender neutral references. Some of this difference might be ascribed to Dolly Daydream’s position within the study. She was part of the pilot study, and so received slightly different instructions. She chose to dictate her story to her mother who acted as scribe. She was also one of the few participants to explicitly depict aspects of her real world educational experience in her story. This connection between the real world representation of adult women and their subsequent depiction in child-authored writing has precedent. As *The Tidy House* (Steedman, 1982) showed, the young authors drew directly from their own lived experience:

...The extraordinary dark nights of whispering and fumbling in the getting of children, overheard by an eight-year-old child through the thin walls of her 1930s’ council house bedroom ... (p.19).

And the relevant scene itself from *The Tidy House*:

...Turn the light off, Mark.

I'm going to. Sorry.

All right.

I want to get asleep.

Don't worry, you'll get to sleep in time.

Don't let us, really, this time of the night... (p.20).

Whilst further research into the representation of adult women in juvenilia would be warranted, and for that research to pay particular interest to the agentic discourse about these women, the work of Dolly Daydream, Rose Gold, and indeed the authors of *The Tidy House* suggests at how a child-author can be influenced directly by the experiences of women about them.

A further point of interest in the work of Dolly Daydream is in how she represents violence within her story and in how the headmistress meets her fate. Again, I have redacted potentially identifying data in what follows:

...But when Mrs [Name] went into a small dark room the boy locked her in!

Meanwhile the other boy got a ladder from Mr [Name]'s shed and put it up against the balcony that Mrs [Name] would stand on to ring the bell to signal to the children to come into school. He climbed up the ladder and got onto the balcony then locked the door so Mrs [Name] would be trapped in the room. He raced back down the ladders and put it back in Mr [Name]'s shed.

Mrs [Name] was gone for good....

The focus of interest here rests upon the violent actions of the boys. One boy gets a ladder from the caretaker's shed, whilst another locks the headmistress in to the room. After climbing to the balcony, the boy with the ladder is able to lock the other door. These actions result in the headmistress being trapped and, ultimately, dying: "Mrs [Name] was gone for good." Notably the headmistress is named in full throughout; we are left in no doubt as to the focus of the boy's intent.

Violence remains a complex topic within children's literature and often becomes something of a critical taboo. Indeed, it was something that I did not quite recognise as being present in Dolly Daydream's story until a long way through my analysis. When it comes to the intersections between children's literature and creative writing, discussions of violence manifest themselves in very conceptual terms. Researchers have illustrated, for example, the hegemonic violence of the workshop model and how it lionises the middle class "lone wolf" writer whilst excluding others. (Dressman, 1993, p.247), and the exclusionary violence that comes from minoritising the work of young black female writers (Toliver, 2021). Researchers have also conceptualised violence in more practical terms, writing about how creative writing can offer incarcerated young people an opportunity to safely express their voice (Smitherman and Thompson, 2002) and in a related area, how participatory creative activities such as writing and art-making can allow young girls to explore their feelings about sexual micro-aggressions (Renold, 2017).

A tension remains however in the intersections between violence and the creative writing of young girls. Bronwyn Williams argues that girls are often expected to explore violence at a distance through their creative writing and give teachers "character-driven, nonviolent, open and reflective interpretations of reading and writing" (2006, p.301), similarly Valerie Walkerdine highlights how young girls are often "presented with, and inserted into, ideological and discursive positions by practices which locate them in meaning

and in regimes of truth.” (1990, p.87). Young female writers thus come to exist in a “series of double-binds and contradictions such that certain positions become overtly open to them, while others have to exist only in the margins.” (116), a concern echoed by Charlotte Woolley who writes thirty years later: “Girls’ identities are troublingly narrow” (2020, p.9). It is worthwhile recognising that a handful of studies have questioned these assumptions about violence highlighting how girls do write about these topics whilst simultaneously tempering their arguments due to the small scale context of these findings (Hunt, 1995; Peterson and Ladky, 2001). More studies on the topic do exist, most notably in the fields of fanfiction, but these do tend to focus on the writing of adult women and much more adult content.

Returning to the idea of a narrow identity is productive, not only in how it influences the representation of violence within the data but how it shows how narrowly the participants interpreted the idea of being girl. In exploring violence within her story, and filtering that violence through the actions of the two Year 6 boys, Dolly Daydream allows herself to explore a non-normative way of being girl. Not only does this draw upon elements of the carnivalesque, as already discussed, and so allows the exploration of unsanctioned power in an unsanctioned space, but also upon the essence of fictionality itself. Dolly Daydream is able to create an imagined situation to explore alternative ways of being. She can carry out violence and move around the school environment in a manner that she is able to control and ultimately end. Dolly Daydream was the only participant to write a story which centred upon an act of implied violence in this manner. Although the other participants touched on themes of violence, most notably Pink Paw and her description of the psychological violence of COVID-19, these were not bodily nor physical as in the case of Dolly Daydream’s story.

At one level, the uniqueness of her approach may be ascribed to her age. Dolly Daydream was one of the youngest participants in the project and her experience of education

was lesser than the other participants. It is possible that she had been less exposed to gendered cultural expectations about her writing. Similarly, she may have been less familiar with the idea that she was required to fulfil these expectations as author. Yet, if read in terms of narrowness, it suggests a movement away from the slender tranches of identity allotted to young girls within the school environment. Rather than being the “good girl” (Woolley, 2020, p.9) or expressing conservative gender roles in her writing (Greenhalgh, 2014; Harper, 2020), Dolly Daydream could diverge from that identity and explore less socially acceptable behaviours.

It was noticeable that whilst many participants clearly wrestled with issues of identity and being girl they, somewhat paradoxically, did not acknowledge nor consider gender as a relevant nor particularly pressing variable. Ruby Redfort, for example, was aware of Bridget’s gender prior to the workshop and offered her own ideas within the session itself: “the way that he slash she wrote it, sounds like a girl”. At its most immediate level, I felt that this comment was another incident of a corrective. These, as I have written elsewhere, were moments where the participants gave an immediate response before then contradicting or correcting themselves in their follow up comments. In this instance, I felt that Ruby Redfort had defaulted towards a masculine pronoun before remembering the context of our interview. I also wondered if, at some level, she had forgotten her prior knowledge of Bridget’s identity or otherwise decided to ignore it.

Following my confirmation of Bridget’s gender, Ruby Redfort still felt that she was unable to connect to the story:

If I knew more about Bridget’s life, then I would feel more feelings about it, but all I know is that she’s Bridget, she was ten, and it was made in 1949.

At some level I had theorised a connection between young girl as reader and young girl as author, seeing both the participants and Bridget Shevlin as existing on a continuum with notable points of kinship and alliance. For example, all of the participants I worked with had experience of full time education in school and none, to my knowledge, were formally home-schooled. The educational situation represented in *A Ghost Visits Her Old School*, despite its more specific terminology, was not an unfamiliar situation for a modern day student to understand.

Yet it is important to recognise here that *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* is not what one may dub as a stereotypically feminine text despite its epistolary form. It details a day in the life of a girl's boarding school and whilst it references their appearance, and so the signification of being girl (Walkerdine, 1989), it offers little detail on the relationality of that performance (Grebowicz et al. 2013; Twomey, 2011) nor does it overtly depict "traditionally "feminine" values" such as "compassion, empathy, collaboration, listening, nurturing" (Woolley, 2020, p.13). Finally Shevlin resists giving "something of [herself and reveal something personal" (p.44) in her story. The only detail we learn about her is the paratextual note that she is a member of Upper Second and this story was written in 1949. It is no reach then to suggest that much of *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* did not do girlhood in a way that the participants understood and the lack of gender data in their responses merely signifies this.

Ruby Redfort continued to theorise in the workshop about the type of writer that Bridget may have been:

[She] seems to be the kind of person to, like, write about the future because – but I'm not entirely sure ... maybe she likes to write in first person.

In seeing nuance not only in the persona adopted by Bridget, but also in her writerly style, Ruby Redfort adopted a sophisticated interpretative stance. She had recognised that writing was not simply the rote act of putting pen to paper that many of the other participants had articulated but rather an expression of a personal perspective and standpoint. I acknowledge that Ruby Redfort touched upon the issues of spelling and grammar, with her reference to “first person”, but would suggest that she refrained from the more granular and pronounced interpretation of Bridget’s spelling and grammar skills as with other participants. Furthermore she recognised a difference between the self as presented in the story and the author as individual and, rather than theorising Bridget as somebody who writes, began to theorise Bridget as a writer.

Some of this awareness of Bridget as a writer can be ascribed to Ruby Redfort’s family circumstances. She was clearly familiar with the business of literature and told me about how her mother is a writer and how her best friend’s parent illustrates her mother’s book. This awareness of her mother’s authorship, coupled with Ruby Redfort’s awareness of the illustrative process, was something that demonstrated a clear confidence with the idea of being an author. This was reflected in Ruby Redfort’s bright and charming writing which was a genuine pleasure to read. To all intents and purposes, Ruby Redfort was a confident author in her own right.

A paradoxical note of doubt, however, remained about her ability to perform that role. This was most clearly indicated by Ruby Redfort’s self-deprecating asides throughout the workshop: “I didn’t really think this through very well” and in her interview where she offered an advance apology for her handwriting and her tendency to make stories “way too long”. Her apology for her writing reinforces Jane Considine’s point that “neatness” functions as an indicator for good writing (2016, p.07).

The length of her work was clearly something that Ruby Redfort was conscious of: “be ready for six pages, okay?” In her interview, she returned to this theme and referred to an incident in her education:

... in year two where we had to create - create like Jack and the Beanstalk except in our own words and most people took like one or two pages and I took - was it eleven or eighteen pages... [Mum: It was year one, and almost everyone did one page and you did like six really closely written]. No, I did like eight or eleven or eighteen - [Mum: Okay, it was about eight then] Yeah, eight. (41-47)

This was obviously a source of pride for Ruby Redfort and yet she had also realised that this approach sat against the normative practices of creative writing within the school. Only moments prior, she had told me about how her teacher had asked her to limit her work in terms of output:

...Um, I normally turn a one page story into a four page story and I wanted to continue my story about the demon girl who's actually the last princess of heaven but then my, but then my teacher [name] - this was a couple of weeks ago I think - said 'no, limit it to four pages, okay, I'm not having you writing eleven pages' (32-38)

She returned once more to this theme later in her interview when I asked her about what a girl from fifty years in the future may think of her story:

Fifty years in the future, one: would complain that it's so long, and two: I'm thinking she - what she would feel about it... (151-152).

Juxtaposing Ruby Redfort's asides against her articulate and confident creative persona was productive and often saddening, for it showed how a young girl could confidently and positively embody the role of writer and yet have that confidence impacted by the circumscriptions and limits of the discourse about her. In many ways, her knowledge of creative writing and authorship seemed to have developed outside of the classroom's monologic script (Gutierrez et al., 1995). Ruby Redfort's knowledge was instead a counterscript which, rather than finding a "third-space" (446) of co-existence, was destined to remain at a distance from the established normativities of the classroom.

Yet it is useful to note that alternative and less emotional readings of this situation are possible. In asking Ruby Redfort to limit her writing to a certain amount of pages, her teacher is also asking her to think about the structure of her work and the value of being concise. Writing stories of length is an undoubted skill but so is ending them. Furthermore, by asking her to write a complete story within the fixed frame of a creative writing lesson, the teacher is also asking Ruby Redfort to think about issues of planning and time management. On a broader note, she is also learning how to "write quickly", a recurrent theme within the scheme of work for her year group (Department of Education, 2014) and a skill which will benefit her elsewhere.

It is useful to also note at this point in this chapter that my analysis of the data in this chapter has limits. This is a non-comparative study and that means that the findings cannot be juxtaposed against, for example, the experience of young boys who write nor the experience of adults who wrote as a child. One of the key paradoxes is that these findings cannot be asserted to being specifically related to the experience of the participants in this study but can be read as potentially applying towards a much wider section of society. It is easy to argue, for example, that Ruby Redfort's experience may also apply to other children who are as

embedded and familiar with literary culture as herself. It is also easy to argue that the “impossible fiction” (Walkerdine, 1990, p.119) of “being girl”, along with its “double-binds and contradictions” (p.116), is not an isolated volume on the library of childhood; there are other texts, most likely telling very similar “impossible” stories.

4.1.3.3 *Using metaphors to explore issues of power and gender*

For Judith Armstrong, the ghost within children’s literature symbolises “what-might-have-been as well as what has been” (1978, p.66). They are a device not intended to frighten the reader but rather to provoke a questioning of their own potentiality (59). In many ways, Bridget Shevlin adheres to this idea of the ghost in her writing; *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* is narrated by an open-minded individual who considers the current students without judgement. She is also able to remark upon the changing role of women about the school environment with some wry emphasis: “There were Police WOMEN too, to help the children across the road.” (Shevlin, 1949). As Armstrong writes, ghosts are “psychological possibilities personified ...” who “extend [the protagonists] perception of the possibilities of existence” (p.59). In her story Shevlin shows us that girls within the confines of her school are subject to change and that such change can be positive. Only the nuns themselves, fixed as immutable adults, remain constant and unchanging.

The ghost experiences free movement throughout *A Ghost Visits Her Old School*. She is able to witness the girls arriving at the school and remains present throughout the school day. She goes to a lesson called “Jim” and joins the girls for playtime before watching them all leave at the end of the day. Her movement throughout the school environment seems untrammelled and yet there are notable omissions. The ghosts does not visit any of the adult space in the school such as an office or the residential quarters of the nuns. Their access is

limited to the world of the girls. The adult world is out of bounds or, perhaps, it is simply not interesting enough to be featured.

A part of me had wondered if the liberty of *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949), coupled with its supernatural aesthetic, might enable something similar for the participants. Yet I came to realise that their stories often demonstrated the very opposite. Doors are locked, classrooms closed, and often literal barriers are placed within the narrator's way. Rose Gold, for example, writes about a ghost who must gain permission to enter the school;

I walked up to the glass door expecting that if i pressed the button, the long lasting school secretary, ~~Miss~~ Mrs [name], to arrive and see no-one but let me in, but I was surprised that instead, of jolly Mrs [name], a cold, stern, sour looking man stepped out and saw no-one!

Here Rose Gold documents the restricted access of modern schools but also shows how her ghost is still treated as somebody who is both alive and still a child. Accordingly, the rules and regulations of the academic environment continue to impact them and, by implication, the discourses of adulthood. It is relevant to note that they do eventually gain access to the school building but only through the “cold, stern, sour looking man” opening the front door. This is a fragile liberty and freedom of movement that depends on the actions of others.

It is also noticeable that gender plays a part here. The school secretary is female, jolly, and although Rose Gold first refers to her as ‘Miss’, a later edit sees this change to ‘Mrs’. It is also useful to note that Rose Gold is also the only writer to mention a female ancillary character. Another participant, Dolly Daydream, mentions a caretaker and a chef but they are both male. This is too small a sample to infer anything substantial from and future research,

particularly with a larger sample, would be productive in tracing the representation of secondary characters in juvenilia and their genders. In terms of Rose Gold's story, the behavioural difference between the man and woman is marked: the woman is positive, welcoming, while the man is cold and stern and ultimately unwelcoming. This is only underscored by him quite literally not seeing the ghost as they try to enter the school.

Ruby Redfort's ghost faces similar barriers. Their narrator is a young ghost who wishes to leave heaven and visit their old school. The immediate problem is their parents:

I knew it was forbidden to go down to earth but I couldn't help it. I so wanted to go there! I wanted to see my old school, because I knew it would not have changed at all. I knew from trying that if I asked, my parents would just say no so, I decided to go down myself.

Upon the narrator's eventual return to heaven, her father admonishes her for being late to "the coronation". The story concludes with the reveal that the narrator is the princess of heaven and subject to the authority of her father and the expectations of her position within society.

For the ghost in Dratini9054's story, the fabric of the school building represented a barrier:

The old and ancient wood walls disappeared, replaced by brick ones, which stopped my likeness.

Here she creates a building which is in a ghostly state of flux, paralleling the supernatural qualities of the narrator themselves. The key shift in her story occurs when the building moves from wood walls to brick, shedding that quality of the ephemeral wood for

the more definite and fixed barrier of brick. At this point in the story, the wall halts the narrator from progressing any further. Yet this barrier is only fleeting as the next paragraph shows the narrator exploring a classroom and “venturing” on throughout the school building. As with Rose Gold’s story, this is a ghost who is impacted by human rules and regulations and, despite its supernatural status, is stopped in its path by a real world expression of authority.

A further potential reading applies here and it is one of narrative expertise. As their discussions about reading and writing showed, the participants were clearly familiar with a wide range of literature. Many of them also spoke about the television shows that they watched. It is no reach to suggest that they were, as a whole, familiar with the structural elements of narrative. A wall is a dramatic device used to introduce tension, similarly a closed and locked door. By using such devices within their writing, the participants were able to create a satisfying story for their reader.

At one point in the workshop, I sought to explore the difference between adult and child writing by asking the participants if they thought Bridget would have written a different story as a grown-up. For *The Writer*, this was an opportunity to wonder if Bridget “may have used different words if writing as a grown-up”, a stance echoed by Flying Fox who pointed out in her workshop how “noisy”¹¹ was a particularly childish word choice: “even though I am ten, I wouldn’t really use it”. Quantifying word choice by age was an interesting choice and saw Flying Fox deliberately position “noisy” as something people younger to her would use. This was despite also recognising herself as being a young person in the same sentence. I wondered if at some level this distinction reflected a marker of creative writing competency for Flying Fox; that, rather than describing something as “noisy”, she expected more detailed adjectives by the time a writer had reached her age. Furthermore, in making this point,

¹¹ “I am glad that I am back from the noisy world.” (Shevlin, 1949)

Flying Fox temporarily assumed a position of adulthood and thus, was able to unlock many of its associated themes of power and control whilst simultaneously acknowledging an unpowered child. It was this assumption of power which then allowed her to provide a critical judgement upon the creative work of younger writer.

In her workshop Rey offered an interesting interpretation of how Bridget's writing might have changed as a grownup. She suggested that Shevlin may have put more detail into the story and, when asked to elaborate on this, referenced to a particular moment in the text: "The girls were not wearing long dresses such as we had. They seemed to have shrunk." (Shevlin, 1949). This seemed to connect with Flying Fox's comments about "noisy"; both participants required and expected more detail from the more mature writer. I have already shown how such an interpretation may be connected to expectations about Key Stage Two students and their standard of writing. Here, I see Flying Fox and Rey's thoughts in terms of literary aesthetic. Nick Levey argues for maximalist texts, that is to say overly orientated texts of detail and specificity, as those which shift attention onto the act of writing and reading (2016, p.31). The more detailed a story is, the more it calls attention to the mechanics of that detail, and the more it asks the reader to consider what lies behind those mechanics and the experience of reading them (p.23). Whilst I do not want to characterise the texts of this study as maximalist acts, I do want to argue for Flying Fox and Rey as reading with attention towards literary mechanics and towards detail in particular. In particular, they are reading with an awareness of the role of the author, how their skills will develop with age, and how this will ultimately impact upon the text. In doing so, they call attention to the role of the author and how that individual creates the texts.

It is worth also briefly dwelling on the specificity of Rey's comments. When asked to elaborate on the nature of these potential edits, she said that the adult Bridget Shevlin "might have put, like, how much they [the skirts] had shrunk". This was something which was also

echoed by Jade who, in her workshop, imagined that Bridget may be an adult at the time she wrote *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* due to her concern for the length of the current students' skirts: "The girls were not wearing long dresses such as we had. They seemed to have shrunk." (Shevlin, 1949). The temptation may be to segue into hemline theory here, that is to say the correlation between skirt length and stock price, but I want to focus instead on how Rey and Jade understand the process of "being girl". Their comments, reminiscent of an adult commenting on young people's clothing, suggest that they recognise that being girl is to be "subjected to material practices and understandings of ideal girlhood that restrict their positionings [sic] as gendered beings" (Adams and Bettis, 2003, p.76).

Further readings might see the comments from Rey and Jade as an assertion of difference and as a reinforcement of a binary distinction between adult and child. Both participants clearly see a difference between their own perspective and that of an adult. Yet rather than seeing this as the underscoring of difference, I instead read it as an expression of kinship. Kinship theory as defined by Marah Gubar (2016), and something I return to throughout this thesis, proposes a model of commonality between adult and child where interest is to be found in the things that are shared between the two states of being rather than that which divides and separates. Clémentine Beauvais suggests that thinking with kinships enables readings of "kindness" (2017). Reading 'unkindly' in this instance might see Rey and Jade's comments as marking their difference from adults but I find a more productive, and indeed 'kinder' reading, as seeing this as an expression of kinship. They are able to temporarily assume the position of adults, imagine their point of view, whilst simultaneously inhabiting the role of child.

4.1.4 Summary and contribution to knowledge

In this section, I have shown how the participants understood and enacted their performance(s) of “being girl”. I began by contextualising my usage of this term with reference to Judith Butler’s work (1993), as previously discussed in the literature review, before situating this definition within the wider context of girlhood studies (Cherland, 1994; Earles, 2017). I focused on the experiences of Spiderman123 and Rose Gold, and argued that their reading practices provided a framework for them to understand their enacted identities within the world along with the enacted identities of their peers. Furthermore, this understanding encompassed the performed identities within the present day and also those yet-to-be or imminent performances. As part of this discussion, I showed how the participants side-lined gender as a relevant point of interest in their reading and writing and instead looked towards issues of power and agency.

I then moved onto a discussion of the political as represented in the reading and writing of Rose Gold and Flying Fox. I argued that these participants indicated two different ways of how young writers may engage with political themes and the politicised world about them and express this within their writing. I also recognised how this data and the writing of the participants therein may have been impacted by the research design and my explicit interest in the creative writing of girls. I concluded that the participants’ stories resonated not only within the frame of the study but were also marked with the context of prior discourse and that which was yet to come.

The findings of this section reinforce several long-established trends in the scholarly literature: that girls are influenced and impacted upon by the discursive environments about them (see for example Aapola et al. 2005; Field Belenky, 1997; Finders, 1996; Greenhalgh, 2014; Harper, 1998; Maslen, 2017 amongst others) and that these environments influence and enforce the identities which are constructed and performed by the girls themselves (Dobson, 2015; Dobson and Stephenson, 2017; Guzzetti and Gamboa, 2004; Harper, 2000; Manning-

Lewis, 2019; Moje, 2000; Moss, 2003; Read, 2011; Reay, 2001; Steedman, 1982; Toliver, 2021; Twomey, 2011; Walkerdine, 1989; Williams, 2006). The findings also recognise how a developed sense of literacy can influence upon identity construction and performance (Birr Moje et al. 2009; Guzzetti and Gamboa, 2004; Toliver, 2021; Williams, 2006) and in particular the well-established relationship between reading habits, identity performance, and creative writing (Cherland 1994; Christian-Smith, 1993; CLPE, 2018; Earles, 2017; Harper, 1998). Finally, the findings offer a contribution to knowledge about the representation of the political in the creative writing of young girls by documenting two different approaches taken by young authors in highly politicised and unusual circumstances.

4.2 How the writing of girls responds to the writing of girls of a similar age

In this section I consider the second research question “How does the creative writing of girls respond to the creative writing of girls of a similar age?” and tie this towards wider discussions about how the participants understood being a young author. I begin by discussing a recurrent phenomenon in the research which saw several participants propose a markedly similar question that they would ask of Bridget, before linking this towards their educational experience and wider treatments of creativity within the curriculum. Finally I offer a summary of these findings and reference them against current research whilst also spotlighting their specific contributions to knowledge.

4.2.1 “Where do you get your ideas from?”

... I quite like a book where there's a bit of a mystery and I quite like thinking about 'this could fit here' 'now that can fit there' and trying to puzzle it together, and then

sometimes I just make up a completely random story that doesn't make sense in my head.

(Line 53-55, interview with Rey, 4th November 2020)

At a specific point in the workshop, after the reveal of Bridget's identity and the second reading of her story in light of this knowledge, I asked the participants if they had any questions that they would ask of her. I was interested in whether the participants would see Bridget as a young girl who writes, namely an individual grappling with similar concerns and life-experiences as them and writing about them, or whether they would view her as an adult. It was not long before I realised a notable trend occurring in their responses:

Rainbow: "What inspired you to write the story?"

Rose Gold: "What gave you the inspiration to write this?"

The Writer: "What inspired you to write that story?"

Jade: "What inspired you to, like, write the story?"

Ruby Redfort: "How did you come up with this story?"

It is useful to note here that the participants were unaware of the responses of each other due to the majority of them having independent workshops. It is also useful to note that of the two participants who shared a workshop, Jade and Dratini9054, a version of the question was still asked. In total five out of the eleven participants asked some variant of "What inspired you to write the story?" The initial response to this may be that six out of the eleven participants did not ask this question so some further context is important. Of those six individuals who did not ask about ideas, these individuals either showed reluctance to answer the question or offered a non-committal response. Of the five individuals who did ask the

question, the way they asked it was noticeable. They spoke in a forthright and confident manner which was often in marked contrast to how they had spoken elsewhere. I was also conscious that correctives were not being used here; of the participants who did want to ask Shevlin about her ideas, none of them contradicted or reworded themselves after expressing that initial question.

Scholars have been concerned with the relationship between ideas and creative writing for some time (see Crowhurst, 1993; Grainger et al., 2003; Lane and Kemp, 1967; National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, 1999, p.31; Protherough, 1983 amongst others) and pursuing the question here is productive, not in the least in how it enables a discussion of the cultural intersections between the participants. Five participants asking a similar question of their own volition indicates some sort of a commonality of experience, and I would suggest that one of these commonalities is an established relationship with literary culture. It was noticeable, for example, that three of the participants who asked this question had literary connections in their immediate family and so may have been already familiar with the questions that one could and indeed, did ask of authors. It would be no reach to suggest that they were also familiar with how many times “Where do you get your ideas from” had been one of those questions.

I also wondered if, at some level, “Where do you get your ideas from” was a way for the participants to find out more about the author herself. Several of the participants who asked it had also expressed some distance from Bridget. They had found it very difficult to connect to an author and individual that they knew very little about. The following extract is comes from Ruby Redfort’s workshop and is indicative of such a reading:

If I knew more about Bridget's life, then I would feel more feelings about it, but all I know is that she's Bridget, she was ten, and it was made in 1949.

In asking the question they were utilising a method of enquiry which would generate more knowledge (Cremin et al. 2014, p.23). This knowledge could then be built upon in order for them to find meanings and, potentially, a way of connecting with this unknowable figure.

It is also useful to consider this question in terms of the scholarly literature. Jane Considine explicitly uses the phrase “Where do you get your ideas” (2016, p.192) in her book on writing for teachers: Here she argues that there is a direct connection between reading and being able to generate ideas but recognises that lesser read pupils may struggle:

...children often need more help than we allow for ... it is our job, through a combination of: quality texts, real and imagined experiences, and clear modelling of expectations, to help mould their writing brains (p.192).

Here the responsibility for ideas seems to lie ultimately with the educators and their decisions within the classroom. In asking Bridget where she got her ideas from, the participants could have been modelling their experience of creative writing education and looking towards the adult authorities for answers.

For Ross Young and Felicity Ferguson, a concern for idea generation could indicate the dominance of “teacher-chosen writing topics” (Young and Ferguson, 2020, p.44). This is an understandable argument; if students have been trained to write that which is given them, then independent writing with their own ideas becomes a much more complicated process. Yet I do not think that this or Considine’s explanation is wholly applicable in this study. The participants were a group of experienced and confident readers and writers who clearly had no difficulties in reading, nor in generating ideas. They spoke in their workshops and interviews about the stories that they were working on, and often did so at length. Their ideas

were often surprising and innovative. As a writer myself, I recognised their talents in this area and had no difficulty in seeing them as authors. I wonder if the heart of the matter here was that the participants, themselves, did not believe the same

4.2.1.1 Creative writing in the classroom

In the interview, I wanted to learn more about the educational experience of the participants. One way to do this was to integrate questions about the teaching of creative writing within school and their experience of this. Dratini9054 and Jade, an established friendship group who participated in a joint workshop and independent interviews, both volunteered information about a recent lesson they had experienced. The lesson had seen them being asked to write a letter to Paddington from his Aunt Lucy, both characters from the well-known stories by Michael Bond. I asked Jade to elaborate on how this had been taught in her interview:

Jade: Erm, like, we had to show - each lesson, it was like, sectioned off, so for one lesson you would, we had done, erm, starting and opening, then the next lesson we'd done the middle, and the last has been the end.

Researcher: Aah, right.

Jade: The ending.

Researcher: And so did you get told to write about anything in particular or was it just, sort of, working through how to write it?

Jade: It was just like, erm, we had to like plan as well so like, it was like something had to happen to Paddington and it had to be, like, solved. (23-30).

Here Jade details a creative writing session which asks something very specific from the work produced. This target orientated approach was similar to that described by Rey:

Researcher: ...Alright! So when you're story writing at school how do your writing lessons go? Do you get, sort of, how do you get told, sort of, what to write about?

Rey: Well we usually - well the teacher's usually written an example which he shows us or he shows us a powerpoint on - yeah - how to write it.

Researcher: Alright

Rey: Unless it's a - unless it's a check at the end of a topic where you just, you get a pre-made plan for you and you just have to write it out. (22-29).

This reference to a “pre-made plan” was something I had not heard before in the interviews and I asked Rey to tell me more about it. I was interested as to how specific it was in terms of the targets and indeed, what those targets were. I was conscious that the value of breaking down a topic was well-established pedagogically, and that it had a substantial history in creative writing research (Elkin, 2011; Glarden Brand, 1980; Lensmire, 1994; Young and Ferguson, 2021 amongst others). Plans can offer a model of successful literary structures for students to follow (Atwell, 2015; CLPE, 2018) and also illustrate the steps necessary in achieving this.

Rey: So it's a bit like the introduction you have to do 'bla di bla di bla di bla di bla' and it gives you some ideas, the second - the next - paragraph one: instructions 'bla di bla di bla di bla' - ideas. And then it...

Researcher: Ah, I see...

Rey: ...it goes so on.

Researcher: Do you like doing it that way?

Rey: I better like it when you have time to plan it.

Researcher: Yeah.

Rey: 'Cause, but, I find it okay just to get a pre-made plan and have to do it because it's hard for me to get started but once it's started it's really hard to stop.' (32-41)

In her response to my question, Rey recognises both the value of pre-made plans but also their potentially detrimental impact. She begins by talking about how they help her to “get started” but also in how they impact upon the time she has to plan for herself. She also recognises how difficult it is to stop writing, when she has finally begun. Here the issues of literary confidence and proficiency raise their heads; plans were both productive for Rey in bolstering her confidence but also occasionally reductive when situated against the demands of the curriculum and her personal creative process. This tension accords with the findings of Grainger et al. (2003) who recognise the tension about how Key Stage Two can demand “imposed writing with a closed frame” whilst the student themselves was seeking increased autonomy. It is also important to note that Rey’s experience here is not gender specific; she attended a mixed-sex school but had discussed her experience on an individual basis. It is quite possible that many of her peers felt something similar.

In her description of writing plans, Flying Fox similarly paid attention to this paradoxical experience. She described first how a writing plan worked: “Usually the teacher tells us what to write” (11) before recognising the closed and often prescriptive nature of these: “You have to write on a theme always” (14). The critical edge of her final statement was echoed in Dratini9054’s comment that: “sometimes we’re allowed to write our own [stories at school] but that’s much more rare” (86). It was clear that the participants knew what it took to write, and were aware of the necessary steps to achieve that, but that that

process of learning could also sit at odds with their burgeoning independence as writers and individuals.

4.2.1.2 The influence of literary culture upon young authors

As the study progressed, it became clear that some of the participants' knowledge of what it took to write came from their personal experience and familiarity with literary culture. Several participants in this research had family members employed in literary or literary adjacent business such as librarianship, publishing, or writing. The digital shift of the project, paralleled with the impact of COVID-19 and the associated embrace of online forms of communication during lockdown, made the participants home lives and personal cultures become more visible than would have been with a classroom based project. Spaces that were once "conceptualised as private and safe from judgement", such as their living rooms and bedrooms, were now transformed into sites of "public visibility, surveillance and evaluation" (Kennedy, 2020, p. 1070). Although certain signs of curation clearly applied, participants often had signs of literature and literacy about them with some taking time to show me their favourite books or discussing what was on their bookshelves. The business of books was not unfamiliar to the participants and several of them actively claimed a position within this culture. Perhaps the most notable of these was The Writer who not only claimed a pseudonym that clearly signalled her interest in writing but also spoke confidently about her creative work in her interview:

Well, I'm writing this book called - er - I'm writing two books, well two books about the crazy stuff that I do, I just came up with the idea of one thing when I came home and it was 'how things work' - 'how things work in [Name]'s brain' - this is how I want -

how it works - I want it to work like that but I know it does not. Like I - you know how we have different time periods in different countries? (6-9)

Her articulate and fluent description of her creative work sat at some odds with The Writer's story. I quote it here in full:

I have come from death to see my school in 2030. I was used to the classes but the teacher and format wasn't the same. The lockers had locks the class teacher could leave us alone. We could chat, we had a gym, we were good at cricket and our name wasn't [School name]. Our school uniform was different. Oh how I liked my [School name].

One reason for such brevity may be ascribed to the impact of the workshop: The Writer was unknown to me prior to the workshop and so this was our first meeting. She also wrote on screen, with her camera and audio kept on throughout and with her parent in the room. The presence of an audience was established. It is no reach to suggest that The Writer sought to fulfil the needs of that audience with a piece of writing which delivered what was expected of her. Her personal writing, outside of this context, may have been quite different.

It is also equally possible that the issue of performativity comes into play, not only here and with The Writer but also throughout the other participants and the research process as a whole. I had advertised this as a study of the creative writing of young girls and referred to the workshop as a creative writing workshop. As the majority of participants were self-selecting, rather than randomly selected or teacher-nominated, there was also a level of creative confidence at play. These were participants who liked writing and were comfortable in describing themselves as such. They were able to perform that identity and were aware that this research would require that performance from them. The Writer confidently claimed this

identity in the adoption of her pseudonym. It was a confidence that was not reflected by the more cautious pseudonyms adopted by the other participants and perhaps not even within The Writer's own work.

Finally, it is worth considering the experience of The Writer in terms of educational positioning. As a Key Stage Two student, she would be accustomed to sharing her work and presenting it to people. As the literature reveals, sharing work is a strategy that "we know works" (CLPE, 2018). This is because "writers learn to write when they struggle to convey real meaning to real audiences" (Crowhurst, 1993, p.23) and "stories are always told to an audience, actual or imagined" (Dawson, 1994, p.23). The intent here is for the student to learn from the reactions of that audience and benefit from their feedback. It is useful to note that the audience is often already known to the writer: the "dignity of print and access to an unknown, conjectural audience is a rare event" (Hollindale, 1997, p.10). Taking all of this into consideration allows us to see The Writer, and indeed her colleagues, as somebody who was balancing her creative articulacy with the needs of the situation at hand. In producing a story within the time-frame of the workshop, she was successful in achieving those and thus able to maintain her identity as a young girl who writes.

The Writer also told me in her interview about how she was currently "writing two books about the crazy stuff I do" (6); similarly Ruby Redfort told me about a series she was working on with her best friend. Series fiction by juvenile authors remains an underexplored area within the scholarly literature and some of this critical silence may be ascribed to practicalities. Young writers do not remain young and the writing of series fiction is no overnight affair. However the remarks of The Writer and Ruby Redfort indicate the value of further attention in this area not in the least in how their look towards writing series paralleled with their experience of strongly developed literary family environments.

This also hints at the influence that literature, and the experience of literary culture, can play upon the young writer. Both *The Writer* and *Ruby Redfort* expressed familiarity with the business of literature, drawing influence for their writing from their own reading and the activities of their parents. This is something with historical precedent in terms of juvenilia. Katherine Hall and Pamela Whitlock were, for example, inspired by their shared passion for Arthur Ransome books in the writing of *The Far-Distant Oxus* (1937) and further research on these networks of influence upon the writing of young people would be beneficial.

4.2.2 Summary and contribution to knowledge

In this section I have focused upon the second research question “How does the creative writing of girls respond to the creative writing of girls of a similar age?” I began by discussing a recurrent question asked by the participants and offered some potential reasons behind this. I argue that it could also indicate certain commonalities of experience for the participants, such as their personal experience of literary culture and their experience of being Key Stage Two students. The findings here tie into the third wave of literary and identity research (Busse, 2013) by recognising how the situatedness of young people who write affects their self-identification as “author” (Currie et al., 2009; Dobson and Stephenson, 2017; Vacchelli and Peyrefitte, 2018). The findings also show the impact of educational and social literary cultures upon the identity-making process of an individual (Cherland, 1994; Dobson, 2015; Hall, 2007), the tension between pre-made educational plans and personal autonomy for Key Stage Two students (Grainger et al. 2003), and also indicate a potential connection to a creative pedagogical shift in primary school education (Cottle, 2019; National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, 1999; Craft, 2014). Finally, these

findings offer a particular contribution to knowledge by practically illustrating the desire for autonomy by Key Stage Two students.

It is also important to note here that, in contrast to the first research question discussed in this chapter, I do not believe that this research question has been wholly or convincingly answered. One reason for this is due to the sample size and the amount of participants worked with: as it presently stands, this is too small a sample to infer that girls do or do not respond to the creative writing of girls of a similar age. Should I revisit this angle of the study I would introduce a wider range of juvenilia to work with and recruit a larger group of participants. What can be said about this study as it stands at present, however, is that the participants were both willing and able to perform the identity of author within the research process but their performances seemed unaffected by the contents of *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* or their knowledge of its authorship. As Ruby Redfort commented in her workshop:

“If I knew more about Bridget’s life, then I would feel more feelings about it, but all I know is that she’s Bridget, she was ten, and it was made in 1949”

Perhaps this response does, in fact, sum up one of the key findings of this section and its contribution to knowledge: if one child author is to find an emotive connection to the work of another child author, something of a personal and tangible connection must be formed between the two writers. Certain participants sought this connection through their own experience of literary culture and asking questions of Bridget, whilst others remained at a distance. I discuss the implications of these differences in subsequent chapters.

4.2.3 The reading habits of young authors

Like, when I wake up in the morning, I just pick a random book off the shelf ... close my eyes, point at a book and that's the book I read.

(Rey's interview, lines 109-110).

Though not deliberately looked for in the research design, a key area of data turned out to be the participants' reading habits. Reading was a pleasant pastime for many of the participants and they spoke of their reading habits with some excitement. In her workshop, Dolly Daydream told me about her "favourite book ever" which was "*The Worst Thing About My Sister* by Jacqueline Wilson" and, after discussion with her mother, also told me about how she liked *The Magic Faraway Tree* by Enid Blyton, *Tom's Midnight Garden* by Philippa Pearce, and *Riddle Of The Runes* by Janina Ramirez. A similar discussion occurred in Dratini9054's workshop where she referenced *Kestrel Island* by A.B. Martin, the *Pinch of Magic* series by Stephanie Burgis and her love of non-fiction magazines such as *National Geographic*. Flying Fox's favourite author was Jo Cotterill and her "all-time favourite book" was *The School For Good And Evil* by Soman Chainani. Jade picked Jacqueline Wilson as a favourite author alongside Enid Blyton and Julia Donaldson. Pink Paw liked the *Warrior Cats* books by Erin Hunter, the collective pseudonym for a team of authors writing to specified publisher guidelines, and had also enjoyed *Dragons Race to the Edge*, a TV series inspired by the *How To Train Your Dragons* books by Cressida Cowell. Rainbow named Jacqueline Wilson as her "favourite author" while Rey spoke about the *Witch* series by James Nicol and the *Harry Potter* series by JK Rowling. Rose Gold was one of the participants to name both author and title when talking about her reading habits and referenced Robin

Stevens, Sharna Jackson, and Katherine Woodfine. She also spoke in detail about how she enjoyed classic detective stories as a whole. Spiderman123 picked the *Tracey Beaker* series by Jacqueline Wilson, alongside references to JK Rowling and Michael Morpurgo. Ruby Redfort took her pseudonym from the *Ruby Redfort* books by Lauren Child, and also named authors such as Robin Stevens, Rachel Renee Russell, Roald Dahl and David Walliams as those that she had enjoyed.

I describe the participants' favourite authors and books in this manner, not only to recognise the breadth and detail in which it was given but also to trace the connections between their choices. A brief caveat does apply here: this study did not gather data on how these books came to be present within the participant's reading habits, other than incidental, nor did it consider the presence of gatekeepers upon this material. By gatekeepers, I refer to adult individuals such as librarians, booksellers, teachers or adults who can impact and affect the reading decisions of young people. What this study can recognise is how several of the participants picked authors or referenced titles with a notable presence in popular culture. The impact of the *Harry Potter* books by JK Rowling needs little explication whilst Jacqueline Wilson's *Tracy Beaker* books and their associated spinoffs have proven a staple on children's television in the United Kingdom for many years. Julia Donaldson is a well-established author with several popular media adaptations to her name whilst *Dragons Race To The Edge*, part of Cressida Cowell's fictional universe, is part of an Oscar winning franchise.

This study can also recognise the gender balance of the texts and authors referenced by the participants. Out of the twenty-seven authors referenced, twenty of them were female or adopted a female identity, as in the case of Erin Hunter, whilst only six were male. This weighting indicates that there was a clear and visible presence of female authors in the lives of the participants: women who write were present in their literary environments and the participants were reading them. It was also noticeable that all of the participants named adult

authors. In many ways, it would have been surprising if they had named child authors as the literature review had indicated that although the work of child authors had been published in mainstream contexts, this rarely occurred in a mainstream and indeed, modern publishing context.

Dratini9054 was indicative of how the participants spoke about their reading. This following extract comes from her interview and indicates the near-uniform positivity expressed by the participants:

I just want lots of stories, just to read them, but there's also some problem. [laughing]
I don't read one book at a time, I read many at a time 'cause I love them all so much.
And! I read the ones I've read over and over again over and over again. (148-150).

Here Dratini9054 constructs a positive value relationship with the act of rereading, finding pleasure not only in reading one book at a time but reading several and then taking the time to repeat the experience. She also hints towards what Alison Waller recognises as reading across “untensed time”, that is to say how the act of reading that is not bound to a “single moment or even a single period of life” (2018, p.139). For Dratini9054, stories were something that should be revisited and reread without tying them to a specific period or point in her life. The act of rereading was something to be proud of and deliberately sought for in her reading life.

4.2.3.1 Reading to think about others

For some participants, reading was a way to think about others and their experience of culture. In my interview with Spiderman123, I asked her about her reading habits:

Researcher: ... Do you like reading stories about girls in particular or do you not mind who, sort of, features?

Spiderman123: Um, I don't really mind about it but I - I do like reading girl's stories ... um 'cause I, like, think that they're like inspirational and stuff...

Researcher: Ah, right, that's a good word

Spiderman123: If the girl's like a footballer or something 'cause not many girl footballers get noticed (50-55).

It was noticeable that despite her initial demurrals, Spiderman123 recognised the value of representation within the books she read for others. At one level this seemed a corrective in action but I also saw this exchange as indicative of her own emotional intelligence and also of her consideration for others, something that was apparent in her manner since the start of the research process. The representation of female footballers, something which clearly gave her strength and support on a personal basis, was important for other readers who could then potentially experience the same.

The issue of representation was also present for Jade. She had attended the workshop with Dratini9054, as requested by their parents because the two of them were established friends, but ended up having her interview separately. When I asked her about her favourite author, she spoke about Julia Donaldson, Jacqueline Wilson and Enid Blyton before dwelling further on the topic:

I like Jacqueline Wilson 'cause, like, she does, like, really nice stories 'cause, like, some of them are adventures and, like, it's about, like, how they live and kind of and like ...

it's like ... it's like always fun to, like, imagine what it would be like if you were in one, if you were in one, one of the main characters position. (44-47)

The prolific Jacqueline Wilson “often focuses on the difficult issues that children face” (Harde, 2014, p.53) in her work and so the imaginings of Jade allowed her to explore situations which could differ from her own lived experiences and knowledge. For Jade, her reading of Wilson’s work allowed her to practice these alternative ways of being girl and to explore a range of complex scenarios within the safety net of fictionality. This moved away from the representation-for-others model of Spiderman123 and instead embraced a more reflexive idea of representation, one which recognised the value of diverse models of being for the initial reader.

Rose Gold was a confident reader and spoke articulately about her favourite characters in her interview: “I like reading about erm... detectives. And I definitely like Poirot. And Sherlock Holmes.” (72). She later mentioned her two favourite mystery authors as being Katherine Woodfine, author of the *Sinclair’s Mysteries* (93/94) and *Taylor and Rose Secret Agents* (96) series, alongside Robin Stevens, author of the *Murder Most Unladylike* series (93). Again, this reinforced the visibility of female writers and protagonists for the participants: both Woodfine and Stevens’ series feature a strong group of individuals, the majority of whom are female. Rose Gold also described *The High Rise Mystery* by Sharna Jackson (64) as a book she’d enjoyed, despite struggling with the beginning of it. For Ruby Redfort, interest was found in recognising her own position as a reader and the influence that her own personal context played upon her meaning-making. In her interview, I asked her about what she liked reading:

Researcher: ... do you like reading about - like - girls in particular? Or boys in particular? Or is it more - like- the type of people, like what they do?

Ruby Redfort: Well, I like - I like reading about girls because I feel that girls adventures - I kind of - this is coming from the opinion of a girl

Researcher: Yep, yeah?

Ruby Redfort: I would say that I like girls more but I think if I was a boy I'd say I like boys more but I also like when they go on this ginormous adventure, like in Ruby Redfort." (100-107).

Here Ruby Redfort not only attempts to understand her own perspective as a reader but also works to consider the potential positioning of others. It was noticeable that she recognised the influence of gender on her response and in doing so demonstrated the emotional intelligence which was characteristic of the participants as a whole. At some level, there also seemed to be a sense of emotional labour here: Ruby Redfort was working to understand the reactions of readers other than herself and to centre them as much as her own. As this is a non-comparative study, further research would need to be taken with a wider spectrum of young authors to see whether this quality of emotional labour is the sole responsibility of young girls who write.

4.2.3.2 How young authors read and relate to their own work

A key part in the interview saw me ask each participant to describe the story that they had written in the workshop. I deliberately did not ask them to read it out loud to me, though I decided I would not stop them if they did. My interests here lay in the potential transformations and changes in the story that had occurred since writing and how the

participant might perform it to an audience, namely myself. For some participants, talking about their story was a complex ask:

Ruby Redfort: Um. I would describe it in my own words as - do you want me to tell you the story or the girl?

Researcher: Whatever you want to tell me about. Sort of what happens and who's in it, however much you can remember?

Ruby Redfort: I would say first, with the girl, the girl is, erm, I feel the vibe that she's a bit mischievous? And mischievous and not that ready for change. And I would describe the story as - I'm not sure - so I'm just gonna say something really basic which is adventurous.

Researcher: That's brilliant.

Ruby Redfort: I don't really know how to describe it. I'm good at writing stories, not good at talking about them that much. (120-128).

The otherwise articulate and forthcoming Dratini9054 also required clarification on this task:

Oh! So I'm going to tell you about it or am I going to read it...? (140)

Similarly Rey:

Rey: I'm going to need to go and fetch it from downstairs...

Researcher: Oh! Can you remember any of it?

Rey: Yeah. I can remember literally the baseline but I can't remember-

Researcher: That'll do. Just tell me that bit, that's fine...“ (152-155)

Some of this confusion can be ascribed to the way that the participants, and also their parents, interpreted this question as a test of memory. One parent, who had been present with their child throughout her workshop and interview, pointed out when the participant had finished that they had the story in front of them and that her daughter had read from that. Although I suspected several other participants had referred back to their story while reading (and notably, there were some difficulties in being precise here due to the visual limitations of online video-conferencing) this was the only situation where it was made explicit. In terms of my response here, I reassured the participant that this was a completely fine response and continued the interview.

I wondered if the difficulties that some participants had with this question was connected with their wider feelings about being an author. When I asked Flying Fox to read her story, she replied:

How do I explain it? [Mum: Just think about - what was your story about that you wrote?] Ghosts? [Mum: Mmhm. And who was the main character] There was no main character. (32-33)

Before this, she had expressed some discomfort about writing in general. I had asked her about the things she enjoyed writing about:

Flying Fox: Magical stuff.

Researcher: Oooh. What do you mean by magical stuff? Tell me a bit more about that...

Flying Fox: Erm. I'm not sure.

Researcher: Is it like people with special powers? Or like a talking dog or something like that? Or like wizards and witches and dragons?

Flying Fox: I don't know. I haven't actually written many stories. (12-19)

The increasingly brief responses of Flying Fox and her final comments signalled a clear urge to move on from the topic. This was something that I respected and did not push back on. Yet looking back on this, it is easy to see a point of connection between this exchange and her later difficulties when asked to talk about her work. It seemed that at some level, she was uncomfortable about thinking of herself as an author at all.

These episodes have several potential interpretations. Being asked to read their story out loud was a familiar and yet unfamiliar request of the participants. They would have been familiar with the concept of reading a story aloud (CLPE, 2018), but potentially less so with being asked to describe it to a relative stranger. Interpreting the question as a test of memory may have been related to the examination orientated nature of Key Stage Two and a tendency towards pedagogical exactitude. The participants expected an examination because that was what they were used to and so reacted to the question that most felt like such. Finally, the question itself may have been a factor. My phrasing intimated that a more straightforward, and perhaps more traditional, yes/no answer was available. This was something unusual in an interview where the majority of other questions had open answers. It is no reach to see that some of the participants may have struggled with this shift in style and had to then exert effort, namely ask for clarification, in order to understand what was expected of them. For those participants who struggled to see themselves as an author in the first place, a further layer of difficulty was added to the situation.

Yet in retelling these episodes and considering their potential explanations, I must also recognise the complexities and difficulties that can occur when asking any writer to

describe their work to an interested third party and note that these are also difficulties that I have experienced myself. Not only must the writer negotiate the complex emotional feelings about performing their work in public but they must also contend with the likelihood of feedback, both negative and positive, whilst simultaneously working to understand what role they are being asked to perform. These are issues experienced by any author and, as this section has shown, the participants were not immune to them.

4.2.4 Summary and contribution to knowledge

In this section, I have discussed the relationship that the participants had with the books they read. I began by acknowledging the unlooked for nature of these findings before showing how they helped to illuminate the literacy cultures about the participants, both in terms of their own reading habits and of their wider creative writing. Finally, I discussed the complex relationship that many of the participants had towards reading their own work aloud in the workshop and offered a number of explanations as to why this may be.

The findings of this section accord with previous findings in how girls seek to provide what literacy classes expect of them (Williams, 2006; Woolley, 2020), the connection between developed reading habits and enhanced literacy skills (Barrs and Cork, 2001; Cherland, 1994; Christian-Smith, 1993; CLPE, 2018), that readers are influenced in their reading by their own personal context and associated discourse (Guzzetti and Gamboa, 2004; Harper, 1998; Tandoi, 2019; Walkerdine, 1990), and finally offer support to the assertion that reading is a diachronic process (Waller, 2018). The findings also give a new contribution to knowledge about how young girls read and related to their self-authored work and hint at the need for further research in this area, particular in terms of comparative studies which work with a wider range of participants.

4.3 How the creative writing of young girls facilitates thinking about girlhoods

In this section I consider the third research question “How does the creative writing of young girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?” I begin by discussing the narrator’s voice within the text and the participant’s performance of their text and show how this links to the often fractious discourse about young authors in general. I then consider the representation of the supernatural within the participant’s work and juxtapose this against the very present impact of the COVID-19 pandemic before discussing how the pandemic was described by only one participant in her story. I also recognise how the stories indicate the narrative skill of the participants and connect this back to their reading habits and knowledge of literary culture. Finally, I offer a summary of these findings and contextualise them against the scholarly literature whilst also spotlighting their specific contributions to knowledge.

4.3.1 Narrative style and aesthetics

One of the most appealing characteristics of *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* is the lively voice of the narrator. Not only does Shevlin write with some warmth and humour, her decision to tell her story in first person brings the reader directly into the action. This was a technique that many of the participants latched onto, finding some inspiration in not only how Shevlin used the narrator to navigate the changes in the school environment, but also in how it provided a replicable model for them to use in their own work. Some of this familiarity with first person perspective could also be connected to the styles represented in the books that that participants themselves read but I am loathe to suggest this as the majority of stories

referenced by the participants embraced a third person point of view. It is useful, however, to note that this study does not provide enough data on the intersections between prior reading and creative writing, particularly with regards to stories that the participants didn't like to read, to make these final points anything more than conjecture. Further research would be recommended for a more definitive conclusion here.

Flying Fox provides a typical sample of first person perspective in style. She uses it to allow the narrator of her story to become an intimate witness to events:

... before me the ruins of the school were fixed. Many other ~~children~~ girls all ghosts ~~leapt out~~ materialized.

This extract includes two edits, indicated in this instance by the usage of strikethrough text. At their most immediate level, these edits seemed to indicate both her understanding of this research project and an urge to accord with its aims. At this point in the process, we had spoken at length and the intent of the thesis, namely an interest in girls and their creative writing, was clear. Yet this was an interest on one side only; Flying Fox made little reference to issues of gender throughout either her workshop or interview and this edit signified one of her rare forays into direct commentary on the topic. It is no reach to see such this amendment as a corrective where she had written something before editing that to accord with the perceived intent of the research. However the secondary edit where she replaced *leapt out* with *materialized* felt like more of an aesthetic decision, indicative of her ability to critically revise her own work to a high level. Not only did Flying Fox possess the vocabulary to bring in an advanced verb appropriate to the mood that she was trying to convey, she was also able to think reflectively upon what had gone before in her sentence. She had realised that ghost do not tend to leap out, but rather materialise.

At the conclusion of Flying Fox's story, the narrator makes a key decision:

Finally, I decided to show myself. They screamed silently when I came out. One rung a harsh bell...

The sound of this bell comes to mix with the ring of the new school bell and the narrator wonders if it was all just a dream. However, when they reach into the bag for their books, they experience a note of doubt: "I brushed against the remains of the piece of bread I had eaten in the ghost school." In appearing in both the supernatural and the real world environment, the bread forms a note of constancy within the story and forces the formerly distanced narrator to question their understanding of events.

These themes of doubt, contradiction and paradox become further emphasised when we turn back to the literature. The young author must also "give of themselves and reveal something personal" (Woolley, 2021) whilst simultaneously negotiating the potentially contradictory (Adams, 2003), heteronormative (Earles, 2017), hostile (Moje, 2000) discourses located about them. It is relevant to note that these discourses may also be of a very present and dynamic nature, publicly working out their theoretical kinks as the young authors write within them. For example, in September 2015, the Young Adult author Corinne Duyvis developed the #ownvoices hashtag which spotlighted texts written by authors who shared an identity or experience with the characters and communities represented within their work. It is no reach to see such movements such as #ownvoices and the related #WeNeedDiverseBooks¹² as having some impact upon the reading habits of the participants; Rose Gold's reference towards Sharna Jackson, an author of colour published by Knights Of,

¹² The #WeNeedDiverseBooks hashtag was developed in 2014 in response to the "whitewashed lineup of Bookcon [a book convention] Guests" (We Need Diverse Books, 2014). The US-based campaign, driven by the authors Ellen Oh, Malinda Lo and Cindy Pon, alongside Lee and Low Books and Braun Books, looked to address the lack of diversity in children's literature and asked for positive and affirmative action towards visibility.

an independent publisher specifically concerned with representation and set up in 2017, provides a useful example of such impact.

It is also relevant to note here that despite the subsequent nuancing of the #ownvoices debate within children's literature, and the associated recognising of the complex demands this places upon those authors unable to share their lived experiences or identities publicly, alongside a sustained discussion about representation and diversity in children's literature, any discussion of age and the role of the young author has remained a somewhat absent variable. At some level, this is indicative of the historic discomfort about juvenile authors within the context of the mainstream publishing: as Kathleen Keown recognises in her study of eighteenth-century women's poetry, it was "acceptable to endorse a young woman's poetry as a recreational accomplishment, but it is inadvisable to encourage her to make it a more serious, public, or professional pursuit" (2021, p.2), yet it is also symbolic of the paradoxical forces which work upon the voice of the young writer. In many senses, the body of the young writer becomes something of a state of contestation, marking both the search for voice alongside the modulation of such.

This idea of contestation was present from the first days of data collection. I had originally envisaged that the participants would write their story independently after the workshop and send it to me once it was complete. We would then discuss the story and anything arising from it in the subsequent interview. I felt that working in this manner would allow the participants both the time and space to reflect upon what we had talked in the workshop and, in addition, minimise any potential influence from myself upon what they wrote. Yet following the completion of the workshop in the pilot study with Dolly Daydream, I received an email: Dolly Daydream had finished her story and was requesting to read her story to me. I was obviously happy to accord and logged straight back into the meeting to do

so. I subsequently built in time to subsequent workshops for the participants to be able to read their stories to me if they so desired, and to thank them for doing so.

Dolly Daydream delivered a strong performance while reading her story. It was a performance which stood at odds with her quiet demeanour throughout the workshop and required some unpacking. Not only had her request to read her story indicated a desire for an audience, and indeed a confidence that her request would be fulfilled, her actual reading of it involved dramatic emphasis and vocal stylistics. I felt an echo of this confidence when I asked her to retell her story in her interview:

Erm. [Mum: You don't have to reread it, just can you remember what it was about].
Yeah. So it's about, er, a teacher at [School Name] and she's really, like, mean, and two Year Six boys lock her up in a room, in a dark room, for a hundred years but she escapes and she comes back to [School Name], erm, to get her revenge but, but she doesn't get her revenge, there isn't like a big battle, erm, erm, but she wouldn't leave without her revenge. (29-33).

Whilst some of her peers had approached reading the story as a straightforward task of simply reading what they had written, Dolly Daydream performed her story and did so with feeling. Her quieter responses in the interview and workshop when, read in isolation, could have suggested a creative voice lacking in confidence. When read in conjunction with her performance of her story, the data suggested quite the opposite.

Rainbow experienced something similar in her workshop and interview. She was a quiet and careful participant in both the workshop and interview, and often took a noticeable amount of time to reply to questions. These pauses often indicated the precision of her response or indeed, a closure of the topic. As the following extract shows, Rainbow was able

to use a number of techniques in order to manage the interview and the answers she gave therein:

Researcher: I get that. I get that. So maybe when you're writing at school is it any different? Do you like writing stories at school?

Rainbow: Erm. Well. Erm. Sometimes I think I do a little bit.

Researcher: Okay. A tiny bit.

Rainbow: Mm. (9-13).

When laid out here, even the narrowing sentences indicate how this question was closed off. In the moment, I interpreted this as an instance of Rainbow wanting to move on from that question and accordingly, I respected her wishes. I also noted that as the interview continued, her responses grew shorter. Some of this can be ascribed towards fatigue, both with the interview itself and also with video-conferencing software. Some of it can also be indicated as an effort to control the narrative of the interview itself.

When Rainbow came to write her own story in the workshop, she requested that the camera be turned off but the audio remain on. She worked steadily for fifteen minutes without interruption before telling me that she had finished. As with every other participant, I concluded the session by asking her to send me a photograph of her story. This revealed that Rainbow had revised and edited her original draft. In the following, I share a notable edit that she did. I use the ^ symbol to indicate how she had added a section into the original sentence.

Today I returned to my old school, just to see if anything had changed. When I saw it all, I nearly died ^ even though I was a ghost.

As this edit shows, Rainbow had seized the opportunity to express a strong sense of humour in her writing. It was also a moment for her to demonstrate her ability as a writer. This is a complex sentence which delivers a note of wry humour whilst also responding to any critique of the phrase “I nearly died” before it happened. As with Dolly Daydream, Rainbow had seemingly found other parts of the workshop difficult and used her writing as a chance to fully express herself.

4.3.2 Choosing whether or not to write about COVID-19

For Pink Paw, her creative writing was an opportunity to grapple with current and pressing political issues. Our workshop occurred in the middle of lockdown, a period where the impact of COVID-19 had seen the majority of children within the United Kingdom be home-schooled with only a minority still being sent into the school building itself. Many of the participants had discussed the impact of this lockdown and the pandemic upon their experience, what with lockdown being something of a global phenomenon at this point, but Pink Paw was the only one to address it directly in her story:

...All of the grown-ups were wearing face shields and, as I looked around, I began to think I had arrived on some kind of ninja day. When I checked the classrooms, I saw only half of them filled with children. Why have the rooms if they're not being used? At one point, I saw a class getting picked up at one in the afternoon! As I strolled through the empty halls, I began to piece things together. There were bottles of foam hand cleaner and boxes of tissues everywhere and signs about corona 19. I realised there must be a problem so I went to see a class that were watching the news. On it,

there were people talking about a pandemic and a virus. My head was going to explode with all of the things that were happening...

This is a detailed chronicle of education during a pandemic, and one which is starkly underpinned with unease. The narrator is rebuffed and repulsed by the changes at the school and does not understand what has happened there until seeing the news. This is almost too much information for them to handle and their head is “going to explode with all of the things that were happening”. This is not a comfortable nor indeed, happy story.

I was also conscious that this piece may reflect some of Pink Paw’s own experience of education during the pandemic. At the time I was working with the participants, the majority of school age pupils across the United Kingdom were more than familiar with what it took to attend school during the pandemic. They had experienced home-based education, phased returns, bubbling of their year groups whilst on campus and the associated trappings of masks, social distancing and increased hygiene requirements. I felt that Pink Paw’s story showed her experience and dislike of these privations and so, out of concern for her wellbeing, did not push the conversation towards her own experiences of the pandemic. I would have only pursued it should she have explicitly mentioned it herself and this did not occur. Whilst I am conscious that this leaves some of my analysis as conjecture, I felt that this was the best decision under the circumstances.

The detail in Pink Paw’s story was also, I felt, indicative of the foregrounding of the media as information source throughout the pandemic and the recognised stresses this had placed on young people (Dalton, Rapa and Stein, 2020). For Pink Paw, the pandemic had manifested itself as a series of changes about the school environment and many of these seemed to be deeply unwelcome and troublesome. In writing about those incursions and questioning them through the narrator’s voice, her story became an expression of power in

often powerless circumstances. It is relevant to note that Pink Paw was the only participant to write directly about the pandemic in her work, something which I found surprising at the moment of data collection and less so as the pandemic progressed. Participating in a pandemic and experiencing all of its associated stresses is difficult at best. For those participants who did not write about the pandemic, that decision to ignore those stresses was more than understandable.

One of the key elements of Pink Paw's untitled text was the ending. After reflecting upon all that they have witnessed, the narrator then makes a firm decision:

I thought about all of the things I saw and pieced them together. There was some sort of plague happening. I was very confused by what was happening. I now know I never want to come back again.

This decided conclusion sat at odds with the work of the other participants who embraced a more supernatural, gothic uncertainty. The appeal of these genre trappings is of interest and some temporal factors clearly played an influence. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon data gathering, the majority of the workshops and interviews took place between September and October 2021. As October 31st and Halloween drew closer, with its associated visibility in public culture, many of the participants became acutely aware of the ghostly and supernatural qualities to Bridget's original story and began to reference them in their responses. Dratini9054 wrote of a narrator coming into contact with Halloween decorations:

My feet floated down the road with decorations high and low ... Bats hung up from a pair of torn thingummies [sic] ... A pumkin [sic] with a sickly smile was glowing, like it would not behave.

The supernatural was an appealing theme for Dratini9054 and one she returned to throughout. She spoke in her joint workshop with Jade about how, if Bridget rewrote the story, it might include zombies or vampires or devils as additional or replacement characters. She also talked in the workshop about how the story felt like “from life til [sic] death” and about how it ultimately reminded her of a riddle with no easy or obvious answer. In these recurrent looks towards the supernatural and the mysterious, Dratini9054 draws upon the wider cultural discourse of Halloween and allows this to influence her story. I suspect that had we been speaking at another point in time, these elements would have been less pronounced. It is worthwhile noting that the influence of Halloween may have also been felt by young boys who write and adults as much as the participants themselves, accordingly I do not seek to position this as a phenomena specific to young girls but rather to recognise its influence upon the stories written within this research by these participants.

It is also productive to consider why the elements of the supernatural appeared throughout the work of Dratini9054 and that of her peers whilst the details of the COVID-19 pandemic remained unique to Pink Paw. If writing is an “inescapably social process” (Dawson, qtd. In Greenhalgh, 2014) then an embrace of the supernatural and otherworldly hints at a conscious move away from their immediate social environments then it is no reach to suggest that the pandemic and all its associated stresses played some influence.

4.3.3 Summary and contribution to knowledge

In this section I have discussed the third research question “How the creative writing of young girls facilitates thinking about girlhoods?” and shown how the creative writing of young girls can be symptomatic of the often fraught discourse about young writers. I focused upon the treatment of voice both within and without the text, and showed how the participants often wrote with their audience in mind. Finally, I discussed the reference of the supernatural within the stories of the participants and juxtaposed this against the work of Flying Fox, the sole participant to consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in her work.

It is worthwhile noting here that I do not believe the third research question has been wholly answered. Some of this can be ascribed to the, as previously discussed, lack of concern for gender as a relevant variable. Having made that caveat, there are still notable contributions to knowledge within this section. The findings here recognise the value and pleasure that young writers can find in performing their self-authored texts to an audience (Beauvais and Ryland, 2020; Crowhurst, 1993), the awareness that young writers have of an audience (Greenhalgh, 2014; Lane and Kemp, 1967), that young writers may be reluctant to write about their everyday lives (Lensmire, 1994), may be restricted from doing so (Adsit, 2018; Keown, 2021) and yet find value in it (DiMarzio and Dippre, 2011; Manning-Lewis, 2019; Moje, 2000), and how experiencing a wide range of literary cultures and texts can be reflected in the writing of young people (Barrs and Cork, 2001; CLPE, 2018, Cherland, 1994). The findings of this section also contribute specifically towards discussions about the ghost in children’s literature, recognising how it may function as a metaphorical device for wider issues (Armstrong, 1978; Jackson et al., 2013) such as the enduring impact of power structures upon the young body, whilst also documenting how the metaphor can be adopted and adapted by young writers. Finally, the findings of this section offer a valuable

contribution towards discussions of the creative writing practices of young children within the context of a pandemic (Clark et al., 2020).

4.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I analysed the data generated within this research and presented it under three key headings drawn from the research questions:

1. How the creative writing of young girls represents being girl
2. How the creative writing of young girls responds to the creative writing of girls of a similar age
3. How the creative writing of young girls facilitates thinking about girlhoods

I began by considering how the creative writing of young girls represented being girl. I discussed how the participants connected to Bridget Shevlin's story, and also the idea of Shevlin as an author, through a variety of filters which drew upon their own family histories and their understanding of the aging process. I used this as a springboard into a discussion of the differences and kinships that the participants understood in their conceptualisation of adults and children, and drew in particular upon the work of Marah Gubar and Maria Nikolajeva in order to facilitate this. I conclude by arguing for the benefits of readings of mutuality.

I then looked at how the creative writing of young girls responds to the creative writing of young girls of a similar age and began by considering a recurrent question asked by the participants, namely where did Bridget get her ideas from. I recognised how this concern for ideas was a well-established theme within the scholarly literature and offered

several explanations as to its presence within the research, drawing not only on upon creative writing education but also the increased profile of creativity within primary education. Following this, I looked at the participant's experience of creative writing education and traced the increasing tension between authority and autonomy for key stage two students, before moving onto consider the participant's reading habits. I recognised that this was incidental data which came to play an important role by mapping the female authors who were present in the participant's literary lives, before concluding with a discussion of how the participants read their own texts to me during our calls.

Finally, I discussed how the creative writing of young girls facilitates thinking about girlhoods. I began by looking at the role of the narrator in both Bridget Shevlin's story and the stories of the participants, tracing how this revealed not only the doubts of the participants about their own creative abilities but also the fractious discourses about the young author in general. I then discussed how narrating their own stories offered the quieter and more restrained participants an opportunity to express themselves on their own terms. I concluded with a discussion of the supernatural as represented within the participant's stories, juxtaposing this against Pink Paw's story, the sole text to explicitly reference the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout this chapter, the findings have shown how being a young girl who writes requires not only a consideration of their own cultural positioning but also the demands of others upon that positioning. The young girl who writes participates in notable emotional labour, working not only to recognise their own needs within their literary cultures but also the real or perceived needs of their audiences. The findings have also provided a spotlight on the working practices of the young author during a pandemic, illustrating not only the ability of young writers to represent a normal idea of schooling in their writing despite the extraordinary circumstances that they were personally facing, but also in what they

understood that normal to be. Notably, the findings have also shown a reluctance to address and represent those changed circumstances within writing, and here the limits of a non-comparative study must be emphasised: reluctance to address or depict the COVID-19 pandemic within creative writing may be, quite understandably, a global phenomenon in its own right. Finally, the findings have also offered a unique contribution to knowledge by illustrating the increased desire for autonomy on the part of the Key Stage Two student and juxtaposing this desire against their experience of creative writing within the classroom. I consider the implications of this in the next chapter.

5 Implications

“When I had finally found my way out I couldn't believe how much had changed.”

(Extract from Rey's story, written 28th October 2020).

In this chapter, I discuss the key implications of my research for both theory and practice. I move away from the research questions and instead organise this chapter by disciplinary focus as this illustrates the potential reach of the findings. I begin by considering the implications of these findings for creative writing education before moving onto a discussion of the implications for juvenilia, girlhood studies, and finally archival studies.

The quote which opens this chapter comes from Rey's story. In it, a ghost tells an audience about their visit to their old school and all the changes that have occurred since they knew it last. Many of these changes leave the ghost uncomfortable. They remark, for example, upon the shock of seeing girls write with computers rather than fountain pens. The computers are so bright that the ghost must shield their eyes. Nevertheless, the ghost decides to use one of these computers and is only halted in their endeavour when somebody turns the light off. When they eventually find their way out of the room, they reflect upon how much things have changed.

Rey's story indicates her attention to the text we discussed in the workshop. She echoes a key moment within Bridget Shevlin's story with her reference to the light-switch¹³ and similarly uses this to note the shift in time. Yet rather than then illuminating the room, as Shevlin does with *A Ghost Visits Her Old School*, Rey uses this as a moment to turn the lights off and end her story.

¹³ “*Inside school, if it was dark they tapped the wall, and as if by magic a light came where it had been dark.*” (Shevlin, 1949)

...as if by magic one girl tapped a small patch on the wall and the once thriving [sic] circular [sic] room descended [sic] into darkness. When I had finally found my way out I [starts new page] couldn't believe how much had changed. the end.

This is a moment of closure and also a point in which the narrator is allowed time to reflect upon their experience. This chapter adopts a similar attitude.

5.1 How juvenilia can benefit the creative writing classroom

This study has implications for how creative writing is taught within the classroom and most particularly, the role that juvenilia can play within that process. As has been shown throughout this thesis, creative writing education has historically tended towards using the work of adults and established authors as part of its teaching process. This has led to certain norms being established within the classroom, such as in age or gender, and the modelling of certain behaviours or identity. Accordingly, this has also led towards the exclusion of students who do not accord to these expectations. One of those exclusions has been the work of young authors, and in particular the interpretations of their work in a literary sense. Their work may be displayed on the wall or published in a school magazine but it is rarely used as material to inspire the creative writing of other authors their own age. Yet this study has shown the value of doing precisely this and the conversations that can be prompted as a result. Integrating juvenilia into the creative writing classroom, and particularly material that shares some commonalities with the present-day students, can facilitate provocative and indeed, productive discussions about what it means to be a young girl who writes.

One element in these discussions, for example, is the issue of age and how it is represented in the literary cultures of childhood. As the interviews showed, and the literature review only emphasised, the participants were connecting with an aetonormative literary culture and were not coming into contact with representations of the child author either inside or outside of the classroom. It is possible, then, that this study marked the first time they had ever come across a child author or been asked to interrogate a child authored text from a literary perspective within an educational context.

However, as this study also showed, child authors are visible within the academic literature and indeed, also within popular culture¹⁴. Such authors have been published in a wide range of contexts and have often experienced considerable success and popular visibility on an international basis. Whilst that visibility and success may have been fleeting, for reasons I have already discussed, it is worthwhile recognising that it does, nevertheless, occur. It however rarely translates into educational matter and a search of the Times Educational Supplement resources website demonstrates this to some effect: on a site with “over 900,000 resources made by teachers for teachers”, only two resources involve the keyword of “juvenilia”. (Times Educational Supplement, n.d., accessed 4th October 2022). The answer here is not to simply add more resources to counter these absences but rather to question why these texts are rarely seen as objects of literary interest in their own right.

Part of this process of questioning involves the unpacking of assumptions, and in particular those which are brought to the child authored text and make meaning of it. This was indeed something that I had to do myself in this study. For a long time, I understood it as something which existed outside of children’s literature theory. My reasons for this were that

¹⁴ The case of Dillon Helbig springs to mind here. In February 2022, he wrote a short story called *The Adventures of Dillon Helbig’s Crismis*, and left it on the shelves of his local library. It was then subsequently catalogued and added to the holdings of Ada Community Library, Boise, Idaho. This episode was covered at length in local and international media.

I was interested in the stories that children told and these were something Other and Mysterious in nature. One day I realised, with a moment of Damascene clarity, that my research was very deeply intertwined within the theory of children's literature and my assumptions of its Otherness had spoken instead towards issues of aetnormativity. Unpacking these assumptions was vital towards my understanding of the thesis as a whole.

In this study, which is the first to position the literary analysis of juvenilia in an educational context, I have argued for the necessity of such assumptions to be unpacked on both an individual and institutional level. The findings have shown the value of juvenilia within the classroom and developed a case for it to be conceived as central towards creative writing education. A central tenet of this case was the assertion that juvenilia could be read as a literary text which was capable of sustaining pronounced and in-depth literary investigation in the same manner as an adult authored text. By reading juvenilia in this manner, and applying to it the same values that they apply to the adult-authored texts, adults can facilitate productive and in many senses new conversations about what it means to be girl,

This study also has implications about what it means to perform the identity of a young author. The connection between creative writing and identity work are well-established and my study reinforces this. It traces how the participants claimed their identity as author from their self-selection in the process through to the writing of their story and participation in the interviews. Being an author was an important part of their identity and something that had become publicly accepted about them.

The findings of this study also showed that being a child author requires substantial emotional labour. The participants wrote with an awareness of the emotional needs of others, both human and nonhuman, and often modulated their efforts and identities in response to these needs. For two participants, political matters and in particular, the climate crisis and the impact of plastic on the environment formed one such need. Other participants recognised the

needs and impacts that adults would bring to their work and modified their words and output accordingly. Being a child who writes was as much about learning to tell the story of others as it was about telling their own.

All of this has implications for what is expected of the child author, and especially so within an educational context. The study has illustrated the benefits of literacy rich environments and having good quality books available for young readers. What might happen if classrooms were crafted to be writing rich environments? What might happen if educators move beyond the default of displaying child authored writing on the wall or viewing it as an apprenticeship towards adult work and instead utilised its educative potential *as juvenilia*?

These findings also have an implication in a practical sense. One of the key findings of this study was how the participants did not overtly engage in discussions about gender. I have offered a series of potential reasons throughout the previous chapters as to why this may have been but here I wish to dwell on the implications of that absence for educators. It may have been that the participants simply did not have the tools for what they wanted to say, nor the confidence to express potentially contradictory opinions in the educational context of the study. Students must be given the tools and the space to articulate their feelings about a text, even if these feelings are negative or contrary or not immediately forthcoming, and educators must consider how to best facilitate and allow these discussions within the script of the classroom.

5.2 How juvenilia can benefit readings of girls and girlhood

This study broke new scholarly ground in how it used the historical juvenilia of a young girl to investigate what it meant to be a girl today. The findings offered a new way to

theorise the girl, namely in response to her own cultural output, and in relation to her historic self. Other studies have engaged in similar activities, most notably Heather Fitzsimmons Frey who used historical material to facilitate “encounters” between twenty-first century and nineteenth century girls (2019). These encounters saw contemporary participants re-enact dance and theatrical performances from the nineteenth century in the present day and discuss the outcome. Fitzsimmons Frey describes the nature of these encounters:

An encounter is brief ... [it] does not suggest the time to develop a deep relationship. An encounter is often about first impressions and lingering questions – and these questions shape the next steps of research (85)

Where this study differs, and indeed offers a new contribution to knowledge, is in how it lingers. It proposes that juvenilia, an often erased artefact of childhood, can be used as a way to chart where girlhood has been and now is, and shows the theoretical value of taking time to deliberately stay with that material and the questions it proposes.

The findings also have implications for the type of girl which is theorised from a text. The last decade has seen a pronounced trend towards the representation of girls and girlhood within mainstream children’s literature publishing. Texts such as the *Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls* (2017), or the ongoing *Little People: Big Dreams* picture book series (2016-date) are now firmly situated on bookshelves alongside other brightly coloured and often biographical texts designed for a young audience. This then results in a marked visibility for the extraordinary and valorising experiences of being girl and an associated lack of interest for more “middlebrow” (Humble, 2001) lives. Yet this study has shown the value and enjoyment that young writers can find in expressing the more prosaic details of childhood. The participants wrote about the importance of play or the joy of the end of the school day

and did so during the particularly unique circumstances of COVID-19. If any situation warranted writing about the unusual and the extraordinary, then they were in the middle of it. In underscoring the value of the ‘normal’, the young writers embraced a plurality of childhood experience and, in doing so, resisted the sense to make one more heroic than the other.

It is useful to conclude here with a brief emphasis issues of privilege and exclusion. This study has exerted effort to preserve the writing of young people, use it within a scholarly context and secure it for the future. These are circumstances, as I have discussed elsewhere within this thesis, which do not always apply to juvenilia and the situations where they are applied they can often work to inadvertently exclude and marginalise the juvenilia which does not conform. To phrase this another way: writing requires the cultural capital and ability to write, yet stories are also written by those who do not possess such. Similarly, forms of storytelling other than writing exist: this study does not consider oral narratives nor graphic, to name but two others. One way to counter these exclusions would be to work with school archives which might offer more diverse models of storytelling, the consideration of a wider range of individual abilities, and wider experiences of “being girl”.

5.3 How juvenilia can add “value” to an archive

My study has considered a wide range of child authored material, some of which was located far beyond the established conventions of the scholarly and canonical, and showed how this material can provide valuable insights into issues of identity, gender and what it means to be a girl. This section considers the implications of my findings for archival practices, from the perspective of both the researcher and of the archivist.

The findings of this thesis, and indeed the entire project, would look substantially different were it not for the assistance of libraries and archives. I would not have been able to access as much child authored material as the project warranted, let alone juvenilia which had been published in an unconventional context. I was unaware, for example, of the existence of *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949) prior to the project and only discovered it after a protracted search. In this section, I discuss the implications of that search and what it means for future researchers of juvenilia.

I begin by recognising the benefits of prior professional knowledge. I am a chartered librarian with experience of supporting a wide range of students in a higher education setting, along with managing the inter-library loans scheme for my department. Alongside this, I have also worked as a freelance researcher for a wide range of clients where I researched material on their behalf. All of this meant that I had prior knowledge as to where archives may be found, the likelihood of relevant material being there, how to infer meaning from archive schedules, and finally how to access that material. This meant that I was able to adopt a wide and somewhat flexible research strategy which drew upon my knowledge of local libraries and potential sources.

Nevertheless, finding *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949) was a difficult task. My criteria was simple: I was looking for a child authored text which dealt, however tangentially, with being a girl. I knew that the juvenilia of adult authors was easily available; some of Judith Kerr's childhood artwork is held by Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books, similarly the childhood writings of the Brontë family and those of Jane Austen can be found at the British Library. Seven Stories also holds an archive collection for Pamela Whitlock, one of the teenaged authors of *The Far-Distant Oxus* (1937), which was donated after Whitlock's death by her daughter. The archive includes Whitlock's own material but also details of her correspondence with the author Arthur Ransome. Yet despite

the availability of these collections, I was reluctant to work with them. As Karen Sánchez-Eppler writes, archives tell “us” what is important to society (2013, p.213) and “what has been thought worth collecting” (p.220). Many of these collections exist because the child-author has gone onto write in their adulthood and achieve some notoriety. This tended towards, what I felt, was a ‘heroic’ model of girlhood. The author’s juvenilia had been understood in light of those adult achievements and positioned as something of an apprenticeship towards them. Rather than working with a piece of juvenilia that accorded to this model, I felt that I needed to break new scholarly ground and work with lesser known material that was not wholly understood in light of the author’s adult achievements.

At this point, I was grappling with the idea of value in the archive and how that impacted upon its holdings and indeed, what was available for an archive in the first place. Emily Murphy writes, for example, about how the authors and illustrators of children’s literature destined for the de Grummond Collection had to be persuaded that “their original materials were worth preserving” (p.557) and, during times of economic stress, that they would receive some sort of “financial compensation” (p.557) for their donations. It was no reach to see that such conversations might sideline the sort of material that I was interested in. It was also no reach to recognise that other factors would play a part: the formally funded and well-established national archive would have substantial space at its disposal and thus more flexibility in its reading of value whilst the informally established and unfunded archival collection may be working in much more straitened circumstances.

Lucy Walker offers a relevant case study here in her discussion of Benjamin Britten’s juvenilia. This collection includes approximately one thousand manuscripts which detailed eight hundred odd “distinct works, all composed by Britten between the ages of six and eighteen” (2008, p.642). Walker first wrestles with the questions of practicality such as the size and scalability of both the collection and its intended development. Some of her concerns

are addressed with the aid of digitisation but the “significant scholarly value” (p.642) is less straightforward to reconcile. She argues that there is sentimental value within the collection, namely in the understanding of Britten’s personal relationship to his juvenilia (p.644); practical value, namely those compositions which have influenced his future work or depicted recurrent themes (p.647); which demonstrate his affinity towards specific genres or instruments (p. 648), or his developing skills as a composer (p.654). What seems to collectively unite these values is an idea of retrospection, that is to say a theorisation of juvenilia in relation to the subsequent achievements and notoriety of the child author.

The response to these concerns not to simply gather more juvenilia and to have it embody more diverse ways of being but to rather unpick how an archive articulates value, and how those articulations exclude others who do not conform. For example, if value is understood in relationship to the adulthood of the author, and only towards this end, then what of the young author who is yet to achieve adulthood? Similarly, if the value of juvenilia is linked to their adult achievements, then what happens to the texts whose authors do not achieve adult success?

These questions are not the sole responsibility of archivists. Researchers of children’s literature must consider how the material they select to work with perpetuates certain models of representation and silences others. They must consider the implications of the material they work with, and how these then factor into their subsequent critical work. Similarly, adults must also reckon with their own meaning-making processes about the child authored text and how that influences their work. This is not to suggest that such actions are not already being carried out by scholars already, for indeed they are and with some grace¹⁵, but rather to underscore the necessity for those discussions and ways of thinking to continue.

¹⁵ I think, for example, of the sense of scholarly revelation I had upon reading *The Tidy House* by Carolyn Steedman (1983).

The study has shown how juvenilia requires energy to locate and discover and the benefit that professional experience and knowledge can play in this process. Researchers must be prepared for their efforts to work with juvenilia to take time and to be, perhaps, unsuccessful. Researchers must also be prepared to embrace serendipitous and potentially unorthodox research strategies. The juvenilia referenced within this thesis came from areas as varied as a convent archive, a university library, and charity shop, and each of these locations brought with them their own legacy of meaning. Archivists have the chance to disrupt these legacies, and indeed the perpetuation of them, by actively valuing and making visible the creative work of young people within their collection.

6 Conclusion

“That traffic! I nearly got my ghostly toes crushed by one of those hooting monsters. I am glad that I am back from the noisy world”

(Extract from *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* by Bridget Shevlin, 1949).

In this chapter, I summarise my study. I recap the findings and their key contribution to knowledge. I then consider how they correspond to the original research questions. I acknowledge that while some of these questions may not have not been answered, the findings of this study offer a valuable contribution to knowledge about the young female author and her writing. I also offer ideas for future research.

6.1 Summary of study and findings

This study showed how the conversations around juvenilia can facilitate an exploration of what it means to be girl. Participants were asked to write in response to a piece of juvenilia called *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949) which was written by an author of a similar age and gender. These stories, alongside *A Ghost Visits Her Old School*, were then analysed alongside the participant’s workshop and interview. The research questions were:

1. How do girls creatively (re)write girls and girlhoods?
2. How do girls creatively respond to written portrayals of girlhoods?
3. How can creative writing by girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?

The findings answered some of these questions more productively than others. It was shown that being girl involved the navigation of a series of complex and often hostile paradoxes along with a protracted sense of emotional labour. The findings also indicated how juvenilia is a rich and under-utilised resource in both an academic and pedagogical sense. Finally, the findings showed how working with historic juvenilia can help to destabilise and interrogate heroic models of girlhood by focusing attention upon the everyday.

6.2 The contribution to knowledge

This study developed a way of reading girlhood through the cultural output of the girls themselves and contributed to lively debates about the girl within children's literature, creative writing, girlhood studies, and juvenilia studies. It supported the reading of creative writing as identity work and provided new knowledge about how young writers performed the identity of author and girl.

This study also contributed to knowledge about writing and researching in times of crisis. It documented the experience of young writers during a period of global disruption and the impact of that disruption upon the research process. It provided a contribution to knowledge about how to research during such times of crises and the ethical impact of continuing to do so. It also offered new knowledge about young participants and the potential stresses they may experience if taking part in research under such circumstances.

Finally, this study contributed to knowledge about juvenilia and its role within the canon. It offered new knowledge about a text previously unknown to academic research and positioned both it, and the stories of the participants, as valuable objects of scholarly interest. It offered new knowledge about the theoretical intersections between juvenilia and identity practice, whilst also asserting the value of juvenilia for scholars of girlhood studies.

6.3 Limitations of study and recommendations for future research

In this section, I consider the limitations of this study and provide some recommendations for future research. I begin by providing a recap of its constituent phases. This study was a non-comparative study which took place with a small sample of participants. Qualitative data was gathered in order to answer the research questions with the actual data collection taking place over a relatively short time frame. The data collection was also carried out remotely and required that the participant had access to the internet and a device capable of running video-conferencing software.

6.3.1 The impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 enforced clear limitations on this study. The first was the necessity to work remotely and with self-selected participants. The participants also required a parent who was active on social media, so that they saw the call for participants in the first place, and for them to be comfortable with their child meeting a relative stranger online. As a result, the generalisability of this study is limited, similarly the diversity and representation of participants. There are also limits in terms of the type of writers who participated here; this study was overt in its intent to work with young girls who wrote stories and so it is likely that children who did not define themselves as writers were not represented. Finally, due to the extraordinary impact of the pandemic, this study has little to no replicability. Further research would be suggested in response to these points and for that research to be within the classroom and of a comparative nature. A wider pool of participants would benefit the study

in terms of generalisability, similarly a longer intervention would provide valuable data about how the writing of young people may change over time.

6.3.2 Thinking with gender as a variable

A recurrent theme in this study was gender and how the participants saw it as something of an irrelevant variable. I have discussed reasons for this throughout the preceding chapters yet it also plays a factor here. This was a study which looked to foreground the voices of young girls who wrote and made that intent very clear from the first steps of participant recruitment. The participant information sheets showed how I was interested in a creative writing workshop with girls, and about how they might react to writing by a girl of a similar age. It is no reach to suggest that the discussions about gender did not happen because they were already happening within the research itself. Should the research have centred on a text written by an adult, or by somebody of a different gender identity to the participants, then it is possible that the findings may have been substantially different. These would be valuable areas for future research to explore.

It is also useful to note here that no male adults were involved on a practical level in this project, either at point of participant recruitment or during the data collection. The participants were nominated and supported throughout the process by adult women with only one male adult being visible during an interview as a background figure. It is quite possible that the data gathered would have altered considerably if a male parent or caregiver had been involved or participated throughout the workshop process alongside their child. This is another potential area for future research to explore and one which would provide a useful and complementary comparative to this study.

A further and final limitation applies. Due to this being a non-comparative study and one with a relatively small sample size, I cannot claim for these findings nor my reading of them as being indicative of the experience of all child authors. Gender may be a preoccupation for young writers who identify as other genders, and further research of a comparative and wider nature would be beneficial in exploring these areas.

6.3.3 The limits of creative methods

In asking participants to write a piece of creative writing, this study adopted creative research methods. Such a decision comes with implicit limitations and impacts upon the data. Creative methods can be:

...potentially exclusionary for some participants, since they value particular kinds of 'reflexivity' and 'creativity', which I argue, are socially constructed and unequally distributed resources, with particular classed resonances (Cuthbert, 2021, p.2)

This study required a certain form of creativity and knowledge from the participants in order to be successful. They needed to be confident in writing in response to stimulus and indeed, to the requests of somebody who they had only just met. They needed to be confident in writing independently and, depending on their circumstances and decisions about the videoconferencing software, to do so with an audience. Furthermore, the participant also needed to be able to write within a particular time frame.

Further research, carried out over a longer time frame and over less pressured circumstances, would work to ameliorate some of these factors. It would allow less confident

writers to take part and for other forms of storytelling knowledge, such as oral narratives, to be also integrated into the data. Locating that research in the context of the classroom would also counter the need for the individual participant to have access to technological equipment along with a viable internet connection.

6.4 Concluding remarks

In the autumn and winter of 2020, I asked eleven young girls to write a story in response to a piece of juvenilia: *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* (Shevlin, 1949). Their stories came to form the basis of this study, the first to wed the literary analysis of juvenilia with qualitative methods and to do so in an educational context. It showed how being a girl, let alone being a young girl who writes, requires not only the navigation of a series of complex and often hostile binaries but also the exertion of a considerable amount of emotional labour. The findings of the study were grouped under three research questions: How girls creatively (re)write girls and girlhoods; How the creative writing of girls responds to the creative writing of girls of a similar age; and finally how the creative writing of young girls facilitates thinking about girlhoods. These categories had some common threads, namely a concern for the value of juvenilia as literary text and resource; the disruption of heroic and valorising models of girlhood; a questioning of normative expectations about the young author; and the emotional labour of the young author. Nevertheless, despite these circumscriptions and curtailments, the young author persists. This study saw them write stories about haunted schools, vengeful headmistresses, and heavenly coronations, and it was these texts, alongside that of Bridget Shevlin, which then facilitated a discussion about gender and identity and what it meant to be a young girl within the world.

7 Appendices

7.1 A Ghost Visits Her Old School

A Ghost Visits Her Old School

“Dear fellow ghosts, to-day I visited my old school, the Bar Convent, York. My goodness! How things have changed since I was there fifty years ago! Only the nuns remain the same.

At the Bar Convent there are day girls now. In the morning the children get on big monsters which put them down at the gate. They are called “Buses” and they make an awful noise.

The girls were not wearing long dresses such as we had. They seemed to have shrunk. Instead of laced boots they had shoes in all kinds of styles. They had funny little round things on their heads which they called “Berets”. Most of them had short hair whereas we always had it very long.

Inside school, if it was dark they tapped the wall, and as if by magic a light came where it had been dark. The girls had a room called a “Cloakroom”, where they hung their coats and hats. They spoke in strange language, using words like “wizard” and “smashing”, etc.

The girls talked about something that sounded like “Jim Slip” which they evidently wore, and of a place called “The Jim”. Out of curiosity, I actually went to a lesson called “Jim.”

In the middle of the morning they have a playtime called “The Break”. Then they have free, wonderful little bottles of milk, one for each girl. They have little tubes stuck in each bottle so that the girls can drink their milk; these they called “Straws.”

At dinner-time I saw them dash out of school instead of walking sedately. There were Police WOMEN too, to help the children across the road. That traffic! I nearly got my ghostly toes crushed by one of those hooting monsters. I am glad that I am back from the noisy world.”

B. Shevlin (II Upper)

pp 27 / 28

Christmas 1949

Bar Convent School Magazine

7.2 Workshop Outline

- Introductions and housekeeping. Gain informed consent to record the session. Ask the participant to think up a pseudonym and explain that this is to keep their information private and safe.
- Tell the participant that I am going to read them a story and then ask them some questions about it.
- Read *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* by Bridget Shevlin to the participants. Make sure to include the title of the piece.
- Ask the following questions in order:
 - What words would you use to describe this story?
 - What words would you use to describe the ghost?
 - Would anything be different if this story was about somebody or something else? What sort of things -?
 - How old do you think the author was when they wrote it?
 - Can you describe the author for me?
- Tell the participants that the author's name was Bridget and that she wrote it in 1949 when she was at school. Tell them that she was in a form called II Upper which means she was around ten (ish!) when she wrote it.
- Tell the participants that I am going to reread the story to them and then ask some more questions. Ask them to think about how they feel about the story now they know who Bridget was and how old she was when she wrote it.
- Read *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* by Bridget Shevlin to the participants. Make sure to include the title of the piece.
- Ask the following questions:
 - How does it make you feel now that you know who Bridget was?

- Do you think Bridget would write a different story as a grown-up? Why?
What sort of things would she write about?
- What sort of questions would you like to ask Bridget if she were here?
- Ask the participants about their own days at school. Allow the conversation to move freely but utilise prompts if necessary about their favourite subject / times of the day.
- Once this conversation has come to a natural end, ask the participants if they felt able to write me a story.
- Read the following to them: “So I'd like you to write your own version of *A Ghost Visits Her Old School* - and it's up to you to figure out who the ghost is, which school she's visiting, and what she does when she gets there. You can use the things that we discussed previously if you want [naming some examples that the participant has mentioned here] or you can have something different happen, it's entirely up to you.”
- Offer the participants the decision of whether they stay on the call, turn the mic off, turn the video off, or log off the call and log back in when they are finished. If asked for a timeframe, ask them to call back within an hour. Stay on the call until they call back.
- Thank the participant for their efforts. Ask them to read the story out loud to you if they feel able. If they don't feel able then thank them. Thank them again after reading if they do.
- Tell them that the next step will be a follow up interview and that this will just be a chat about their reading habits and their books. Ask for a photograph of the story / the file to be sent via email. Thank them again for their participation and say goodbye.

7.3 Interview Outline

- Housekeeping and introductions. Ask for informed consent to record. Share the outline of the interview – I will be asking some questions and if there's anything they don't understand or don't want to answer, just say. Also tell them they can ask me questions at any point.
- Ask the following questions in order. Move onto the next when conversation is over. Allow segues and discussions. Follow their conversational leads.
 - Do you like to write stories at home? (Why / Why not / what sort of things do you like to write about...) What about story writing at school?
 - What are your favourite stories about?
 - Can you describe your ideal character to read about?
 - Do you like reading stories about girls in particular? (If yes - why / if no - why not...)
 - Let's talk about the story you wrote in our sessions. Can you describe it for me in your own words?
 - Do you think you would have changed anything you wrote if you knew that the author was a different person? (If no - what sort of things would you have written instead?) [If this requires clarification, talk through how we read Bridget's story together before the participant wrote the story. Ask them if they'd have written something different if she was somebody different]
 - What do you think a girl from 50 yrs. in the future would say if they read your story or saw your pictures? What do you think would be different in their world?

- Upon completion, thank the participants.
- Tell the participant that this is their turn to ask any questions they want – about the research or whatever they want.
- Once conversation has reached a natural halt, wind things up. Thank the participant again and tell them how much you appreciate their time. Say goodbye.

7.4 Participants stories

7.4.1 Guidance note

In transcribing these stories, I have retained the original spelling, grammar and structure. When a participant edited their work by crossing it out, I have indicated this with strikethrough text ~~like this~~. Other edits, such as new words being inserted into the same sentence are indicated in this manner: ^word^. Finally, when a participant moves onto a new page, I have indicated it in square quotes [like this].

For purposes of readability, I have indented new paragraphs.

I have redacted potentially identifying data throughout.

7.4.2 Dolly Daydream

Our story starts hundreds of years ago when Mrs [Redacted] was headteacher at [Redacted] School. She was horrible. Absolutely horrible. She whipped the children if they even made one ^small^ noise ~~that disrupted~~ ^in class. Like somebody putting a ruler on a table loudly, she would whip them very hard five times. She would whip them even harder if they spoke.

All the children hated her. Especially the Year Sixes. ~~Before her~~. For 3 years ^before Mrs [Redacted]^ they ~~had~~ had lovely Mr [Redacted]. She had been their headteacher for two years now and they wanted to do something about it. One day two of the year six boys made a plan! One of the boys went to breakfast club but snuck out around about the time when Mrs

[Redacted] would go up the spiral staircase. Tap! Tap! Tap! [erased and struck through illegible sentence] ~~He went up the spiral staircase.~~

He followed Mrs [Redacted] through the corridor and

But when Mrs [Redacted] went into a small dark room the boy locked her in!

Meanwhile the other boy got a ladder from Mr [Redacted]'s shed and put it up against the balcony that Mrs [Redacted] would stand on to ring the bell to signal to the children to come into school. He climbed up the ladder and got onto the balcony then locked the door so Mrs [Redacted] would be trapped in the room. He raced back down the ladders and put it back in Mr [Redacted]'s shed.

Mrs [Redacted] was gone for good.

Or was she?...

Hundreds of years later Mrs [Redacted] came back to the school. She made Chef [Redacted] put a special powder in the dinner that made all the children and the teachers see Mrs [Redacted] as a real person instead of a ghost.

Now Mrs [Redacted] came back to get her revenge. But the thing is she never got her revenge. There never was a big [Redacted] battle. A few years later when she'd been headteacher for five years she left the school. But she wouldn't leave without her revenge, would she? ...

7.4.3 Dratini9054

My feet floated down the road with decorations high and low. My pale eyes stopped, staring at the new school.

I ducked the decorations, the girls and boys describe it with a word that is “fantasy”. The old and ancient wood walls disappeared, replaced by brick ones, which stopped my likeness.

Bats hung up from a pair of torn thingummies. I peeked inside a classroom and horror met my eyes. No wips, no phones, no...

My eyes were dragged out, and I ventured on. A pumkin with a sickly smile was glowing, like it would not behave. I kicked it aside and dragged on.

A “dong” sound broke my ears and children screamed, pushing their way to the playground. There were climbing walls, something you call a trimtrail, and a whole ton of swings.

I'd had enough. I floated back to Phantom world, never again would I go down to human world, same for my old school.

7.4.4 Flying Fox

The translucent white figure stepped cautiously over the pile of rubble. She looked up at a burnt archway that read “Mary's Primary”. Only now it was Mar-'s P-im-ry. Creeping closer, I saw the pale form was a ghost girl. She closed her eyes, and before me the ruins of the school were fixed. Many other children girls all ghosts leapt out materialized. I saw a strict line follow a teacher into the stone building. ~~He~~ Keeping my head low, I stalked into many classrooms. . The children wrote out sums and recited poems while others still sung as an elderly woman conducted. When the bell rang for lunch, everyone sedately walked into the spacious hall. As I was hungry I stall a slice of bread and nearly finished it. The day continued until the end. Finally, I decided to show myself. They screamed silently when I came out. One rung a harsh bell...

Then I was rubbing my temples as ~~my~~ the newer school nearby clanging its ending bell. Just a dream, I thought. When I reached into my bag for my books, I brushed against the remains of the piece of bread I had eaten in the ghost school.

7.4.5 Jade

Opposite field trip

I'm Britany the ghost and i'm visiting my old school. Listen to how my day went. We all filed into the dining room wich was filled with long ^wooden benches. I heard someone talk about their grammar class.

I hung back as everyone made their way to outside P.E. Suddenly the bell went and all the girls galloped ~~outs~~ to the playground wich had changed massively with all the rope tyres and basketball hopes. Finally ^the^ bell rang to signal the end of playtime.

In maths something called ~~long~~ divisoin & multiplucation started. When I was here we only had additoin & subtraction!

Finally it was tea. Then the best thing happened it was ~~hometime~~ the end of the day!

7.4.6 Pink Paw

To all the other dead ghosts who have been wandering what has been happening since we left. Today I took a trip back to school to see how things were and I was shocked by what I saw. All of the grown-ups were wearing face shields and, as I looked around, I began to think I had arrived on some kind of ninja day. When I checked the classrooms, I saw only

half of them filled with children. Why have the rooms if they're not being used? At one point, I saw a class getting picked up at one in the afternoon! As I strolled through the empty halls, I began to piece things together. There were bottles of foam hand cleaner and boxes of tissues everywhere and signs about corona 19. I realised there must be a problem so I went to see a class that were watching the news. On it, there were people talking about a pandemic and a virus. My head was going to explode with all of the things that were happening. There was no one in the hallways and some of the children were at home. I thought about all of the things I saw and pieced them together. There was some sort of plague happening. I was very confused by what was happening. I now know I never want to come back again.

7.4.7 Rainbow

The Ghost Visits her Old School

Today I returned to my old school, just to see if anything had changed. When I saw it all, I nearly died ^even though I was a ghost^. It was so different! They had this big dirty floor outside with small buildings on them called “climbing frames”. I was horrified when I saw them wearing trousers and t-shirts which were apparently called “P.E. Kit”. They had weird boards which had something called a “screen” on it which was fascinating.

The girls suddenly left the school at one point and onto this moving building called a “bus”. I was mortified at the sound of it. I hated it so much and I couldn't bear to see my school like this so I flew and flew away back home.

As I went to lie down in my grave, I heard a whistle. I turned my head sharply but then realised it was just the wind. Or was it?

7.4.8 Rey

When I visited my old school today and couldn't believe my eyes much had had changed. In the morning when a bell sounded I had first arrived I saw what looked like dozens of girls entering the building that I believed to be my old school where I learnt to read and write. At first when the girls went in I saw what gave me a great big shock! Instead of writing with neat fountain pens about twenty or so girls were sat at large round desks with vertical squares sticking upwards from boards with many buttons on and every time a girl clicked a button something appeared on the vertical square in front of them. The things gave so much light I almost had to shield my eyes.

[end of p1]

I didn't remember sitting in this tall circular room. But then I spotted something that I felt like I needed to try it was like one of the so called computers that the girls were using only ten times bigger I quickly swooped over to it and tried pressing a button for myself it and as if it was magic a letter appeared and another and another. By the time I had gotten a little board with letters the girls were packing up their bags ready to go home then as if by magic one girl tapped a small patch on the wall and the once thriving circular room descended into darkness. When I had finally found my way out I

[end of p2]

couldn't believe how much had changed. the end.

7.4.9 Rose Gold

As I walked through the rusty gates that clearly hadn't painted for decades, I noticed the *rotten wood that used to be the vegetable plant plots, and next to it I see a fading sign saying here lies Ariel, the cat who mat made all the descisions and realised when she passed, the students must of decided to bury her here!

I walked up to the glass door expecting that if i pressed the button, the long lasting school secratary, Miss Mrs [name], to arrive and see no-one but let me in, but I was surprised that instead, of jolly Mrs [name], a cold, stern, sour looking man stepped out and saw no-one!

[note at the bottom of page one ->] *slowly decaying

I glided walked into my old yr 5 classroom to see what had happened to it and I was pleasntly surprised to see the children were midway through an english lesson!

The uniforms seemed pretty similar but the hair is another thing...

Most of the girls either had pink, Blonde, or blue hair while the majority of boys had none at all!

I ventured all the was down to class I and I was amazed to see that Mrs [name], who mind, in my days at school was allready 100, was still helping and making perculiar smelling play dough!

last I wanted to see the Forest School, the place I spent most of yr 6 in, and I was gratefull to see that it was still being maintained but still in a naterul way.

7.4.10 Ruby Redfort

Chapter 1

“From trying”

I felt a little weary up here in heaven.

I knew it was forbidden to go down to earth but I couldn't help it. I so wanted to go there! I wanted to see my old school, because I knew it would not have changed at all.

I knew from trying that if I asked, my parents would just say no so, I decided to go down myself.

Chapter 2

“Like we had in 2020”

I went down and felt a little weird tingle down my spine. I realized I was turning into a human!

I fell down, down, down, down and “Owch!” I said, as I landed on the floor. “BEEEEEEEP!!!” What was that?! I looked up to see a big Blue something coming towards me.

At first I thought it was the school bus, like we had in 2020, but it was blue and, WHOOSH I was thrown out of the way by a tall boy, just as the big blue thing went past.

“ Be more careful why don't ya, you should know that jumping in front of the hover bus “ said the tall boy.

“Umm....okay, but umm excuse me for asking but umm... Where am I”

Chapter 3

“My mocking tone”

“What do you mean, where are you, also did you just fall down from the sky!?” He said

“I mean...” I said “ WHERE AM I. I mean it is quite simple, I don’t know where I am, and you are going to tell me. You getting it now.”

I said, in a mocking tone.

“ Ye well I know what it means but... Oh don’t worry, but to answer your question we are in [Redacted]!” He said “ Also my name is Jason, what’s yours?” He asked.

I realized something very important. You see when I was alive (50 years ago) I was very popular and my surname is very, very, VERY hard to come by so he would definitely recognize me.

“ Um, I am Christina Edwards “ I said a little too quickly, but he didn’t suspect anything.

“ I’m looking for [Redacted] school, you know, the one that’s named after [Redacted] “ I said not really sure he would know it.

“ Oh, well you’ve come to the right boy, I’m going there right now!” He said giving me a smile.

“ And what’s even better, we can meet up with my girlfriend Emilia!” He said as we started walking.

Chapter 4

“Pressing the wall”

After five minutes we came up to a huge white building with a extremely pretty girl, who said “ Hi Jason, now let’s get to our first class before we’re late.” She said, before looking at me and bombarding me with questions “ Oh, who are you? Are you new? What’s your name?”

As soon as I answered all her questions we went in and saw the teacher. Every one of the students was holding a tablet and up at the front, instead of a wall there was a massive iMac or something. I mean don’t get me wrong, I was used to a big screen but I mean, this was GIGANTIC. And I assumed that she would at least talk but, she but she didn’t talk she just kept pressing the wall and all the children nodded and kept doing things on their tablets!? I did not understand this and if that wasn’t worse we had to do maths on tablets to!

Chapter 5

“Iphone 36”

Well I have to say I did NOT enjoy the start of today because well first, everyone wore their own clothes, second in playtime everyone got chocolate, third, for the older years, THERE WAS NO PLAYTIME, and well the food, ye did you guess it... You ordered it on tablets! And everyone was bragging about getting the new “Iphone 36” and I hated it. And I had finally had enough! But the thing is, I could not just leave, so I, I kind of had to lie to

Jason and Emilia which was really, super-duper hard, but I had to and I said, “I, umm, have to go to a different country with my parents so, umm, bye” I said before I gave them both a big hug.

“Bye, Christina” They both said in chorus. So this was it the end of my visit. Oh how I was going to miss that world.

Chapter 6

“The WRONG place”

Well that was the end I went up and out and that’s the whole story. Okay, maybe not the WHOLE story. The end of the goes like this.

“ Young lady, you had us so worried” That was my dad and then he looked over at the exact WRONG place.

“ YOUNG LADY WHERE IS YOUR CROWN!” He said. Ye I kind of hid it, I really didn’t want to go to the coronation. Oh, did I mention I’m the princess of heaven?

7.4.11 Spiderman 123

A ghost visits her old school.

today I visited my old school, it was very weird and extraordinary. The students arrived at school on loud machines that just seemed to glide along the smooth road., Goodness me, there was Boys! I would never dream of going to school with a BOY, in there english lesson it was very different to what I had, in the maths lesson they talked about

something called Mastery which was basically solving other peoples maths problems. they had short periods of time ~~what~~ that they called the break-time, they would eat apple or strawberry sclices and drink milk with tubes coming out of them. after the breaktime they did a lesson called History which I did at my school as well, they learnt about victoria era, for I learnt about that as well, as those children wearing grey pinafors and ugly marroon jumpers. at the end of the day all lined up and pointed to their waving patronising parents and ran of wildly to their loud machines.

7.4.12 The Writer

I have come from death to see my school in 2030. I was used to the classes but the teacher and format wasn't the same. The lockers had locks the class teacher could leave us alone. We could chat, we had a gym, we were good at cricket and our name wasn't Kingsway. Our school uniform was different. Oh how I liked my [school name].

7.5 Interview transcripts

7.5.1 Guidance note

The interviews took place between September and October 2020. In transcribing them, I indicate the researcher as Researcher and the participant's name in full.

In terms of transcription, I mark pauses with an ellipsis and use square brackets to indicate comments from other parties. I also use square brackets to indicate moments of anxiety or concern for the participants and have redacted the more confidential parts of these discussions from the record. Finally, all transcripts were sent to the participants to review, comment and amend if they so desired prior to my publishing them here.

7.5.2 Dolly Daydream

Researcher: Do you like to write stories at home?

Dolly Daydream: Erm.. [Mum: What do you think? Do you like to write stories at home?].

Yep! Yep.

Researcher: Why do you like writing stories at home?

Dolly Daydream:... Don't know.

Researcher: When you do write stories or when you do read stories, what are your favourite stories about? Do you have anything in particular that you like reading or writing?

Dolly Daydream: Erm, yeah. ... I'm reading *The Magic Faraway Tree* by Enid Blyton ... I'm reading *Hetty Feather* by Jacqueline Wilson

Researcher: And are they your favourite sort of books? Do you like reading a lot of Jacqueline Wilson and a lot of Enid Blyton?

Dolly Daydream: Yeah, Yeah. [Mum: What else have you got on your shelves? David Walliams, all the David Walliams. We've got Roald Dahl and what about these ones you've started?] Oh yeah I like started *Starfell* by... [Mum: Dominique Valente, I think it says] and I'm reading *Tom's Midnight Garden* by Philippa Pearce and *Riddle of the Runes* by Janina Ramirez.

[Interviewer: Brilliant! That sounds like a pretty good library!]

Dolly Daydream: Yeah

Researcher: Do you have any of them that's your total favourite?

Dolly Daydream: My favourite book that I've ever read is *The Worst Thing About My Sister* by Jacqueline Wilson.

Researcher: And why was that so good?

Dolly Daydream: ...erm

Researcher: Was it just very good?

Dolly Daydream: Yeah.

Researcher: Do you have like a favourite character to read about? Do you like girls or boys or animals or ...?

Dolly Daydream: Erm ... Girls. Mostly girls.

Researcher: Do you know why that is? Or is it just because, you know, you just like them the best

Dolly Daydream: Erm. Yeah.

Researcher: Alright. So. The story you wrote yesterday, I had a read of it and it's lovely, thank you so much. Could you describe it for me again in your own words? Do you remember what you wrote?

Dolly Daydream: Erm. [Mum: You don't have to reread it, just can you remember what it was about]. Yeah. So it's about, er, a teacher at [School Name] and she's really, like, mean, and two Year Six boys lock her up in a room, in a dark room, for a hundred years but she escapes and she comes back to [School Name], erm, to get her revenge but, but she doesn't get her revenge, there isn't like a big battle, erm, erm, but she wouldn't leave without her revenge

Researcher: So the story we read yesterday, the one about the Convent girls, it was by, um, a girl, do you think you would have written anything different if it was by a boy or someone older or someone younger?

Dolly Daydream: Yeah, I think it would have been different.

Researcher: Do you have any idea why that would have been - or do you think it just would've? [Mum: Would you have written something different?]

Dolly Daydream: Yeah. I would have written something different. [Mum: if we'd have listened to a story that was by somebody else?] Yeah. [Mum: so what would have made it different? It was a girl talking about other girls, wasn't it, so what if it had been a boy talking about other boys?] Not sure.

Researcher: That's alright! So if a girl from fifty years in the future, which is a very long time, saw your story and read your story (which, fingers crossed, they will, that'd be really exciting), what do you think they'd say when they read it?

Dolly Daydream: ... [Mum: What do you think they'd say? Will things gonna different in the future?] Yeah. [Mum: Is [School Name] gonna be there still?] No. [Mum: You don't think the school will still be there in fifty years?] No. Yeah. [Mum: What will there be instead? Where will the children from round here go to school?] Not sure. No.

7.5.3 Dratini9054

Researcher: Alright, so the first question is do you like to write stories when you're at home?

Dratini9054: What did you say? Do you like...?

Researcher: Do you like to write stories when you're at home?

Dratini9054: Um, yeah! I will try and write stories every now and then. Um, but I usually do it in secret.

Researcher: Ah, right! So why are you a secret story teller? Can you tell me or is that a secret?

Dratini9054: Um, yeah, that's a secret as well.

Researcher: That's fine! That's perfectly fine. So can I ask about the sort of stuff that you write or is that secret?

Dratini9054: Um, that's not secret, I usually like adventure stories and mystery ones, those are my favourites.

Researcher: And what sort of happens in your mystery stories then that you like writing?

Dratini9054: Um, it's usually that - either something goes wrong and they, um, have to get it back again, like, um, this one I've just made up, um, so, like, if there's a lockdown 'cause of mists of time, two people get stuck in the mists of time and they have to work out how to get back.

Researcher: Wow, oh that sounds good!

Dratini9054: And, um, that one's kind of an adventure one, or something goes missing, like, a ruby that holds up the world and whoever holds it will control the world and people have to get it back. So those are the types of stories that ... yeah.

Researcher: That sounds amazing! I love the ruby holding up the world idea, that's so great.

Dratini9054: Yeah, it's - I just got it from episodes that I like to watch, series about, um, a heart-stone that holds up a place underground.

Researcher: Ah, right, is that a TV show?

Dratini9054: Yeah, well it's not a TV show, it's more like the children's episodes on Netflix...

Researcher: Ah, right, so it's something on Netflix.

Dratini9054: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Researcher: I get you. Is it good? Should I be watching?

Dratini9054: Yeah, I do like watching it. But, um I watched it lots of time now, I need to get something new.

Researcher: [laughs] Yeah, we do - yeah, I get that, we've watched a lot of things on Netflix, and it's like - what else is there to watch?

Dratini9054: Yeah. Netflix is actually kept on my TV because of me. Do you know why?

Researcher: Why?

Dratini9054: Because I'm the only one who watches Netflix.

Researcher: Wow.

Dratini9054: [laughs]

Researcher: Alright! So can I ask you about story writing at school? What sort of stories do you write when you're at school?

Dratini9054: Erm. Sometimes we're allowed to write our own but that's much more rare. Um, soon we're going to write, well, um, our own mythical stories

Researcher: Wow!

Dratini9054: Like the ancient Greek ones, I'm going to do that. I've written a Paddington letter - Paddington to his Aunt Lucy - and I've also written a story about a gerbil with wings [laughs] I think that one's funny, it's about my gerbil.

Researcher: Thumbs up for that one. I love it.

Dratini9054: It was, er, based about, um, you know, Jack and the Beanstalk, but it's a bit different.

Researcher: That sounds like a brilliant base for it though?

Dratini9054: A flying gerbil! [laughs] Gerbils are my favourite type of animal, that's why I picked it.

Researcher: I love it. If you were going to choose another, sort of, animal to fly with it, what would it be?

Dratini9054: Erm, if I chose another animal, ooh, that would be quite hard, there's a lot of cute animals. I think I'd choose a ferret.

Researcher: Ooh, good call.

Dratini9054: Yeah! A ferret is like - it's a bit like a mini sausage dog. Much more furry and it's got smaller ears and it's got a nose a bit like a cat. So, erm, it's got it on its, er, head and it's got whiskers...it's really cute.

Researcher: I can see them having adventures.

Dratini9054: Yeah, usually it's adventures.

Researcher: Nice! So when you're told to write something, like about a specific something, how does that work?

Dratini9054: Erm, if it's not something I usually write about, it would be quite tricky but, erm, I do think different about all these stuff. I like, in my stories, I like to add mythical creatures - this is what I like my main base on, so magic or mythical creatures. Yeah?

Researcher: Brilliant. So if you were at school and they say to you 'write a story about a magical, mythical creature' you'd be very happy?

Dratini9054: Yeah.

Researcher: Nice

Dratini9054: I would be happiest if it was something like a dragon, that's my favourite mythical creature.

Researcher: Excellent, cool. I love a unicorn I have to say.

Dratini9054: Yeah, I used to love a unicorn but when I looked at the dragon, I realised that they could be quite cute, much cuter than baby unicorns or alicorns - that's a unicorn with wings and a horn.

Researcher: Ooh.

Dratini9054: Um, but dragons sound a bit more exciting, they can shoot lots of various different things - they can shoot water, they can shoot things like ice, they can shoot stones, they can shoot, well, really anything.

Researcher: Brilliant, they sound amazing things to write about. Alright! So, I think you've talked to - about this a little bit already, but your favourite stories then, sort of magical, mystery, adventure type things?

Dratini9054: Yeah, yeah, and, erm, yeah I do write them, but sometimes I write my least favourite ones. Um, if I would write, like, an information, erm, fact-file or something that's a bit like a story with all the facts and things like that, I'll be happy if it was about gerbils.

Researcher: [laughs] That sounds fun.

Dratini9054: Yeah. Um, I couldn't write about ferrets, even though they're very cute, I do not know any information about them at all.

Researcher: That would make it pretty hard

Dratini9054: Yeah

Researcher: Alright! So, you said about writing your least favourite type of stories there, so what are they? What are your least favourites?

Dratini9054: I don't really think about them very much so I usually forget them ... so, the one's I don't like really are the fact-file ones that have lots of facts in (unless they're very funny) like some of the books I have - *That's Deadly*, *National Geographic*, *Weird but True* *National Geographic*, well most of the really nice ones are *National Geographic*, the *Almanac - National Geographic*, and um, the last *National Geographic* that I've got is - which one was it again? - erm, it was something that had technology and stuff, but that one's definitely *National Geographic*. You can get lots more of them. Those are my favourite types. Erm, but erm, there's also some other ones that I do not really like - if it doesn't have

adventure or mystery then I'm not really interested in them, so then, erm, the type of books I like to read is something, so erm, one of my favourite mystery stories is a limited series called *Kestrel Island*. That one's really an adventure one, and then, well, most of my favourites are usually adventures. I don't have very much mystery. Erm, I've got - I've got - which was one was it again? - erm, oh yeah, *A Pinch of Magic* and *A Sprinkle of Sorcery*, both mystery and adventure, that's a lot, but the ones I don't like, they don't have action and usually they're the funny comedy books, I do have, erm, some funny ones, comedy ones, kind of ones, that I do like, but most of them, I don't really.

Researcher: That was an amazing answer , you're brilliant, thank you! So if you were going to tell me to read one book out of all of those things that you like and enjoy, which one do you think it would be?

Dratini9054: Erm, if I was saying it, I think *A Sprinkle of Sorcery* - the second book in a *A Pinch of Magic* - would really be the best one for you. As for - it includes a girl, erm, so a girl arrives at a house where Betty and her friends live. So Betty and her sisters live. Betty, Charlie, well Charlotte, she's only known as Charlie - and Fliss - so that's what she calls her or Felicity, that's what she calls her - um, there's a girl that - warders who lock up prison, people in prisons and they search for them - are looking for. She's a 'will o wisp' with them!

Researcher: Wow-

Dratini9054: And! She locks up Charlie and their granny-

Researcher: No way!

Dratini9054: And they have to go back for them! But the people who were saying they were warders were not actually warders! They took away Charlie to a shipwreck - they were trying to get treasure!

Researcher: This - this

Dratini9054: And, um! [overlap previous]

Researcher: This is too much! [overlap following]

Dratini9054: [inaudible/overlap previous] So to follow them to their island of treasure and try to get it back! But can I tell you the best thing of treasure?

Researcher: Sure!

Dratini9054: So, first, what would be your treasure if you found that island and you got that treasure?

Researcher: Ooh.

Dratini9054: What would it be, what would you want?

Researcher: I think I would like a lovely bookshop - or a very cute dog!

Dratini9054: That means that in that box you may find whatever you wish for! So, for Betty, she wanted maps! So Fliss, Fliss, there were lots of things for love and beauty, and for Charlie, it didn't really say in the book but I think it would be animals...

Researcher: Wow!

Dratini9054: Um! If I looked in there, I would choose pets. We can't really have pets because we go to [country] every year in August, because that's the best time. Um. So, we've got gerbils instead. They're quite cute and they run around and they have long, long yellow teeth -

Researcher: Wow.

Dratini9054: The weirdest thing is when they climb on the bars of their cage, you'll be able to see the privates of them [laughs] it's so funny!

Researcher: Oh my goodness! Alright, so I'm going to go and read this book and I'm going to find out about gerbils. Okay! So do you remember the story that you wrote for me in the session that we did?

Dratini9054: Yeah.

Researcher: Can you describe it for me again? Pretend that I've never read it and that I've never heard of it ... what would you tell me that your story was about?

Dratini9054: [inaudible]

Researcher: I'm sorry?

Dratini9054: Oh! So I'm going to tell you about it or am I going to read it...?

Researcher: Nope! Don't read it, just tell me about in your own words.

Dratini9054: It's about a ghost who visits her old school and how it's changed - she speaks about how it's changed. It's like diary set, it's speaking in first person.

Researcher: Great answer, good job you! Okay, so when you're reading stories - 'cause you've told me a lot about the stories that you read and that is brilliant - but can I ask you about the characters in them? Do you like reading stories about boys or girls or sort of more animals or do you not really care who's in it, as long as it's - like - exciting?

Dratini9054: Well, I just prefer for a mixture, I just want lots of stories, just to read them, but there's also some problem. [laughing] I don't read one book at a time, I read many at a time 'cause I love them all so much. And! I read the ones I've read over and over again over and over again.

Researcher: Perfect! That sounds like a really good skill to have!

Dratini9054: I just like reading them again. But it's not the way I really learn. I need to do good ones. And also, one of my favourite books that I got out of the library at my school was called *Hetty Feather* and it was about a servant girl who searched for her mother! She was sent to her foster mother - as her mother couldn't look after her - and after that, she got sent to a mean foundling hospital. When it was Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, well, Golden Jubilee, they went and she found the circus that Madame Adeline - that she thought was her mother - was in! But it was the wrong circus! And she ran away. She found some people and she decided to stay with them but she got took away by someone - I've forgotten the name -

Researcher: That's alright! I really like this book, it's very good.

Dratini9054: And she got to her in hospital! Her only friend now Ida! Because Polly, she made friends with, she went off - because she got adopted by a rich family, it can only be adopted by the Governor or things like that...

Researcher: Right

Dratini9054: Um, and her other friend went off to be a servant, so she only had Nurse Winnie - the kindest one there - as a nurse, and, erm, she had Ida, Ida Battersea, Ida Battersea was actually her mother! And she was never called Hetty Feather. Guess what she was called?

Researcher: Hmm.

Dratini9054: She was called Sapphire Battersea!

Researcher: That is a pretty good name!

Dratini9054: I know! It's very pretty.

Researcher: Ohh. Excellent choice. Alright, so can you ask you about the story that you wrote? If you knew that the author was a different person - so remember that she was Bridget and that she was ten years old when she wrote the ghost story - do you think your story that you've written would have been any different if you knew that she was someone else?

Dratini9054: So - do you think my story would be different if it was written by someone else?

Researcher: No, no, no, so-

Dratini9054: Oh!

Researcher: The story that we read was written by a ten year old girl. Right?

Dratini9054: If it was written by a ten year old girl, do you think it would be different?

Researcher: No, no, no, shall I repeat it? Again?

Dratini9054: Yes. It's just that your - uh - network -

Researcher: Is the internet getting a bit patchy?

Dratini9054: You've frozen-

Researcher: Oh no!

Dratini9054: Aah. Oh it says mine -

Researcher: I'll put it in the chat?

Dratini9054: You just froze for a moment then!

Researcher: Is that any better, are we back?

Dratini9054: Yeah! Oh you're frozen again!

Researcher: Hang on, I'll put it into the chat-

Dratini9054: My internet connection -

Researcher: Is that good? Are we moving? Are we back do you think? Shall we do a test, sort of, dance to see if it works?

Dratini9054: [laughs]

Researcher: Working?

Dratini9054: Yeah!

Researcher: Perfect! So do you remember - if we freeze, I'll put it in the chat...

Dratini9054: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay, so - remember the story that we read together? It was by a ten year old girl

Dratini9054: Yeah!

Researcher: If it had been written by, say, a three hundred year old man, do you think you'd have written a different story yourself?

Dratini9054: Written a different story than him?

Researcher: No, no, no, your story that you wrote - do you think it would have been any different if the story that we read together would have been a different story? Or does that not make much sense?

Dratini9054: Yeah, I would think so, because, um, adults - as I know - they have had much more learning than children, they know all the good stories, they know what they can write

and they know how to write it, so we're just children, we just write stories in our ways. We don't write it like a normal adventure story-

Researcher: Okay!

Dratini9054: And we, um, write, erm, that would not be exciting as another story, so it wouldn't be as exciting as, um, the [inaudible], unless you thought so yourself.

Researcher: I think your story was brilliant! Can I tell you that? I think it was really great.

That's cool, that's a good answer, thank you. So! My last question for you - actually my second to last question for you - is what do you think a girl from fifty years in the future would say if she read your story?

Dratini9054: Well. There's still much more to learn. There could be different things that you learn in the future so I would think it would be just like me reading ten year old girl writing the story of the ghost who visits her old school so it would be just like me reading that to her reading mine.

Researcher: Brilliant! So very similar then, nothing much would have changed?

Dratini9054: A bit could have changed or maybe our working ways could have changed lots, because it's fifty years in the future ... I would be about fifty eight if I was alive at that time! So there would be much different-

Researcher: It's a long time isn't it, it's a long time to think about.

Dratini9054: Well, it's not as long as you think!

Researcher: No, it's not is it. [laughter] So do you think schools would be different fifty years in the future?

Dratini9054: Um, maybe! I don't think it will have changed like a ton of it, I just think maybe a little, um, it takes a lot of time to change!

Researcher: That's a really good point.

Dratini9054: It's like the earth is taking a long time to actually slow down.

Researcher: Brilliant! So that's really interesting, thank you!

7.5.4 Flying Fox

Researcher: So my first question's going to be do you like writing stories at home?

Flying Fox: Um. I don't usually write stories at home but I do like thinking of stories.

Researcher: Do you usually do them at school?

Flying Fox: Mmhm.

Researcher: And why is it that you do them school more than at home?

Flying Fox: Mainly just because I don't - I don't know.

Researcher: That's alright. Is it 'cause someone asks you to do them?

Flying Fox: No

Researcher: Okay. Alright. So when you do write a story then, let's say one of the ones you're doing at school, what do you like to write about?

Flying Fox: Um. Usually the teacher tells us what to write.

Researcher: So do you get any chances that they tell you to - to write just like a free story?

Flying Fox: Mmhm. [Mum: Do you ever - do you ever get the chance to write exactly what you want [NAME], or do you have to write on a theme?] You have to write on a theme always.

Researcher: Alright. So they always give you sort of a prompt?

Flying Fox: Mmhm.

Researcher: Okay. When you read then or you write a story, what are your favourite stories about?

Flying Fox: Um. I don't know. [Mum: What sort of books do you like to read? What's your favourite series?] [discussion] *Electrigril*. Jo Cotterill. [discussion] My all time favourite book is *The School for Good and Evil* by Soman Chainani...

Researcher: That is a pretty good choice! Well done you! Do you know why you like that one so much? ... Is it just because it's good or is it because it's got certain things in it or...?

Flying Fox: Just the idea.

Researcher: Oh right, it is a really cool idea. I really like that one as well. Alright. So, the story that you wrote for me last time? I read it and as I say I really enjoyed it, I thought it was excellent so thank you very much for that, I thought you did so well.

Flying Fox: You're welcome.

Researcher: Can you tell me - er, can you describe it for me in your own words? You don't have to sort of reread it or anything - can you just remember what you wrote about?

Flying Fox: Mmhm.

Researcher: And can you have a go at telling me what that was?

Flying Fox: How do I explain it? [Mum: Just think about - what was your story about that you wrote?] Ghosts? [Mum: Mmhm. And who was the main character] There was no main character.

Researcher: That's perfect, you're doing so well. Just pretend that I've not - I've never read it. What would you tell me sort of happened in it?

Flying Fox: Um. So there's this person who's looking at some ruins and then there are some ghosts that go back and make it a proper school but then the person wakes up and thinks it's a dream but then they find out it's not a dream and that really happened.

Researcher: That was perfect, well done you. Do you go to Mary's Primary then, is that your school that you go to?

Flying Fox: [Mum: You called it Mary's Primary didn't you?] No.

Researcher: Do you go to a different school?

Flying Fox: Mmhm.

Researcher: Ah brilliant, because I was worried that you were going to a school full of ruins and ghosts and that was a bit concerning for me...! Alright - is there - would you have changed anything you wrote in there, were you fairly happy with it, or would you have done anything differently?

Flying Fox: I would have been more descriptive

Researcher: Yeah. Would it have been longer words do you mean then or just more detail or...?

Flying Fox: Detail.

Researcher: Okay. What sort of thing would that have been on? The people or the ... like the landscape or the ghosts themselves or ...?

Flying Fox: Everything

Researcher: So a bit more detail on everything.... Alright. So would you have changed anything that you wrote if you knew that the author was a different person?

Flying Fox: No because I don't see how that changes it really.

Researcher: That's a perfect answer. So even if you knew that they were say a boy or a grown-up, would you have done anything differently?

Flying Fox: Um. Not really.

Researcher: Okay. And - I'm going to get you to a bit of an imagination here now for me. If you thought that a girl from fifty years in the future - which would be.... 2070? I think the year would be? - if they read your story or if they, sort of, had a look at your story, what do you think they would think?

Flying Fox: They would think it's very old fashioned not to do every lesson on computers.

Researcher: That's a good thing. Do you think they'd do all their lessons on computers then?

Flying Fox: Probably. Like - here is the White Rose Maths website - it's very old.

Researcher: What else do you think would be different about the future?

Flying Fox: Um. There would - The school fields would - would have more astroturf than grass.

Researcher: Ooh that's a good choice. Where do you think all the grass would go then?

Flying Fox: Dead.

Researcher: It'd just die?

Flying Fox: Mmhm. I'm a harbinger. [Mum: A harbinger? A harbinger of what?] Of plastic.
[laughter]

Researcher: Who knows where we're gonna be in fifty years! Do you think anything else would have changed then if we've got a lot of plastic and no grass? What else do you think would be going on?

Flying Fox: I think that there will be way more packed lunches because of - the years before - some years before there were loads of really unhealthy lunch menu options so instead it'll just get healthier and healthier and healthier until people just started bringing in packed lunches all the time.

7.5.5 Jade

Researcher: Alright, so, my first question to you is do you like to write stories when you're at home?

Jade: Yeah.

Researcher: What sort of stories do you like writing?

Jade: Erm. I forgot if it's fiction or non-fiction but it's the type where it's, like, made-up.

Researcher: Oh! So fiction?

Jade: Yep.

Researcher: And what sort of things do you like making up?

Jade: Erm, like adventures.

Researcher: Ooh! Do you do, sort of, like fairy tale adventures or do you do different sorts of adventures?

Jade: Erm, I've done one about some, like, people who have, like, robbed a bank and someone's seen them and like and then they've written a letter to him but I've not finished it and I've also written one about unicorns

Researcher: Aah! I love a good unicorn story - what happens in that one?

Jade: Erm, like, one of the unicorns finds out they've got, like, special magical powers and, like, they save the unicorn world but I've not finished that either.

Researcher: Oh! No, it's still great to have started them, this sounds really impressive?

[pause] Big thumbs up and congratulations on starting your stories, that's so - I'm so impressed. [pause] So what about story writing at school, do you do much of that?

Jade: Erm, yeah, 'cause recently - like last term - we were writing a story about Paddington and we'd already written, like, letters to him.

Researcher: So when you got told to do that, was it - did they just say write a story to Paddington or...?

Jade: Erm, like, we had to show - each lesson, it was like, sectioned off, so for one lesson you would, we had done, erm, starting and opening, then the next lesson we'd done the middle, and the last has been the end.

Researcher: Aah, right.

Jade: The ending.

Researcher: And so did you get told to write about anything in particular or was it just, sort of, working through how to write it?

Jade: It was just like, erm, we had to like plan as well so like, it was like something had to happen to Paddington and it had to be, like, solved.

Researcher: Oh wow. That sounds fun. Was it alright? Did you like doing it?

Jade: Yeah.

Researcher: Brilliant. [Pause] Alright, so, when you're reading or you're writing, do you have, like, a favourite story to read or write about? We sort of talked a bit about the adventure stories but do you like reading about adventures?

Jade: Yeah.

Researcher: What sort of - who's your favourite author then?

Jade: Um. I've got a few. I've got - I really like, I really quite like Jacqueline Wilson and I also quite like Enid Blyton and - her name's Julia Donaldson or something like that...

Researcher: Oh yeah, the lady that did the *Gruffalo*?

Jade: Yeah.

Researcher: She's fun isn't she, I really like her stuff. So what is about Jacqueline Wilson and Enid Blyton, then, that you - that you like?

Jade: I like Jacqueline Wilson 'cause, like, she does, like, really nice stories 'cause, like, some of them are adventures and, like, it's about, like, how they live and kind of and like ... it's like ... it's like always fun to, like, imagine what it would be like if you were in one, if you were in one, one of the main characters position.

Researcher: Yeah, she's good like that isn't she. Have you read the *Famous Five* stuff?

Jade: Erm. I think I've read a few of it.

Researcher: I like them, they're my favourites. [pause] What about, erm, do you have a favourite Jacqueline Wilson then? Is there any particular ones of those that you like the best?

Jade: Erm. Erm. I like the *Tracey Beakers*.

Researcher: They're great. Have you watched her on telly as well?

Jade: Yeah.

Researcher: Which one do you like better, the TV Tracey or the book Tracey?

Jade: Book Tracey.

Researcher: Ooh. Good choice. Alright. Can you remember the story that you wrote for me in our session the other day?

Jade: Yeah. I've got the same book here.

Researcher: Oh well done you. So pretend, pretend that I've never heard of it or never read it, how would you describe it to me? You don't have to read it out - just try and describe it for me in your own words.

Jade: Erm. Maybe, maybe like kind of exciting 'cause you want to be, like, see what the ghost does next?

Researcher: That's a really good way to do it, well done you! Can you tell me a bit about what happens in it as well?

Jade: Erm so like Britney the ghost went to her old school and like, 'cause so much things had changed, she was like, she was really like nervous and didn't know what everything was.

Researcher: Yeah. Brilliant! I'm going to give you a round of applause because you've done so well. [claps]. So. Do you think you'd have changed anything if the author - do you remember that we talked about her being Bridget and ten - do you think you'd have changed anything if you knew that the author, if you knew that the author was somebody else?

Jade: Erm. I don't think so.

Researcher: Alright. Why do you not think so?

Jade: 'Cause like, it was already quite good.

Researcher: So, if she had been, maybe, a really clever, older woman writing it or something, you'd have written the same story that you wrote, do you think?

Jade: Yea... I think so.

Researcher: Yeah. That's a good answer, well done you, you're really good at this! Alright, so, my other question is what do you think that a girl from fifty years in the future would say if they read your story?

Jade: Um. I don't know. Like, they might think, they might think, like, it would be a bit weird 'cause like they'd have different things in the future, so they'd think, like, 'cause some words might have changed, like 'what does that word mean'

Researcher: Aah, yeah. That's a really good call. So the word they used might have changed a little bit. What do you think their schools would be like in the future, do you think their schools would have changed?

Jade: Yeah, 'cause like, erm, you'd have, like, more technology probably, and like, and like, maybe like bigger classrooms and different, like, zones and there might be like different subjects as well.

Researcher: Ooh, that's a good call. What sort of different subjects do you think there might be?

Jade: They might - they might have, like, erm, they might all have a music lesson, like they might all play the - one instrument like we had in year three, and that, like, erm, they might have, like, they might do different things in like maths and like, they might do different subjects in maths.

Researcher: Yeah, there's a lot of things that could change isn't there? Do you think they'd still use the same sort of names that we call each other?

Jade: Maybe, yeah.

Researcher: Brilliant, alright, good job you!

7.5.6 Pink Paw

Researcher: Alright, so! My first question for you is do you like to write stories at home?

Pink Paw: Kind of. It's hard to come up with an idea

Researcher: But once you've got an idea, do you sort of enjoy doing it?

Pink Paw: [nods]

Researcher: Where do you get your ideas from do you think?

Pink Paw: Mostly films and tv shows and books

Researcher: Yeah, good call! Do you have, like, a favourite film or a favourite tv show that you've watched recently?

Pink Paw: Erm. *Dragons Race To The Edge*.

Researcher: Do you recommend it? Do you think I should watch it?

Pink Paw: [nods] Umhm.

Researcher: Brilliant, I will make a note of that one, I'll write it down. Alright. So what sort of things do you like to write about once you've got your ideas sorted?

Pink Paw: Magical stuff.

Researcher: Oooh. What do you mean by magical stuff? Tell me a bit more about that...

Pink Paw: Erm. I'm not sure.

Researcher: Is it like people with special powers? Or like a talking dog or something like that? Or like wizards and witches and dragons?

Pink Paw: I don't know. I haven't actually written many stories.

Researcher: Okay! That's cool. So what about story writing at school, is that any different from writing at home?

Pink Paw: Yes.

Researcher: How is it different?

Pink Paw: They tell us what to write about.

Researcher: Is it mainly, like, books that they tell you to write from or - or - sort of - do they give you ideas or?

Pink Paw: Lots of things.

Researcher: What was the last one that you can remember - have you done a writing lesson recently?

Pink Paw: I don't remember what the last story was.

Researcher: That's alright. So - what are your favourite stories about? I'm going to guess that they're sort of magical sort of things like that, are they?

Pink Paw: *Warrior Cats*.

Researcher: Ooh. *Warrior Cats*. Okay, so pretend I don't know anything about them, what are they like? What are they about?

Pink Paw: Cats who fight

Researcher: Ooh. Do they fight for anything special? Or just 'cause they're really angry?

Pink Paw: Cats who live in the forest.

Researcher: And they fight each other to... win something do they? or....?

Pink Paw: They fight to defend their territory

Researcher: Aah, right, okay. So they're looking after each other.

Pink Paw: [nods]

Researcher: And have you read a lot of them? 'Cause there's a lot of those - that series, aren't they? Do you have a favourite character in them?

Pink Paw: Erm. Not yet.

Researcher: Okay. But just everyone's alright.

Pink Paw: [nods]

Researcher: Brilliant. Okay. If none of this makes sense what I'm asking you, feel free to ask me a question back or go 'it's not making sense', that's alright. Alright. So. Do you have, like, a favourite character to read about - sort of - generally? Not just in the *Warrior Cat* books but maybe in any book?

Pink Paw: What do you mean by a favourite character?

Researcher: So maybe if your favourite books included - say - I really like reading about horses, for example, I like reading pony books and I like reading books where girls win the day and when they're really cool and they sort out things. So I like reading books about that. I don't like reading books about, ermm, sort of, fairies and vampires and things like that. I don't really enjoy that so much. So is there anything for you - sort of - popping out here?

Pink Paw: Just normal people characters.

Researcher: So just everyday people doing, sort of, cool everyday things?

Pink Paw: Mmhmm.

Researcher: That sounds great. You're brilliant at this, thank you very much. Alright. Do you like reading stories about girls in particular? Or do you like reading stories about boys? Or are you, just sort of, more interested in stories just about everyday people?

Pink Paw: Everyday people.

Researcher: Cool! So if you could describe like your perfect story that would really be like making you go 'oh it's my favourite thing', what sort of thing do you think it would be?

Pink Paw: *Harry Potter* but with less death.

Researcher: [laughter] That is an excellent answer. Have you read all of them?

Pink Paw: The *Harry Potter* books?

Researcher: Yeah

Pink Paw: [nods] Except the one that's the script for the play.

Researcher: Yeah, that was really recent wasn't it? Excellent, alright. So, can you remember the story that you wrote for me? Back when we talked before?

Pink Paw: I can open it up?

Researcher: That's alright. Can you - just - tell me what you can remember of it - pretend I've not read it and what would you describe it like to me? Can you have a go at that?

Pink Paw: It's a story about someone walking through - through a school during the pandemic.

Researcher: Brilliant. I'm going to give you a round of applause because you're doing excellently well. Okay. So is there anything else that I need to know about it? Or is that the main - sort of - thing?

Pink Paw: That's the main part.

Researcher: Brilliant. Okay. Do you think you would have changed anything you wrote about in your story if you knew that the author was a different person?

Pink Paw: [mum: did you understand the question?]

Researcher: Yeah, did that make sense?

Pink Paw: No.

Researcher: Alright, so do you remember the story that we read was by a girl of, sort of, ten years old? Yeah? Do you think - and you wrote a story after we'd talked about that a little bit. Do you think, if say, the story had been written by somebody who wasn't a ten year old girl, you'd have written a different story of your own?

Pink Paw: Probably.

Researcher: What sort of things do you think would be different?

Pink Paw: The place that they're in. The character walking through.

Researcher: Yeah. So maybe it might not have been at school and it might not have been about a person? Brilliant! That's a really good answer and you're really good at this. Alright.

So, I have a big question for you now. What do you think a girl from fifty years in the future would say if they read your story?

Pink Paw: Erm. Well it would be proba- it would probably be hard to figure out which bits were normal now and which bits weren't.

Researcher: Because there's a lot about the pandemic there, isn't there? I was reading it this morning, it's really lovely. It's perfect. Do you think that they'd be, like, comparing it against their time then?

Pink Paw: [nods]

Researcher: Great. What do you think their time would be like? How different do you think it would be?

Pink Paw: Um. Well I watched *Back To The Future* and the future was 2015 and that was supposed to have flying cars so it's probably not going to be anything like flying cars in fifty years.

Researcher: I'm so disappointed. I really wanted there to be flying cars by this year and it's like - no - we didn't get them. It's not fair. [laughter] What else do you think would change in fifty years?

Pink Paw: Hmm. Houses.

Researcher: Do you think they'd be bigger or smaller or made out of custard?

Pink Paw: Probably not made out of custard.

Researcher: Okay. Good call.

Pink Paw: Probably a lot bigger. And covered in technology.

Researcher: Ah, right, yeah, there'd be a lot more of that around then? That's cool. So is there anything else you want to tell me about your story or your books that you read or the stories that you write? Or anything that I haven't asked about that you want to mention me.

Pink Paw: No

Researcher: Okay. Cool.

7.5.7 Rainbow

Researcher: My first question for you is do you like to write stories when you're at home?

Rainbow: Erm. Sometimes.

Researcher: So why sometimes and not all the time, do you think?

Rainbow: Erm. I'm not sure why.

Researcher: That's alright! If there's any of these that you're not sure about just let me know and that's cool. Are there sometimes you like to write stories more? Do you have to be - does it have to be a good day, do you think?

Rainbow: Erm. Maybe.

Researcher: I get that. I get that. So maybe when you're writing at school is it any different? Do you like writing stories at school?

Rainbow: Erm. Well. Erm. Sometimes I think I do a little bit.

Researcher: Okay. A tiny bit.

Rainbow: Mm.

Researcher: Brilliant. So what sort of stories do you like writing when you're at school?

Rainbow: Erm. I like writing about magic.

Researcher: Ooh. So you're going to have to tell me what it means to write about magic because there's a lot of different ways that could be taken? What's a good magic story?

Rainbow: Erm. [laughs as cat jumps on desk]

Researcher: Does it involve a cat?

Rainbow: Erm. Sometimes.

Researcher: Sometimes! So is your favourite magic stories are they, like, dragons? Or are they, sort of, wizards and witches? Or sort of Harry Potter-y?

Rainbow: They're, erm, witches and fairies sort of things.

Researcher: I get you. Do unicorns feature?

Rainbow: Yes sometimes.

Researcher: I like a good unicorn. Alright. So what sort of things happen in your magic stories then?

Rainbow: Erm. Well, usually, they go on, like, adventures or something.

Researcher: That sounds like a lot of fun ... so going to sort something out or get something?

Rainbow: Umhm.

Researcher: Yeah. Do you have a favourite magic story you've read?

Rainbow: Erm. I don't know.

Researcher: Oh that's alright. Do you have a favourite, sort of, any story that you've read - not just magic maybe?

Rainbow: Erm.

[Mum: You've got a favourite author at the moment haven't you?]

Rainbow: Umhm.

[Mum: Tell her who that is?]

Rainbow: My favourite author is Jacqueline Wilson.

Researcher: Aah. So she's very much every day, isn't she, she's more contemporary than magic-y. Do you have a favourite one of hers?

Rainbow: Erm. I think, erm, I have a few. So I like one that she did – *Candyfloss*.

Researcher: Ah right

Rainbow: And, erm, *Lily Alone*, erm, *Cookie*.

Researcher: Oh hey, good choices

Rainbow: And *Rent A Bridesmaid*.

Researcher: Ooh, I don't know that last one, what's that last one about?

Rainbow: Erm, it's about this girl who, erm, who - and her friend had a bridesmaid dress and, erm, she really wants to borrow it and then she starts, erm, like, going to people's weddings and being a bridesmaid.

Researcher: Oh that sounds pretty good. Does it all go well for her or are there a few complicated bits?

Rainbow: Erm. I think, yeah, it all goes well.

Researcher: Oh that's good! Have you read *Tracey Beaker*?

Rainbow: Yes.

Researcher: Do you like her?

Rainbow: Yeah.

Researcher: I think she's pretty fun. Have you seen the TV one of her as well?

Rainbow: Yeah.

Researcher: Which is your favourite then, TV Tracey or book Tracey?

Rainbow: Erm. I think, maybe, TV.

Researcher: Good choice. Do you know why that is?

Rainbow: Erm. Maybe - [laughs] - I don't know.

Researcher: That's alright! Don't you worry, you're doing so well. So - are your favourite stories then - do you think your favourite stories are the sort of things that Jacqueline Wilson writes? Or...?

Rainbow: Erm, yes.

Researcher: So if you could describe for me, like, a perfect story for you to pick up off the bookshelf, what do you think it would be?

Rainbow: Er. [pause] I don't know.

Researcher: That's alright. I know it's a big question isn't it! Do you think it would have, erm, do you think it would be historical or more modern, maybe?

Rainbow: Modern.

Researcher: And do you think it would be magical or sort of people, sort of, sorting things out in the everyday?

Rainbow: People sorting things out everyday

Researcher: Ah, right, cool. And do you think it would be grown-ups or do you think it would be kids sorting the stuff out?

Rainbow: Erm. Kids.

Researcher: Yeah, they're more interesting I think.

Rainbow: Mm.

Researcher: Excellent, alright. So if you had, say, a character then that you liked reading about – have you come across anyone that's been your favourite so far?

Rainbow: Not really.

Researcher: No ... so is it just that there's a lot of people that are, kind of, fine

Rainbow: Yeah

Researcher: Right ... and are these people, are they boys or are they girls, or are they - are they cats? or are they dogs or...?

Rainbow: Mm. Girls.

Researcher: Right... and what is it about the girls that you've enjoyed reading? Or is it that you just like them?

Rainbow: Yeah - I just like them.

Researcher: They're fun aren't they.

Rainbow: Mm.

Researcher: Excellent. I'm going to give you a little round of applause to you because you're doing so great, really really impressed with you, you're amazing. So - can you remember the story that you wrote for me a couple of weeks ago?

Rainbow: Yes.

Researcher: Yeah? So don't worry about reading it out loud, just try and describe it for me. Pretend that I am someone who's never heard of it, how would you describe it for me?

Rainbow: Erm. Err.

Researcher: I know!

Rainbow: Erm.

Researcher: Can you remember a bit of what it was about, maybe? Start there?

Rainbow: It was about a ghost and then she visits her old school and she, erm, sees all the girls - like - doing things that she'd never seen them do before.

Researcher: Aah. Excellent. And can you remember how it ended?

Rainbow: Erm. It ended, erm, when she was lying in a grave and she thought she heard the wind.

Researcher: Huh! Wow! I am going to give you a double thumbs up there. That was amazing, well done you. Alright!

[Mum: I would say we have got it in front of us, so that's not memory so much]

[Mum laughs]

Researcher: No, no, no, that's fine, even just telling me about it is pretty good, I'm really impressed. Erm. So can you think - you know when, when - sorry, let me start that over. So when we talked, we talked about a story that was written by Bridget when she was ten, and do you think you would have changed anything in your story if you knew that Bridget was maybe a different person - like a boy, or a cat, or somebody who was really grown-up?

[pause]

Researcher: Does that make sense?

Rainbow: Hmm. Sort of.

Researcher: Okay. So what do you think?

Rainbow: Hmm. I don't know.

Researcher: That's alright! So say if we'd have written - if we'd have talked - I'm falling over my words, you can tell it's the end of the day. If we'd have talked about a story that was maybe written by a grown-up man and it was all about boys and maybe doing, I don't know, something very different...

Rainbow: Mm.

Researcher: Do you think you would have written a different story yourself? The one that you wrote?

Rainbow: Erm, yes.

Researcher: Yeah....why do you think that would be?

Rainbow: Erm. Maybe because, like, erm, what it's about is different?

Researcher: Right. So it would be the source material...

Rainbow: Yeah

Researcher: The prompt, it would all be a little bit different.

Rainbow: Mm.

Researcher: Brilliant, alright. So what sort of, hmm, what sort of thing do you think a girl from fifty years in the future would say if she read your story now - sorry, then?

Rainbow: Erm. ERM. Erm.

[laughter]

Researcher: Do you think she'd have a cat fifty years in the future?

Rainbow: Erm. I don't know.

Researcher: Do you think school would be different then?

Rainbow: Erm, yes.

Researcher: What sort of things do you think would be different?

Rainbow: Erm, maybe the technology?

Researcher: That's a good call! So what sort of things do you think we'd be doing different technology wise?

Rainbow: Erm, maybe, erm, um, maybe they had like, sort of, electronic desks or something?

Researcher: Ooh, that sounds exciting. And do you think they'd be doing the same sorts of lessons that you do?

Rainbow: Erm. Yes.

Researcher: Yeah? And eating the same sorts of lunches?

Rainbow: Erm. Maybe.

Researcher: Ooh, there was a little bit of doubt there, was there?

Rainbow: [laughs]

Researcher: What do you think they'd be having for lunch fifty years in the future at school?

Rainbow: Err, erm. I don't know.

Researcher: Oh that's alright! Just something different maybe.

Rainbow: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay. So, if in the middle of all of that, a girl sat down to read your story, what do you think she'd be reading it on?

Rainbow: Erm. A, sort of, erm, like, electronic device?

Researcher: That's cool. And do you think she'd think anything when she read it on the electronic device? What would her reaction be?

Rainbow: Er. She might, erm, think, erm, er, I don't know.

Researcher: That's alright! And do you think boys would be there? Because don't you go to a single sex school, right?

Rainbow: Yes.

Researcher: Do you think boys would be in your school in fifty years?

Rainbow: Erm. No.

[all laugh]

Researcher: Very definite there, I like this. Alright. So you've done so well in answering all of these!

7.5.8 Rey

Researcher: So my first question for you then, is do you like to write stories when you're at home?

Rey: Well, I - I - I quite like doing it but I never really actually get round to it, I'm always busy. [laughs]

Researcher: I get that. So do you like, sort of, thinking of them?

Rey: Yeah - but I never actually write them down

Researcher: Alright, no, that's good, even if you think of them, that's still writing, right?

Rey: Yeah.

Researcher: What sort of things do you think of?

Rey: Like, erm, maybe a story I'd heard at school or trying to puzzle out a book that I'm reading or something like that.

Researcher: Alright, okay, so it's sort of related to the stuff that you're doing at that sort of day?

Rey: Yeah.

Researcher: I get you, alright. So what about, erm, story writing at school? Is that any different?

Rey: Yeah because at school you actually have to do it.

Researcher: Yeah, do they make you do it at a specific time?

Rey: Sorry?

Researcher: They make a specific time for you to do it?

Rey: Yeah, like, yeah - and also at school, it's probably easier to get on because everybody else is getting on and there's no distractions.

Researcher: Yeah [overlapping following]

Rey: I mean [overlapping previous] at home there's loads of distractions

Researcher: Oh, I know, honestly! It's very - there's - there's a lot of stuff making you want to do it and you never quite want to do the things that you have to do? I feel that, very much.

Alright! So when you're story writing at school how do your writing lessons go? Do you get, sort of, how do you get told, sort of, what to write about?

Rey: Well we usually - well the teacher's usually written an example which he shows us or he shows us a powerpoint on - yeah - how to write it.

Researcher: Alright

Rey: Unless it's a - unless it's a check at the end of a topic where you just, you get a pre-made plan for you and you just have to write it out.

Researcher: Alright, okay, so tell me a bit more about a pre-made plan - is that really specific, then, as to what you have to do?

Rey: So it's a bit like the introduction you have to do 'bla di bla di bla di bla di bla' and it gives you some ideas, the second - the next - paragraph one: instructions 'bla di bla di bla di bla' - ideas. And then it...

Researcher: Ah, I see...

Rey: ...it goes so on.

Researcher: Do you like doing it that way?

Rey: I better like it when you have time to plan it.

Researcher: Yeah.

Rey: 'Cause, but, I find it okay just to get a pre-made plan and have to do it because it's hard for me to get started but once it's started it's really hard to stop.

Researcher: Ah yeah, that's a good point. So with these plans, is it sort of fiction and non-fiction, so like for stories and for fact things, or is it one or the other?

Rey: Is it ... it's like ... well it depends what we're doing. If we've been doing fiction, then it's something on fiction. If we've been doing non-fiction, then it's something on non-fiction.

Researcher: Ah, right, so it's totally related to the lesson that's been

Rey: Yeah

Researcher: Going on. Right, I get you. So what about when you're writing, then, even if you've not, say, written it down, what are your favourite stories about? What do you like writing about? Or thinking about?

Rey: Well, I quite like, erm, like if I'm reading a book...

Researcher: Umhm.

Rey: then I quite like a book where there's a bit of a mystery and I quite like thinking about 'this could fit here' 'now that can fit there' and trying to puzzle it together, and then sometimes I just make up completely random story that doesn't make sense in my head.

Researcher: No, they're the best stories though, they're fun.

Rey: Yeah, they don't make sense though [laughs] especially mine.

Researcher: Oh wow! So, erm, with the mystery stories, do you like reading any one in particular? Do you have a favourite author?

Rey: Well. I've got one of the books I quite like reading right here

Researcher: Okay! If you want to show - turn your camera on, you can show me it if you want.

Rey: Erm, I don't know how to do that.

Researcher: That's alright, just tell me what it is.

Rey: 'Cause - I can see you, but I can't see me.

Researcher: Ah. I think there might be an option somewhere that says something like 'start video'

Rey: Okay-

Researcher: Don't worry about it if you can't find it, just as long as you can see me

Rey: Oh! Got it.

Researcher: Hey, there you are! Fab. Get you.

Rey: So yeah - I quite like reading this one [holds up *A Witch Alone* by James Nicol]

Researcher: Ooh, is it good? Have you started reading it?

Rey: It's a series - it's a series of three books. There's the *The Apprentice Witch*, *A Witch Alone* which is the one here and then *A Witch Come True*.

Researcher: Ooh, so you're only halfway through the series?

Rey: I've got - I've got this one and then I've got the, um, *A Witch Come True* which is the last one but I don't have the first one. But I first came across the series at school.

Researcher: Umhm.

Rey: Because we get reading books from school? And I just saw that one on the shelf and I randomly picked it out and really liked it.

Researcher: Oh brilliant, who's it by?

Rey: Er. James Nicol.

Researcher: Ah right, okay, I will make a note so I can try and remember that one. So do you have any other favourites that you like?

Rey: I like *Harry Potter*. I've got the - [checks shelves] yeah, I'll randomly take this one. My mum and dad heard - have the whole series but then, erm, I've got one, two, three and four in pictures.

Researcher: Oh wow.

Rey: [showing *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by JK Rowling to camera] First the Philosopher's Stone in pictures, so that - there's just some writing pages and some quite nice illustration.

Researcher: That looks so cool.

Rey: Oh yeah, there's quite a good one here [indicates specific illustration]

Researcher: Oh that's lovely, that's really nice.

Rey: Yeah, there's just illustrations on a couple of the pages. [indicates specific illustration] That one looks really funny.

Researcher: Oh wow, oh I love it. Oh that's so great. So do you like them better with the, erm, words or do you like them better with pictures - when they're heavily illustrated?

Rey: Well, I like the illustrations ones -

Researcher: Yeah, they're gorgeous

Rey: Especially when my mum's reading them to me because then when she's reading, I don't just have to sit there, I can actually look at something.

Researcher: Yeah, there's something there to keep you busy as well.

Rey: I can barely carry the, erm, all four picture books.

Researcher: They're really heavy?

Rey: They're really heavy.

Researcher: Ohh, you'll have to do your muscles and then - gosh - okay -

Rey: [breaking up]

Researcher: Brilliant, alright, do you have, like a favourite character that you like reading about? Do you like reading about, sort of, a type of thing in particular?

Rey: Not really. Like, when I wake up in the morning, I just pick a random book off the shelf ... close my eyes, point at a book and that's the book I read.

Researcher: Hey, that's a good way to do it.

Rey: [laughing] 'cause otherwise I can't decide.

Researcher: [laughing] is there just too much? Too much, sort of, stuff to choose from?

Rey: Yeah.

Researcher: Wow.

Rey: It's too much to choose from.

Researcher: Wow. Oh no, that's pretty good - so do you read any, sort of, *Star Wars* stuff I was going to ask you as well?

Rey: Sorry?

Researcher: Do you read any of the *Star Wars* stuff, I was going to ask you as well?

Rey: Well, I haven't read any of the *Star Wars* stuff but I like watching the movies.

Researcher: Yeah. I was - I was loving your posters. They were so great.

Rey: Mm.

Researcher: They look so good.

Rey: Yeah, 'cause I like - I had this magazine once, a *Star Wars* magazine, and it had - and um, yeah, I've just used all the pictures in that to make a big collage on my door.

Researcher: No, that looks great! I like your work! It looks brilliant! Nice.

Rey: It actually fits quite well on there.

Researcher: Good job. So - when you are reading your stories then - and you're sort of saying that you don't really mind what it is, but it's just, sort of, got to be picked at random,

Rey: Yeah

Researcher: Do you want to read about any, sort of, girl stories - or like boy story? Or is it, like, really specifically at random that you're after?

Rey: Well. Really at random really.

Researcher: That's great. So -

Rey: 'Cause like, I like the *Harry Potter* series where the main character's Harry Potter, but then this one the, um, main character's a girl,

Researcher: Mm.

Rey: I like both of them. And it's just like - whatever.

Researcher: How-

Rey: I don't really like it all boys, like - there's got to be a girl in here somewhere.

Researcher: Excellent. So who - who's your favourite girl in Harry Potter? Is it Hermione or is it one of the other ones?

Rey: Yeah. I quite like Hermione. I also quite like Ginny.

Researcher: Ginny's great. I've got a lot of time for Ginny. I think she was cool.

Rey: Yeah.

Researcher: Excellent. Alright, so, do you remember the story that you wrote for me in the session that we did before?

Rey: Aah yeah.

Researcher: Could you have a go at describing it for me in your own words? So don't, like, um, worry about reading it out again - just pretend that I've never heard of it. How would you describe it to me?

Rey: I'm going to need to go and fetch it from downstairs...

Researcher: Oh! Can you remember any of it?

Rey: Yeah. I can remember literally the baseline but I can't remember-

Researcher: That'll do. Just tell me that bit, that's fine.

Rey: Well it's like, erm, a ghost visits her old school and absolutely loads has changed and she's like 'what on earth is going on here'.

Researcher: Brilliant! Perfect. Can you remember anything else about what happened? Or is that pretty much it?

Rey: Umm. Yeah, that's pretty much it. Unless you want me to fetch it.

Researcher: Well, I'll give you a round of applause then because that was excellently done.

Well done you. So you know the story that we read was by a girl

Rey: Yeah

Researcher: And she was ten years old. Do you think that you would have changed anything you wrote in your story if you know that she had been, say, somebody different?

Rey: Hmm. Probably not, because if she still wrote the same example then I'll literally follow the same thing.

Researcher: Excellent.

Rey: But if she had - but if she had been a different person, then I'd probably still have written it the ... same... yeah, probably have written it the same. As long as it was the same story.

Researcher: Alright. So it's more about the - like - the story that she wrote, as opposed to who was writing it.

Rey: Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah, I get you.

Rey: Yeah.

Researcher: So what sort of things do you think, erm, a girl from like fifty years in the future would say if she read your story?

Rey: Maybe like 'why on earth do you have to tap a button on the computer, now we just talk to them' or something like that ... yeah

Researcher: Do you think it would be something -

Rey: Or like..or like 'now the buses drive on their own' [laughs]

Researcher: So the differences in technology...

Rey: Yeah

Researcher: Do you think things ... do you think anything else would have changed in fifty years?

Rey: Umm. I don't know -

Researcher: Do you think we could build houses out of custard?

Rey: [laughs] Probably still not.

Researcher: Okay! That's one I'll cross off!

Rey: It would need to be dried custard.

Researcher: That is a very valuable point. I will note that one down.

Rey: Yeah.

Researcher: So mainly the technology and things like that would have changed.

Rey: Yeah

Researcher: Okay, cool.

7.5.9 Rose Gold

Researcher: Alright, so, my first question for you - and if any of this doesn't make sense or you don't want to answer, just say and we can move onto the next thing - do you like to write stories when you're at home?

Rose Gold: Depends. Like if I'm just feeling like I want to write a story, then I'll write a story but if I don't feel like writing one then I don't write one.

Researcher: So do you think it's more about your feelings as opposed to, like, where you are?

Rose Gold: Yeah

Researcher: Okay, cool. So, say, if the feeling came at school, you'd just go ahead and do one?

Rose Gold: -Depends [overlapping] Researcher: If you could.

Rose Gold: [laughter] Yeah, if I could.

Researcher: You can sit in the middle of a maths lesson and go 'No, I have to write my story now'

Rose Gold: Yeah

Researcher: [laughter]

Rose Gold: I wouldn't. I don't think [laughter] I'd be allowed to do that.

Researcher: No. Yeah. I think not maybe. So what sort of things do you like to write your stories about when you do write them?

Rose Gold: Erm. Mysteries ... actually it can be anything really. Anything that pops into my head.

Researcher: So it's like the idea that matters

Rose Gold: Yeah

Researcher: K

Rose Gold: Murder mysteries.

Researcher: Ooh. Do you have a favourite author of them?

Rose Gold: Robin Stevens.

Researcher: I love her. She's so great, isn't she?

Rose Gold: Yeah.

Researcher: Have you read all of her *Murder Most Unladylike* ones?

Rose Gold: Yes!

Researcher: Wow

Rose Gold: And I'm really excited for 2021 because that's when her new series is coming out and it's about Hazel's little sister Wong - May. May Wong.

Researcher: How did you feel at the end then, were you a bit worried about Daisy or was she alright?

Rose Gold: Honestly what I did was - as soon as it arrived, I didn't start reading the beginning 'cause Daisy's ... Daisy's my favourite character. I skipped right to the end 'cause like I've been, like hearing that one of them had died - not died - well, like, yeah - and I was guessing it was Daisy, erm, so what I did I just read the end first

Researcher: Wow!

Rose Gold: to reassure myself about Daisy -

Researcher: [laughter]

Rose Gold: And then once I've read that, I was like 'okay read [name], she's alright' and then [laughter], so then I went back to the beginning and started reading it.

Researcher: That is clever work. I like your style with that, that's really good. So...when you're writing stories at school, then, do you - is it just about like writing anything or is it again like the idea that matters?

Rose Gold: So what it is, we usually given the topic

Researcher: Umhm.

Rose Gold: So, erm, like, we're given what to write about so - we usually - we may - we did these, erm, Tudor stories which was about, like, a ship, erm, which was about like a Tudor ship, being on a Tudor ship and they were really fun, erm, because even though we had, like, there were like - it was - it was like a story with a lot of dialogue

Researcher: Umhm.

Rose Gold: And they literally just - one of my teachers teaching assistants - my old teaching assistant [name] - what she did, she made a giant gravestone saying 'Said Is Dead' and around had like all of the words that you can put instead of said like 'explained' or 'whispered' or 'shouted'.

Researcher: That sounds brilliant! Mildly terrifying but brilliant. I like that

Rose Gold: Yeah that's a bit like what [name] was.

Researcher: [laughter]. Alright. So you said, like, erm, that you kind of like writing stories about anything - do you like reading stories about anything, or is it just mysteries that are number one?

Rose Gold: Depends. If it's like - it depends if the story captivates me. If it makes me want to read on then I will read on. If, like, it makes me not want to turn the page then I'll just - I'll just stop. Or I'll just read the - I'll skip like six chapters.

Researcher: Ah right, to see if it gets better later?

Rose Gold: Yeah.

Researcher: Ahh, So do you know - can you remember a story that you've had to do that with recently?

Rose Gold: In fact - yes, in fact yes I can. Surprisingly it was actually a mystery. It was by an author called Sharna Jackson and it was called *The High Rise Mystery*.

Researcher: Ah right

Rose Gold: Erm. And it wasn't like the most - I wasn't like getting the most interested by it so I decided I'd skip like two or three chapters and then suddenly it got really good so I decided I'd carry on.

Researcher: Oh brilliant!

Rose Gold: Now I'm really - even though I did guess who the murder was - very early on.

Researcher: Do you know what, I can never guess. I'm always really surprised at the end, I never have a clue. So, can you describe for me the ideal character for you to read about?

Rose Gold: I like reading about erm... detectives. And I definitely like Poirot. And Sherlock Holmes.

Researcher: So what is it about those two that, sort of, are really good?

Rose Gold: Like old fashioned detectives, I really like ... erm, male or female, I just really like - I just find it interesting

Researcher: Like the way-

Rose Gold: It doesn't matter what age, like, as long as they actually like, the books you have are really interesting then I really enjoy that

Researcher: So what makes, like, a detective story - say Poirot - like really interesting? Is it the stuff that - how he works it out?

Rose Gold: Yeah, it's the - how their brains work, and how amazing

Researcher: Mmm

Rose Gold: Like, and how like - how they describe the characters and it's just really, like - their appearance is definitely like .. how the authors describe them, like - it's so cool.

Researcher: Ah right, okay. So you're saying there that you don't really mind, like, who the character is - it's more, sort of, the things they do...? So if you could say, have a girl detective, or a boy detective, would that bother you or is it more the fact that they're a detective?

Rose Gold: Yeah, it's the more the fact that they're a detective.

Researcher: Right, I get you. So if you could say, do you like reading stories about girls in particular do you think - what would your answer be?

Rose Gold: I definitely do like reading - especially - I really do like reading stories about female detectives. Erm, but, 'cause like, my two favourite mystery authors ... technically it's

two authors but three serieses, erm, so obviously *Murder Most Unladylike* by Robin Stevens.

I loved the *Sinclair's Mysteries* by Katherine ... erm... what was it? [discussion]

Researcher: Woodfine?

Rose Gold: Woodfine. And her latest series *Taylor and Rose* which is about the same, erm, detectives Sophie and Lil, but just in another series.

Researcher: Oh, I'm yet to read them. Do you think I should? I read the first one.

Rose Gold: Yes. They're very good. The - um - the third book in the series - the third book in the series of *Taylor and Rose* is - just came out, well there's only three at the moment, just came out [discussion] yeah in August. It actually came out on the same day as, erm, *Death Sets Sail*.

Researcher: Wow. You had a busy day then.

Rose Gold: Yeah, so, erm, what I did I - er - Mum said, she'd buy one, she'd pay for one, and I'd pay with my pocket money for the other, erm, and yeah. I love the third book. It's really good.

Researcher: Oh that's great [overlapping]

Rose Gold: I love the colour of it, it's like that colour [indicating on screen].

Rose Gold: Ah, that's nice.

Researcher: It's called *Villains In Venice*.

Researcher: Oh wicked. I'm going to make a note of these.

Rose Gold: They're cool. They're basically like, erm, so the first one is *Peril in Paris*, second one's *Spies in St Petersburg*, then the third one's *Villains In Venice*.

Researcher: And you've done all of them, right?

Rose Gold: Yeah. In- and the *Sinclair's Mystery's*. The first one *The Clockwork Sparrow*, erm, *The Jewelled Moth*, erm, *The something Dragon*, yeah *The Painted Dragon*, and *The Midnight Peacock*.

Researcher: Brilliant! Okay, so out of all of those titles and all of those recommendations, if you were to name one that you think I should read straight away, like tomorrow, what do you think it should be?

Rose Gold: Have you read all the, er, *Murder Most Unladylike*'s ?

Researcher: I am up to date on *Murder Most Unladylike*.

Rose Gold: Good.

Researcher: [laughter]

Rose Gold: Erm. I'd probably say the first *Sinclair's Mystery*, the, erm, *The Clockwork Sparrow* because like it really takes on - because if you read the second one before the first one then like it has a few spoilers. So if you'd read like the second series or, erm, anything like that, then it might spoil like the earlier books, like say, the, er, the first one.

Researcher: Brilliant, thank you very much. Alright. So. Can you remember the story that you wrote for me back before?

Rose Gold: Yes

Researcher: Can you have a go at describing it for me? You don't have to, like, read it out again or anything like that but just pretend that I don't know what it's about ... how would you describe it to me?

Rose Gold: Basically about this ghost, he visits his old school and, like, it thinks that everything will be, like, the same, but when it visits the school, actually it's not and it realises like, there's new people, they're not the same, and it's like 'Hang on, what's happened to everyone else'

Researcher: Brilliant! I'm just going to give you a round of applause, that was excellent.

Alright. Do you think you would have changed anything that you wrote if you knew that the author was a - er - different person?

Rose Gold: Not really.

Researcher: So it would have stayed pretty much the same?

Rose Gold: Yeah.

Researcher: Cool. Alright. Do you think you would have written something else if it was by, like, a grown-up or do you think it mattered that it was a kid or do you think it just didn't matter.

Rose Gold: Yeah. You asked us this question last week and I definitely think that it would change if it was a grownup because they don't have the same creativity as a child.

Researcher: You're excellent, you're really on the ball. A lot of people don't remember that question so I snuck it in. Okay, what do you think a girl from fifty years in the future would say if they read your story?

Rose Gold: They'd almost think it described them because, like, fifty years in the future, it would - wait - no I'm thinking - never mind - it'd be like, it'd almost like describe, like, maybe their parents because, because like that's when maybe like their parents went to school so like they probably like, almost, maybe if their parents told them about it then they might recognise it.

Researcher: Alright. What do you think life's going to be like fifty years in the future?

Rose Gold: Well, with climate change, no-one can really know because like, either, with one side, either we - all the David Attenborough people save the planet and it goes well or it's ... goodbye planet Earth.

Researcher: Wow, so it's kind of if they do read it, or if they not read it, there's kind of no inbetween. Rose Gold: Yeah.

7.5.10 Ruby Redfort

Researcher: Alright then, so can I ask you the first question which is do you like to write stories when you're at home?

Ruby Redfort: I don't usually have time but I do. I have a little, um, at - at last Christmas my mum, she gave me a periodic table book and it was full of blank notes and I'm us - well, blank pages - and I'm using it to write a story but it's a really old one.

Researcher: Ooh! So what, it's an old story or an old notebook?

Ruby Redfort: Oh, well, it's an old notebook with an old story in it.

Researcher: So can I ask - can I be really nosy and ask what your story's about?

Ruby Redfort: Oh, well, you see, I've got this best friend called [Name] who actually coincidentally her [parent] is the illustrator for my mum's books.

Researcher: Lovely!

Ruby Redfort: And, and she wanted to illustrate my book so I'm working on a new book right now but that book was about two people and, um, they, they go to the - I didn't really think this through very well but five people get chosen and then asked to find the, um, the, um, the black of the yin and yang?

Researcher: Ooh

Ruby Redfort: And then they realise that actually the black and the white of yin and yang is with the two girls? It's them?

Researcher: I am so jealous of your ideas, these are brilliant!

Ruby Redfort: And then I had an idea about a girl with a mechanical leg, erm, that was quite recently, but now I have a new idea which is a murder mystery.

Researcher: Huh! Oooh!

Ruby Redfort: And [best friend] actually thought of it. It's called [title]

Researcher: [applauds]

Ruby Redfort: Thank you, thank you

Researcher: [laughs] This sounds so exciting!

Ruby Redfort: Yeah. And the main character's gonna be called [name] and I hope it's - I hope it's a series and each book is food related.

Researcher: Look at you, ticking all my boxes with these brilliant ideas of yours this morning, they sound so great!

Ruby Redfort: Also, it's called [title] but it's actually set in a pub but [title] doesn't have the same ring to it as [title] so we're calling it [title] even though it's a pub.

Researcher: [laughs] I'm sold. Either way I'm sold, this sounds so great! Alright, so when you're writing at school, is it any different - do you have more time there, or is it about the same?

Ruby Redfort: I mean, what normally happens is I get an idea and I'm like 'wow gonna do this gonna do this' and I actually do it! After five pages. Um, I normally turn a one page story into a four page story and I wanted to continue my story about the demon girl who's actually the last princess of heaven but then my, but then my teacher [name] - this was a couple of weeks ago I think - said 'no, limit it to four pages, okay, I'm not having you writing eleven pages'

Researcher: [laughs] Oh wow so when - when she does let you write, sort of, stuff, how does it work? Does she give you, like, an idea to write about or is it just free choice or...?

Ruby Redfort: Well, we don't write that many stories in school. One I remember is in year two where we had to create - create like *Jack and the Beanstalk* except in our own words and most people took like one or two pages and I took - was it eleven or eighteen pages...

[Mum: It was year one, and almost everyone did one page and you did like six really closely written]

Ruby Redfort: No, I did like eight or eleven or eighteen -

[Mum: Okay, it was about eight then]

Ruby Redfort: Yeah, eight.

Researcher: This is amazing!

Ruby Redfort: And then, and then, I mean I wanted to write my own story but instead they gave us five starters - we can choose which one - and, [best friend] did something called [title] and I did - it's really embarrassing - I still haven't chosen the name for my story and the only other person who had the same starting as me is someone called [name] and he did it not at all like mine. So, that was different.

Researcher: I find titles really hard as well, I can never choose.

Ruby Redfort: Yeah, sometimes it's really easy with your story but sometimes it's really hard! And I hate when it's really hard because - well - it's really hard.

Researcher: It is, isn't it! It's not an easy thing to do. But your ideas sound so great, I love all of them, they sound brilliant.

Ruby Redfort: Thank you.

Researcher: So - what are your favourite stories about then? Do you have, like, different stories that you like to read and write about or do you just - what do you really like?

Ruby Redfort: Erm, the books that I read are murder mysteries and, er, I like quite long books but I - I'm not really a new book reader as much as other people, I'm more a 'I wanna read this book don't make me read another book I wanna read this book I've read fifteen times'.

Researcher: Hey.

Ruby Redfort: Specific authors I like reading from, like Robin Stevens - all of her books - and Rachel Renee Russell, almost all her books as well.

Researcher: I love a good bit of Robin Stevens. I think she's so great.

Ruby Redfort: Yeah, erm, they're my two favourite authors but then there's also, you know, Roald Dahl, David Walliams and

[Mum: You're very into *Ruby Redfort* at the moment]

Ruby Redfort: Oh yeah Lauren Child, *Ruby Redfort*, I'm reading the third one.

Researcher: Ooh, is it good so far?

Ruby Redfort: Oh yeah it's really good! The first one was on land-themed, let's say, the second one which I finished not so long ago, erm, it's water-themed, underwater, and this one is in the wild themed.

Researcher: Oh wow.

Ruby Redfort: And I think it was the third - I only have the first four - and the third book's the longest of them all.

Researcher: Right, so you're going to have to get your muscles sort of prepared for reading that one then.

Ruby Redfort: Yeah. So far I'm on chapter six? Seven? Fifteen thousand? I don't know.

Researcher: But a good start on it.

Ruby Redfort: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Excellent! Alright, so, do you have, like, a favourite - perfect - type of character to read about then?

Ruby Redfort: Um, well, I like a lot of different varieties of characters. I like - but I mostly like clever characters like *Ruby Redfort*...

Researcher: Mmm.

Ruby Redfort: I feel like there's another - oh yeah! I also like *Matilda*. She's a really great character. And people like that. I like quite clever - and - I like quite clever characters.

Researcher: So people that can use their brain really smartly and quick?

Ruby Redfort: Yeah. One of those - one of those people where you're like 'how did they figure that out' 'I can't understand it at all' 'cause she cracked an entire code in less than one minute and other people took an hour which is amazing.

Researcher: So that was *Ruby Redfort*, was it?

Ruby Redfort: Yes. Third book.

Researcher: I'm making - I love talking to people about these - I'm making loads of lists of things for me to read?

Ruby Redfort: Yeah

Researcher: So now I'm going to add those in.

Ruby Redfort: *Ruby Redfort* is definitely a must-have.

Researcher: Excellent! Aw, thank you very much. Alright, so when you're reading your stories, do you like reading about - like - girls in particular? Or boys in particular? Or is it more - like- the type of people, like what they do?

Ruby Redfort: Well, I like - I like reading about girls because I feel that girls adventures - I kind of - this is coming from the opinion of a girl

Researcher: Yep, yeah?

Ruby Redfort: I would say that I like girls more but I think if I was a boy I'd say I like boys more but I also like when they go on this ginormous adventure, like in Ruby Redfort.

Researcher: Mmm.

Ruby Redfort: Is there - in one of my favourite series which is *Dork Diaries* - but it's still interesting but I like when they go on an amazing adventure basically.

Researcher: So like what they do is what matters?

Ruby Redfort: What they do is what matters.

Researcher: Brilliant, okay. So - erm - do you remember the story that you wrote for me, when we chatted before?

Ruby Redfort: Yeah.

Researcher: Could you have a go at describing it for me in your own words? So ... you don't have to, like, read it out again or anything, you can just - sort of - describe it to me as if I've - erm - never read it.

Ruby Redfort: Okay. So, erm, [discussion with mum about arrangement of desk, repositions camera]

[Mum: Okay, you go]

Ruby Redfort: Um. I would describe it in my own words as - do you want me to tell you the story or the girl?

Researcher: Whatever you want to tell me about. Sort of what happens and who's in it, however much you can remember?

Ruby Redfort: I would say first, with the girl, the girl is, erm, I feel the vibe that she's a bit mischievous? And mischievous and not that ready for change. And I would describe the story as - I'm not sure - so I'm just gonna say something really basic which is adventurous.

Researcher: That's brilliant.

Ruby Redfort: I don't really know how to describe it. I'm good at writing stories, not good at talking about them that much.

Researcher: I think that was an outstanding answer. I'm going to give you a little round of applause again [claps]. That was so good, well done you, you're a top banana. Alright, so - do you think - do you remember when we read the story, it was about a girl called Bridget and she was ten, do you think if we'd have read something by, say, somebody else, you would have written a different story of your own?

Ruby Redfort: Well ... I don't know. There's something about my ideas where, erm, I do something then I think about it so... that's the thing about the story of my ideas. The ideas in my story, not the story of my ideas, the ideas in my story.

Researcher: Okay, I get you.

Ruby Redfort: If it was by another person and it was a different story, then I think it would have been - the story would have been different. But if it was written by somebody else, then ... I'm not exactly sure. I have this thing where I like to put a little twist on it? Like - in my

own about the demon, you think she's going to, like, steal the crown, but actually she gets caught and brought back home, so I - kind of like - putting a twist? So I'm - I think it would be different if somebody else wrote it, or the story was different.

Researcher: I get you. You're amazing at this, this is such a good answer.

Ruby Redfort: Thank you.

Researcher: Ten out of ten. You're doing so well. Alright, so, what do you think that a girl from fifty years in the future would say if she read your story?

Ruby Redfort: I think a girl from fifty - fifty -

Researcher: Yep, Five-Zero

[fireworks go off outside, brief discussion between participant and mum]

Ruby Redfort: Fifty years in the future, one: would complain that it's so long, and two: I'm thinking she - what she would feel about it. Obviously it depends on the type of girl but I'm thinking she would think that, erm, it was - it was maybe kind of weird? Like I felt about the last one, because you're so - even if you're a grown-up, you still love the new times so much so hearing about the old times, you're like 'how did - how did they, you know, how did they entertain themselves with that' like I think about, for instance, the Celtics, once I thought about the Celtics, 'how did they entertain themselves without, you know, like TV or books' so I think it would feel pretty weird to read about something so, as they'd maybe call, basic.

Researcher: Okay! Cool, no, I get that. So do you think their world would have changed a lot in fifty years then or...?

Ruby Redfort: Yes! I mean, if it was one year, then I don't think the world would have changed that much. But if it was fifty years then I think they would have least sorted out self-driving cars because they have made them, I heard, it's just they're not that safe.

Researcher: Right

Ruby Redfort: But I'm sure they would discover other things. And like my - I think it was fifth chapter - iPhone thirty six - I mean, that was a little joke because of iPhone eleven, I don't think that's actually going to happen.

Researcher: Oh, that made me laugh though, I really enjoyed that. I thought that was really smart.

Ruby Redfort: Thank you.

Researcher: Fab.

7.5.11 Spiderman123

Researcher: My first question is do you like to write stories at home?

Spiderman123: Erm, yeah I do. Erm, 'cause I've got, like, my own little desk in my, er, bedroom

Researcher: Lovely! What sort of stories do you like writing at home - what do you write about?

Spiderman123: Erm, erm, well I like writing about ... I like adventure stories about, like, er, camping trips, er, sometimes I write poems, erm yeah, and stuff like that.

Researcher: That sounds so much fun! Do you have a favourite, then, do you like writing more stories or writing more poems?

Spiderman123: Erm, I like writing more stories.

Researcher: Oooh. You sound great, I love your style - this is so much fun. Alright, so what about story writing at school, do you like doing that?

Spiderman123: Er, yeah but sometimes the books are, like, a little bit too easy for me, erm, if you get what I mean, they - 'cause like, I read bigger books at home and stuff.

Researcher: Aah, right, so the books they teach you with at school, they're a little bit too straightforward?

Spiderman123: Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah. What sort of - um - when you get told to do writing at school, then, is it always from, like, a book as a prompt?

Spiderman123: Umm, yeah, but there was this one time when it was like from a film?

Researcher: Ooh...

Spiderman123: ...er...

Researcher: Can you remember what the film was?

Spiderman123: Um. No.

Researcher: That's alright! Was it - was it fun writing from a film instead of a book?

Spiderman123: Um, no because the film was quite long

Researcher: Aaah

Spiderman123: And it took a while to get through it and they had to like do it in little bits and it took a really long time.

Researcher: Ohh, right okay. Yeah, I can imagine it might take a while.

Spiderman123: Yeah.

Researcher: Alright. So, do you have a favourite sort of thing you like to write about? You said about, like, ummm, adventure stories and camping - are they your super favourites or is there anything else that you like to write about?

Spiderman123: I like writing about sports. Um. Like especially football.

Researcher: Do you play football?

Spiderman123: Yeah.

Researcher: Wow. So tell me about - what would be the best football story in the world?

Spiderman123: Um, if there were - if there was like - magical goalie gloves or like a magical football or magical football boots

Researcher: Wow! I would read that! I would so read that, that would be so much fun.

Alright. So you say that they're - that they're like your favourite things to write

[Spiderman123: Yeah], do you have a different style you like to read about? Or is it always about like sports and football and things like that?

Spiderman123: I like reading like *Harry Potter* and stuff, um, and I've just started reading - rereading - Michael Morpurgo. So that's like animal books.

Researcher: Yeah, Michael Morpurgo's really great, I love him. Have you got a favourite one of his that you've read so far?

Spiderman123: Well, erm, I've only read two but I enjoyed, like, reading *War Horse*.

Researcher: Ohh, that made me cry. It was a lot - it was very emotional. Were you brave or did you cry?

Spiderman123: I was brave.

Researcher: Aaah! Well I'd have been weeping next to you, just like crying my heart out.

Alright. So, do you like ridi- oh, I was about to say riding stories and that's a very different question then the one I was gonna ask you, that doesn't make any sense! Do you like reading stories about girls in particular or do you not mind who, sort of, features?

Spiderman123: Um, I don't really mind about it but I - I do like reading girl's stories ... um ... 'cause I, like, think that they're like inspirational and stuff...

Researcher: Ah, right, that's a good word

Spiderman123: If the girl's like a footballer or something 'cause not many girl footballers get noticed

Researcher; Aaah, yeah. That's a really good point, well done you. So if you could read a story about girl's playing football and winning everything in the world, would that be a pretty good story?

Spiderman123: Yeah. It definitely describes my football team.

Researcher: Wow, do you win a lot?

Spiderman123: Yeah.

Researcher: Go you! That's brilliant!

Spiderman123: We got to the, um, semi-finals last season but then we lost in the ... semi-finals.

Researcher: But getting to the semi-finals is such a brilliant achievement. Oh well done you lot! Slightly well done you a bit afterwards, but still this is very good.

Spiderman123: I'm the goalie

Researcher: Aah! Wow, so I see the point now about your magic goalie gloves, that makes a lot of sense! Alright, so can you remember the story that you wrote for me last time?

Spiderman123: Um, yeah, it was about a ghost going to the old school

Researcher: So if I'd never read it - pretend I'm a strange person that's just walked in - how would you, sort of, tell me what was in it?

Spiderman123: So, erm, so basically it's a story about a ghost who's died and they go - and they were at a school in the past, but then they went to it and they - they were quite shocked about how it was, like, set out, they came in, like, school buses and had, like, milk at break and, er, ran towards the school gates.

Researcher: Well done! You're brilliant, you're so good at this. Alright. So if you knew that the author was - say - somebody else other than a girl of your age, do you think you would have written anything differently?

Spiderman123: Well, I might have written about, like, um, I might have - I'd write about like sort of the - sort of the same uniform stuff but might write about some different sports that girls might not be interested in - for example football.

Researcher: Aah, okay.

Spiderman123: Yeah, that's probably like the same - it's probably like the same thing other than that.

Researcher: Aah, okay. Brilliant answer! So you'd be including things that you thought the girls might not necessarily be interested in maybe

Spiderman123: Yeah.

Researcher: Brilliant. I'm just going to applaud every answer you give because you're doing so well. Alright so what do you think a girl from fifty years in the future would say if they read your story?

Spiderman123: Um, I think they'd say like - they didn't have the iphone fourteen! ohhh! and stuff like that...

Researcher: So they'd be comparing it against their own time...?

Spiderman123: Yeah

Researcher: What do you think their own time would be like?

Spiderman123: Um, er, I think there'd be like flying cars

Researcher: Wow

Spiderman123: Um, With like folding wings that can go inside to make, like a desk, on the back seat. Um. I think there will definitely be like a new sport, um, and there'll be lots of new phones like an iphone sixteen or whatever...

Researcher: Do you think there would be flying football?

Spiderman123: Maybe

Researcher: And hovering goalposts?

Spiderman123: [laughter]

Researcher: Do you think that would work?

Spiderman123: It might be like Quidditch

Researcher: Oh yes! Yeah, like Quidditch but without - um - oh that would be brilliant!

Alright so if you had a favourite book - a favourite author, who would they be do you think?

Spiderman123: Um. Either Jacqueline Wilson or JK Rowling.

Researcher: Ooh, so yeah that's the *Harry Potter* connection isn't it. Which - er - Jacqueline Wilson's have you read? Have you read a lot of them?

Spiderman123: Uh, yeah, I've read like *Buried Alive* and stuff and - er - I've read like *Vicky Angel*. That was sad.

Researcher: Yeah.

Spiderman123: Err.

Researcher: And why do you like Jacqueline Wilson?

Spiderman123: Pardon?

Researcher: Why do you like the Jacqueline Wilson books?

Spiderman123: Well, um, I just like how there's always like girls as the main character and there's not really boys. Erm, I especially like the *Tracey Beaker* series because she's a bit of a rebel

Researcher: She's fun isn't she, I like her a lot!

7.5.12 The Writer

Researcher: Alright, so my first question for you is do you like to write stories at home?

The Writer: Yes. I do.

Researcher: And what sort of things do you like to write about?

The Writer: Um. Either the crazy stuff I do or - or - or - people that have abnormal powers.

Researcher: So tell me a bit more about the crazy stuff that you do, that sounds really interesting...

The Writer: Well, I'm writing this book called - er - I'm writing two books, well two books about the crazy stuff that I do, I just came up with the idea of one thing when I came home and it was 'how things work' - 'how things work in [Name]'s brain' - this is how I want - how it works - I want it to work like that but I know it does not. Like I - you know how we have different time periods in different countries?

Researcher: Mmhmm.

The Writer: I want that to be because the sun - um - takes naps a lot and it does not - it's like 'you've got that time when I wake up, you've got that time' and when the seasons swap, there's humans in the sky

Researcher: Wow!

The Writer: And [Name]'s Ridiculous Rhymes - stories and rhymes and anything to do with literature that I made up and it's pretty funny. I mean, I once made up flying scorpions because I accidentally drew a dog - no, I accidentally drew a scorpion instead of a dog.

Researcher: That sounds like a pretty good thing to make up under the circumstances.

The Writer: Mmhmm.

Researcher: Nice work. Alright, so, erm, what are your favourite stories about? Are they - these can be things that you read or that you write - any sort of story...?

[internet connection lost / reconnected]

Researcher: So I'm going to ask you that question again before I randomly decided to disappear and I promise that I'll stay around for at least thirty seconds this time if not maybe a little bit more... alright. So what are your favourite stories about? These can be the stories that you read or that you write, what are they about, your favourites?

The Writer: Um, usually about, erm, magic or creatures that have magic powers

Researcher: So what would your perfect combination be?

The Writer: Hmm. Ah. Magic and mystery.

Researcher: Ooh good choice, nice choice. Alright, so, could you describe for me your ideal character to read about?

The Writer: Err, a scientist that whatever he writes comes to life.

Researcher: Ooh. And what sort of a thing are they writing about, the scientist?

The Writer: Experiments

Researcher: That sounds fun...

The Writer: I mean, all they've got to do is write down the method, all they've got to do is write down the list of - I mean, that could be a cheap get around of buying stuff. Oh! I need the - I need to get some quite expensive stuff, I need to write them down -

Researcher: That sounds like an excellent plan. If you can make this happen, can you teach me how to do it?

The Writer: Maybe? I don't know if I can make it happen.

Researcher: Fingers crossed you do and then that would be really cool, I like that. Alright, so, do you like reading stories about girls in particular or do you like reading stories about boys or do you like reading stories about anybody?

The Writer: Um. Yeah, I'd say anybody or *anything*.

Researcher: So it doesn't have to be, like, a human - it can be any *thing*.

The Writer: Yeah, 'cause there's this thing called *Fire, Bed, and Bone* and it's from the point of view of a dog

Researcher: And is it a boy dog or a girl dog or does it not quite say?

The Writer: It's a girl dog that has a pup called Fleabane and -

[internet connection lost / reconnected]

Researcher: Alright, so, do you remember the story that you wrote for me last time?

The Writer: I have it with me.

Researcher: Excellent! Could you have a go at just telling me about it? You don't have to read it again, you can just tell me about what you wrote?

The Writer: Um. I wrote about ... visiting the future [school name] and not liking it.

Researcher: And is [school name] your school at the moment?

The Writer: Yes.

Researcher: Okay! So why did you choose writing about [school name] then?

The Writer: Um. I really like [school name] and the ghost in the reading story was talking about her going to her school

Researcher: So that just seemed like a happy choice

The Writer: Yeah

Researcher: Perfect! Alright, so, do you think you would have changed anything you wrote if you knew that the author was a different person?

The Writer: Um. Uhh. I think I would have used better vocabulary maybe.

Researcher: Alright. Why do you think that?

The Writer: Well. Well because I like using vo - 'cause when I - when I'm told - to write, like a piece of writing at school -

Researcher: Yeah

The Writer: Then usually - then - I - I like - use lots and lots and lots of vocabulary and metaphors and similes .. idioms ... and stuff like that.

Researcher: Yep, yep.

The Writer: And personification! But I didn't - but I don't think I used that much when I was in Year 2 or 3.

Researcher: Right, okay. So you'd have - you'd have liked to have put more in?

The Writer: Yeah.

Researcher: That sounds cool.

The Writer: I mean, I think I didn't use that much 'cause I didn't know that much in Year 2 or 3. [Researcher: That's fine!] But I did put lots in. I didn't put in as much as I would now.

Researcher: Okay. No, that sounds like a good call. Alright, so my last question ... what do you think a girl from fifty years in the future would say if they read your story now?

The Writer: I would hope that we would change our language so they wouldn't understand it.

Researcher: Ooh, that's interesting!

The Writer: I would think. Because language is changed a lot - it used to, it used to be - it used to be only taught English but you would write Latin and French

Researcher: So you think in fifty years, we'll be saying different things?

The Writer: Yes

Researcher: What sort of things do you think will be different? Like everything - or just little individual words?

The Writer: Um. I would think in fifty years maybe half the language changed

Researcher: Ooh, that's a really interesting decision. Do you think anything else will have changed?

The Writer: School, I think school will have definitely changed.

Researcher: What sort of things do you think will change in school?

The Writer: Erm. I think you wouldn't have - you wouldn't have normal teachers, you would have robotic ones...

Researcher: That sounds exciting!

The Writer: Erm. You probably wouldn't be sitting in a desk, I don't think, you would have something else, I don't know what. And you wouldn't have books, I don't think you would have books -

Researcher: What would you have instead?

The Writer: (What did you say?)

Researcher: What do you think you'd have instead of books?

The Writer: Tablets that can - that are holographic.

Researcher: Wow.

The Writer: And no - tables, your table's holographic and whatever you need, it shares a hologram of it.

Researcher: Wow, so quite a lot of different things then in fifty years!

The Writer: Yes.

Researcher: Excellent!

7.6 Coding Schedule

Coding Category	Criteria for Inclusion	Research Question
References / Direct Address to Bridget	Talking about Bridget (named/unnamed) or critique / description of the story.	RQ1: How does the creative writing of girls represent 'being' a 'girl'?
Gender Roles	Explicit mention of girls / girlhood, or reference to established girls things from the story (such as skirt-length etc.).	RQ1: How does the creative writing of girls represent 'being' a 'girl'?
Questions for Bridget	Questions specifically directed to Bridget (either pre-name reveal or post)	RQ2: How does the creative writing of girls respond to the creative writing of girls of a similar age?
Reading Habits	Mention of the things they read, or mention of their reading habits	RQ2: How does the creative writing of girls respond to the creative writing of girls of a similar age?

Echoing Source Text	Echoes of sentences / structures / form from Shevlin text in their own work	RQ2: How does the creative writing of girls respond to the creative writing of girls of a similar age?
Family	Mention of family or reference to immediate personal situation (home, household etc.).	RQ3: How can the creative writing of girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?
Creative writing - self	Reference to personal creative writing (in school or out) or reference to how creative writing is taught	RQ3: How can the creative writing of girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?
Creative writing – others – not Bridget	Reference to the creative writing of others	RQ3: How can the creative writing of girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?
In-vivo codes	Phrases or words that are peculiarly distinct to the participant	RQ3: How can the creative writing of girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?

Gender descriptions	Use of pronouns (gendered or otherwise) or reference to specifically gendered things (skirts, etc.) or commentary on gendered behaviours	RQ1: How does the creative writing of girls represent 'being' a 'girl'? AND RQ3: How can the creative writing of girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?
Girls doing – actions	Mention of girls doing things	RQ1: How does the creative writing of girls represent 'being' a 'girl'? AND RQ3: How can the creative writing of girls facilitate thinking about girlhoods?

7.7 Letters to participants

Young Girls Creatively (re)Writing Girlhood

Daisy Johnson - PhD Candidate, Department of Education, University of York

Hello,

My name is Daisy Johnson and I am carrying out a research project as part of my PhD in Education with the University of York. The project is called “Young Girls Creatively (re)Writing Girlhood” and I would like to invite you to take part.

Before agreeing to take part, please read this information sheet carefully and let me know if anything is unclear or you would like further information.

Please also read the information about General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that is provided on a separate sheet.

Purpose of the study

The study is interested in the creative writing that girls produce after reading and talking about a historical story written by a girl of the same age. I would like to find out how reading stories might help girls to understand and talk about their experience of being a girl. As this is a project about girls and their experience, I am only asking those who identify as female to take part.

What would this mean for you?

Taking part in the study means that you will attend two - three sessions in total. They are online creative writing workshops. In these workshops, I will ask you to write a story in response to some questions I shall ask you. These workshops will last a maximum of 45mins -1hour.

The second step is a follow up interview of 45 mins - 1hour (maximum) at a mutually convenient date, time and location. In this interview, I will ask you some questions about your creative writing and about the story you wrote in the workshop.

The total amount of time will be approximately three hours.

Participation is voluntary

Participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the project at any point, even if you decide to be involved and then change your mind later. If you do decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep safe and your parent or guardian will be asked to complete a consent form on your behalf. If you or they change your mind about their participation at any point during the study, you will be able to withdraw without having to provide a reason.

Anonymity and confidentiality

The data (this means the things we will talk about and the story you will write) will be made anonymous. This means that any information that identifies somebody will be removed. Any information that does identify you will be stored separately from this data in a secure location.

You are able to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and up to four weeks after that date.

Storing and using your data

Data will be stored on a password protected computer and kept for three years. This means that all of the identifying information will be removed. The data that I collect [photographs of work produced, audio interviews and video recordings] will be used in an **anonymous** format in my research in a potential of different ways. This means that I could quote part of your story or something that you said in my thesis, a conference paper, an academic articles, and / or in an oral presentation, but there will be no information that will let people know who said or wrote it. If you are happy for this to happen, there is a box you need to tick on the next form to tell me (box number 3).

I will also give you the chance to comment on a written record of your interview. This means that if you want to say anything else, reword your reply, or withdraw anything, then you will have the chance to do so.

Please note: If this project gathers information that raises concerns about your safety or the safety of others, or give me any other concerns, I may pass on this information to a responsible adult. This is to make sure that you are safe at all times during my research.

Questions or concerns

If you have any questions about this participant information sheet or concerns about how your data is being processed, please feel free to contact me at [redacted email], or the Chair of Ethics Committee via email [redacted email]. If you are still dissatisfied, please contact the

University's Data Protection Officer at [redacted email].

I hope that you will agree to taking part. If you are happy to participate, please complete the form attached and return it by 15/10/2020.

Please keep this information sheet for your own records.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely

Daisy Johnson

7.7.1 Letter to parents or guardian

Young Girls Creatively (re)Writing Girlhood

Daisy Johnson - PhD Candidate, Department of Education, University of
York

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Daisy Johnson and I am currently carrying out a research project as part of my PhD in Education with the University of York. The project is called “ Young Girls Creatively (re)Writing Girlhood” and I would like to invite your child to take part in this research project.

Before agreeing to take part, please read this information sheet carefully and let me know if anything is unclear or you would like further information.

Please also read the information about General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that is provided on a separate sheet.

Purpose of the study

The study is interested in the creative writing that girls produce after reading and talking about a historical story written by a girl of the same age. I would like to find out if reading stories about girlhood helps girls to understand and talk about their experience of gender. As this is a project about girls and their experience, I am only asking those who identify as female to take part.

What would this mean for your child?

Taking part in the study will involve a two part process: firstly, attending a creative writing workshop online lasting forty-five to sixty minutes (max), and then a shorter follow up interview of one hour (max) at a mutually convenient date, time and location. In the workshops, I will ask the participants to write a story in response to a story I shall read them. We will then talk about the work they produce and their experience of writing in a follow up interview.

Participation is voluntary

Participation is optional and your child can withdraw from the project at any point. If your child does decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet for your records and will be asked to complete a consent form on their behalf. If you change your mind about their participation at any point during the study, you will be able to withdraw them without having to provide a reason.

Anonymity and confidentiality

The data that your child provides (e.g. audio recordings of the workshop and interview, their written work, and / or photos of their work) will be stored by code number. Any information that identifies you/your child will be stored separately from the data. Your child is free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and up to four weeks after that date.

Storing and using your data

Data will be stored on a password protected computer and kept for three years. Data will be anonymised following transcription.

The data that I collect [photographs of work produced, audio interviews and video recordings] will be used in an **anonymous** format in my research in a potential of different ways: my thesis, conference papers, academic articles, and oral presentations. Please indicate on the consent form enclosed with a tick if you are happy for this anonymised data to be used in the ways listed.

Your child will be given the opportunity to comment on a written record of their interview.

Please note: If this project gathers information that raises concerns about your child's safety or the safety of others, or about other concerns as perceived by the researcher, I may pass on this information to another person.

Questions or concerns

If you have any questions about this participant information sheet or concerns about how your data is being processed, please feel free to contact me via email [redacted email], or the Chair of Ethics Committee via email [redacted email]. If you are still dissatisfied, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at [redacted email].

I hope that you will agree to your child taking part. If you are happy for them to participate, please complete the form enclosed and return it by [date].

Please keep this information sheet for your own records.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely

Daisy Johnson

Young Girls Creatively (re)Writing Girlhood

Consent Form

Please tick each box if you are happy to take part in this research.

Statement of consent	Tick each box
I confirm that I have read and understood the information given to me about the above-named research project and I understand that this will involve my child taking part as described above.	
I understand that participation in this study is voluntary.	
I understand that my child's data will not be identifiable and the anonymous data may be used in publications, presentations and online.	
I confirm that I have read the information about GDPR	

Name:

Signature:

Date:

7.7.2 Participant checklist

Full name	
Pseudonym	
Age	
School year	
Responsible Adult	
Point of contact	
Session format (virtual / in person)	
Sessions complete	
Consent forms received	

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