

Adolescent Killer and Politician: Age-Related Ideologies in the Dystopian Future Sweden of Mats Wahl's *Blood Rain* Series

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Imagine that you are an adolescent in a world that is about to fall apart. The adult institutions that are supposed to protect you from harm, like the government or the police, have been corrupted by power and are prepared to sacrifice your well-being and your very life in order to reach their goal of absolute power. This kind of world, in which adolescents are pitched against corrupt adults, is recurrent within the Young Adult dystopian genre. The genre problematises the power¹ adults have over adolescents and children in the real world, by depicting examples of extreme adult power abuse.² YA dystopias portray societies “in which the ideals for improvement have gone tragically amok” (Hintz & Ostry 2003:3). The adult generation’s failure to improve society affects the young protagonists negatively: they are repeatedly monitored, controlled, used as political weapons, abused and even killed by adults.

A well-known example of adult power abuse within YA dystopias is the Hunger Games in Suzanne Collins’ the *Hunger Games* trilogy (2008–2010), which is used to discourage the population from rebelling. The children are both killed in the games and forced to kill each other. The survivors must deal with the guilt and the consequences of the killings.³ Another example can be found in the *Maze Runner* series (2009–2016) by James Dashner, in which adolescents have been locked up in a maze. The maze is an experiment that aims to find a cure for a virus that destroys the brain—an experiment that leads to the majority of the adolescents being killed. The protagonist Thomas

1 I use Michel Foucault’s definition of power as a productive network that runs through the social body. Power simultaneously gives individuals an opportunity to influence their own lives and restricts individuals’ freedom (Foucault 2001:148–149).

2 When I refer to YA dystopias I limit my focus to books marketed for young readers portraying future dystopian societies, in which oppressive institutions, limited free will and privacy, and young characters who rebel against their dystopian societies are frequent. The dystopian mode, however, can be found within numerous genres (Hintz & Ostry 2003:2–3).

3 For previous research on the relationship of power between young people and adults in the *Hunger Games* trilogy, see Chau Ming Tan (2013), Seymour (2015:122-164) and Outtersen Murphy (2012). Vivienne Müller compares the ritual of the Hunger Games to the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, in which seven girls and seven boys from Athens were sent into a labyrinth every nine years as a reminder that Crete had defeated Athens in a war (Müller 2012:54). Kathryn Strong Hansen compares the trilogy to the myths of Philomela and of Artemis (Strong Hansen 2015). For a comparison with Koushun Takami’s *Battle Royal* (1999), which portrays a government that forces adolescents to kill each other, see Day (2012).

is forced to become a killer in order to survive and to protect other people. He experiences guilt due to his actions. Hence, the power abuse that some adults commit against adolescents in the real world is heightened and exaggerated in YA dystopias.

However, the young protagonists of YA dystopias do not accept the adults' abuse of power. Instead, they usually rebel against adult regimes:

[t]he female protagonists of contemporary young adult dystopias occupy liminal spaces as they seek to understand their places in the world, to claim their identities, and to live their lives on their own terms. Further, and perhaps most significantly, these young women also attempt to recreate the worlds in which they live, making their societies more egalitarian, more progressive, and, ultimately, more free. (Day et al 2016:3)

Thus, the protagonists, many of them female, work actively to improve society and/or overthrow the adults' oppressive regimes. Protagonists, such as Katniss and Thomas, recurrently become young leaders, political symbols and politicians. This role affects the relationship of power between the generations in the mentioned examples, and in the genre as a whole, since the adolescents repeatedly represent a new political beginning for their respective societies, through which the adult power abuse is counteracted.

In this article, I explore the power dynamic between adolescents and adults in YA dystopias through two cognitive scripts, which I have identified while reading around 70 YA dystopias published in English and Swedish.⁴ Cognitive scripts are narrative patterns, which consist of a sequence of events; they are "the knowledge representations that store [...] finite groupings of causally and chronologically ordered actions – actions that are required for the accomplishment of particular tasks" (Herman 2002:90). I have named the two scripts *the adolescent killer script* and *the young politician script*. Katniss, Thomas, and the adolescent characters of many other YA dystopias, for example Kass Morgan's *The 100s* series (2013–2016) and Neal Shusterman's *Arc of a Scythe* trilogy (2016–2019), are simultaneously killers and political symbols/politicians. This article focuses on renowned Swedish author Mats Wahl's *Blodregnsserien* [hereafter: *The blood rain series*] (2014–2017).⁵ The *Blood Rain* series is a YA dystopia that works well to exemplify my arguments as the protagonist, Elin Holme, is also simultaneously a killer

4 I am currently working on a monograph project about the relationship of power between adults and adolescents in Swedish and Anglophone YA dystopias. The monograph will be published in 2021.

5 Mats Wahl has published around 40 books, he is well-established as a writer for a young audience and he has received several awards for his books (Bonnier Carlsen's Homepage, "Mats Wahl"). His book *Vinterviken* [The winter bay] (1993) has become "a modern classic" and is often used within a school context. It became a movie in 1996 (Bonnier Carlsen's Homepage, "Vinterviken").

and a politician.⁶ In this article, I thus highlight and exemplify two cognitive scripts that can be found within the larger corpus of my research project.

The purpose of the article is 1) to illustrate how cognitive scripts applied to the intradiegetic world of YA dystopias can be used to further the efforts of feminist and intersectional narratology to pay attention to how narrative form affects the communication of ideologies in narrative fiction (see Page 2016:1; Keen 2015:123–124), and 2) to exemplify how the adolescent killer script and the young politician script are central to YA dystopian fiction's depiction of the relationship of power between adolescents and adults, through a case study of the *Blood Rain* series. I apply an intersectional approach in order to identify the ways in which the protagonist's intersectional subject position influences the depiction of both scripts.

I have chosen the *Blood Rain* series as my primary text for two reasons: 1) because the series highlights how Elin's intersectional subject position affects the depiction of her as a killer and a politician, and 2) because the two patterns are clearly intertwined in the depiction of the protagonist Elin and her access to power throughout the series. According to an intersectional approach to power, it is impossible to separate one power category from another in people's lives because they interact with and transform each other (Crenshaw 1989:139–140; Crenshaw 1991:1244). For example, Black women are oppressed through an interlocking of both systemic racism and patriarchy, but this oppression is not a simple addition of the two; it involves specific forms of oppression that do not affect white women or black men (Crenshaw 1989:140). I define intersectionality as “the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (Davis 2008:68).

As social privilege “is dependent on social, local, national, and regional contexts” (Twine & Gardener 2013:9–10), an intersectional approach to power that pays attention to the relevance of different power categories in different contexts is crucial in order to understand privilege and oppression (Twine & Gardener 2013:10). Similarly, Leslie McCall argues that “different

⁶ Åsa Nilsson Skåve applies an ecocritical perspective to Swedish YA dystopias. Wahl's book series is one of her examples (Nilsson Skåve 2017:102–103). She underlines that the previous generation is portrayed as responsible for the environmental destruction, and that the adolescent generation now has to face the consequences of how their elders ignored the environmental issues (Ibid). This is the only previous research on the *Blood Rain* series that has been published this far, but in “(De)Stabilizing the Boundaries between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’: Racial Oppression and Racism in Two YA Dystopias Available in Swedish” (forthcoming 2020), I explore race and white privilege in Wahl's series.

Nilsson Skåve further argues that there are differences between contemporary YA dystopian novels published in Swedish and English (Nilsson Skåve 2017:105–107). For example, supernatural and monstrous stories where nature takes on the role of an avenger are less common in the Swedish material, the Swedish novels are not as limited to heteronormative romances as their Anglo-American counterparts, and Nilsson Skåve's Swedish examples portray more hope in the possibility of creating a new, better world (Ibid).

contexts reveal different configurations of inequality in this particular social formation. The point is not to assume this outcome a priori but to explore the nature and extent of such differences and inequalities” (McCall 2005:1791). Therefore, I explore which power categories that are relevant for Elin’s access to power in different contexts, without delimiting my scope to certain power categories beforehand.

In Elin’s case, her age, gender, working class background and educational background, as well as her status as an adolescent single mother, all intersect, and affect the depiction of her as an adolescent killer and a young politician. I argue that the relationship of power between adults and adolescents in YA dystopias can be reconceptualised when the protagonist is not only an adolescent killer and a young politician, but is also an adolescent single mother who lacks the authority of being an adult, but who is simultaneously the number one authority for her daughter. The *Blood Rain* series thus illustrates that the subject position of being an adolescent mother interweaves with and redefines both patterns.⁷

The article is divided into two main parts. The first part of the article introduces cognitive scripts and schemas, and clarifies how these methodological tools can be used to analyse ideologies surrounding the power category of age in YA dystopias. The second part of the article consists of the case study of Wahl’s series. The case study is divided into one section each about the adolescent killer script and the young politician script, and a section on how the two scripts relate to the protagonist’s intersectional subject position and how they are interwoven with each other in Wahl’s series. In the conclusion, I summarise my findings and highlight the benefits of combining an intersectional approach with an analysis of cognitive scripts.

⁷ Some other examples of adolescent mothers within YA dystopias can be found in Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* (1993), in which Claire is used as a surrogate mother in a society where birthmothers are not allowed to keep their children, and in Caragh M. O’Brien’s *Birthmarked* series (2010–2012), in which girls are used as breeders by the Enclave. However, adolescent mothers who out of free choice choose to become mothers are rare within YA dystopias. Two examples can be found in James Frey and Nils Johnson-Shelton’s *Endgame* trilogy (2015–2016), in which the adolescent mother Shari Chopra’s husband gets killed, which turns her into a single mother who has to protect her daughter from getting killed by the other players in *Endgame*, and Malorie Blackman’s Persephone Hadley (Sephy) in *Noughts and Crosses* (2001–2008), whose partner gets executed before their daughter is born. What makes Elin different from these mothers is that her character development also follows the adolescent killer and the young politician scripts. While Shari states that she has killed a person in the past (Frey & Johnson-Shelton 2015:65), she never kills anyone throughout the *Endgame* trilogy. Therefore, the trilogy does not provide enough material for an analysis of the adolescent killer script and its intersections with Shari being an adolescent mother. For a further exploration of reproduction and forced motherhood in YA dystopias, see Nilson (2018). For an intersectional analysis of motherhood in YA dystopias, see Gilbert-Hickey (2016).

Cognitive scripts as a tool to analyse ideologies in dystopias

The adolescent killer and adolescent politician scripts found in YA dystopias can be conceptualised as two cognitive scripts that each include a specific sequence of events. The adolescent killer script centres on how an adolescent character comes to terms with how they have become a killer and includes the following sequence of events: 1) An adolescent kills people in order to protect themselves and/or their loved ones, 2) they experience guilt, 3) they start questioning the righteousness of their actions, and 4) the adolescent decides that the act of killing is a) righteous b) morally inexcusable. The second script, the young politician script, includes the following events: 1) An adolescent becomes a popular politician and/or political symbol, 2) they feel like they are being used for political means that they do not fully understand or support, 3) they start questioning whether the regime that they are supporting aims to create a more democratic world or is oppressive, and 4) they a) rebel against the regime, or b) work for political change from within the regime.⁸ I have identified both scripts, while searching for recurrent patterns in the larger corpus of my research project.⁹

Two examples of YA dystopias that invoke these cognitive scripts are the *Hunger Games* trilogy and the *Maze Runner* series. Katniss is forced to kill other participants in the brutal televised Hunger Games, where 24 children and adolescent, two from each district, each year have to fight each other until all but one winner have been killed. Throughout the trilogy, she struggles with the guilt of the killings she has committed, while simultaneously evolving into a leader and a symbol for the revolution against the Capitol, which is not only responsible for the Hunger Games, but also uses all the resources while forcing the inhabitants in the different districts to live in poverty. As the Mockingjay, Katniss has the ability to rally people for the rebels' cause, but in the final novel, *Mockingjay* (2010), she realises that the rebels' leader is just as corrupt as the Capitol's. She kills her, and after that Katniss' world is being rebuilt into a more democratic society. However, she no longer takes part in the politics. Instead, she settles down and creates a family with Peeta Mallark. Thus, there is an interplay between how Katniss is being forced to kill other people by a corrupt regime, how she is used as a political symbol, and how she finally rebels against the way she is being used as a political weapon by killing the rebels' leader.

8 It is the chronological order of the events in the fable that I refer to here. While one or more steps in theory could be presented as a flashback or a flashforward in the plot, Wahl's series is chronological, and hence, the events take place in the same order in the fable and in the plot.

9 In previous research, adolescent killers are explored in for example Jessica Seymour's analysis of male characters in YA dystopias, whereas *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* thoroughly investigates young politicians and rebels. However, I have not been able to find any examples of previous research that use cognitive scripts to highlight these aspects of YA dystopias.

In the *Maze Runner* series, Thomas is defined as a leader for the so called Gladers through a mysterious tattoo and how other people follow his lead when he decides to break out of the maze. In *The Death Cure* (2011), it becomes clear that an adult government decided to put two groups of adolescents through an extreme trial where they observed the adolescents' every move in the different tough situations they created for them as an experiment. The goal was to find a cure to a virus that makes people go insane and eventually kills them by destroying their brains. The prequel, *The Kill Order* (2012), clarifies that the virus was set loose intentionally to kill off parts of the population and create a new sustainable world where the number of humans does not lead to environmental destruction. Hence, the adolescents in the two groups are used as tools to find a cure to a disease that was originally spread by adults who were prepared to sacrifice parts of humanity for "the greater good"—children, adolescents and adults alike. Just like Katniss, Thomas is forced to participate in a game or an experiment developed by adults for their own purposes. He becomes a leader who stands up against the adults' oppression, but he has to live with the consequences of the killings he has been forced to carry out. Just like Katniss, his rebellion ends at the end of the series when he is one of the few immune characters who have the privilege of starting up a new society, in a secluded part of the world. His adolescent rebellion has far-reaching consequences, but he no longer plays the part of a politician after his rebellious youth.

I use script theory to identify recurrent patterns for character interactions within the diegetic worlds of YA dystopias, which affect the distribution of power between adolescents and adults. According to Peter Stockwell, a genre can be conceptualised as a literary schema that consists of different slots. These slots can entail, for example, different participants and props. Stockwell exemplifies his argument with the science fiction genre, and mentions that spaceships and space travel are two examples of slots within its literary schema (Stockwell 2002:79). Similarly, I regard YA dystopias as a literary schema that includes slots, such as an oppressive regime, rebellious youth and specific scripts (cf. Alkestrand forthcoming 2020b). While the adolescent killer script and the young politician script do not exist in all YA dystopias, they are both recurrent within the YA dystopian literary schema. I analyse these two scripts in Wahl's series because they relate directly to the power category of age within YA dystopias by communicating ideologies about adolescents' access to power.

My method for analysing scripts on an intradiegetic level has been developed in a number of articles with a cognitive approach (Alkestrand 2017, Alkestrand & Owen 2018 and Alkestrand forthcoming 2020b). Contrary to most cognitive analyses within the field of children's literature, for example Roberta Seelinger Trites' *Literary Conceptualisations of Growth* (2014), Maria Nikolajeva's *Reading for Learning* (2014) and John Stephens' "Schemas and Scripts" (2011), I do not include a consideration of real or

implied readers in my approach. While Marek C. Oziewicz argues that “it is possible to study scripts through the lens of the author’s cognition, through the reader’s cognition, or as a textual matter with an implied author and reader” (Oziewicz 2015:9–10), in a previously published article Christopher Owen and I argue that “neither the implied author nor the implied or real reader’s cognition is necessary for a cognitive analysis to offer insights about a literary text” (Alkestrand & Owen 2018: 65).¹⁰

In this article, the two scripts help identify events that contribute to the evolution of Wahl’s protagonist in her role as a killer and politician. As David Herman argues, “[a]t issue is what—given a particular textual format, and given prior knowledge of the way the world is or at least seems to be—participants in a story can be interpreted as doing or as trying to do. At issue, too, is how participants’ behaviour can be construed as a response to other actions and to unintended events” (Herman 2002:85). A script is different from a motif. Herman defines a script as follows: “As stereotyped sequences of events, scripts, in particular, help explain the difference between a mere sequence of actions and occurrences and a narratively organized sequence, that is, a molecular narrative” (Herman 2002:85). A script is dynamic and stretches out in time by incorporating a chain of different events that together constitute a script (Ibid), whereas a motif is static. For example, the motif of an adolescent who is a killer can exist in a text even if the adolescent killer script does not, since the latter links together specific events into a “narratively organized sequence” (Herman 2002:85). If they are not linked in that specific order in the fable, the adolescent killer script is not present. Hence, I define scripts as plot sequences that occur within many different

10 The reason why I do not include a consideration of readers’ minds in the approach of this article is explored in depth in “A Cognitive Analysis of Characters in Swedish and Anglophone Children’s Fantasy Literature”. In brief, Owen and I argue that there is a tendency in cognitive text analyses that include a consideration of the (implied) child reader to treat all child readers as an entity that will interpret literary fiction in the same way (Alkestrand & Owen 2018:65–66). For example, in Roberta Silva’s text analysis of two fantasy texts, where she does not include an investigation of empirical reader interpretations, she argues that “through the veil of metaphor and by reflecting the interior complexity of their characters, the young reader can develop a speculative and reflective line of thought which can lead them to see their relationship with fears connected to growth in a different, critical way” (Silva 2013:171). Phrases like this do not take into account that all young readers have specific intersectional subject positions that are dependent on the context they live in and may affect how they interpret the textual qualities that Silva has identified. When cognitive theories are utilised in a text analysis to draw conclusions about child readers based on cognitive theories without empirical research, the analysis does not acknowledge the diversity of child readers and their interpretations (Alkestrand & Owen 2018:66).

In order to be able to combine insights from cognitive approaches to literary fiction and the social justice project of an intersectional analysis, Owen and I instead use scripts to analyse character interactions and to highlight in what ways a text’s plot and themes are shaped by scripts (Alkestrand & Owen 2018:66). We do not explore how the scripts ended up in the literary text, through an analysis of for example the author’s scripts, or how they are being interpreted by readers. Instead, we focus on how they are being depicted in the literary work itself.

works, in this case within one literary schema, even though they can be depicted in different ways in different works, as long as they incorporate the same main ingredients. A motif, such as the love triangle, can be portrayed in an unlimited number of versions, but a script always incorporates the same events in a specific order in the fable. Both the adolescent killer script and the young politician script are personal scripts, since they focus on character interactions (cp. Stockwell 2002:77).

In this article, the purpose of using a script analysis applied to character interactions is to analyse ideologies regarding the power category of age and its intersections with other power categories within the diegetic world of the *Blood Rain* series. One prominent way to explore the power category of age within children's literature research is through the concept of aetonormativity. Coined by Maria Nikolajeva, aetonormativity refers to the "adult normativity that governs the way children's literature has been patterned from its emergence until the present day" (Nikolajeva 2009:16). In my analysis of the *Blood Rain* series, I illustrate how aetonormative power structures affect the protagonist Elin Holme's access to power in a future dystopian Sweden. By viewing scripts as recurrent sequences of events within a specific literary schema, I use scripts to further the efforts of feminist and intersectional narratology by highlighting how narrative form affects the communication of ideologies in narrative fiction. I thus propose a multifaceted method for exploring age-related power relationships within the diegesis, in which a script analysis applied to the intradiegetic dystopian world is combined with an intersectional approach and a consideration of how the two scripts intermingle with each other.

Mats Wahl's *Blood Rain* series: A case study of an adolescent killer, politician and mother

The *Blood Rain* series, which consists of five books, portrays a future Sweden in which the environment has been destroyed, which results in floodings and sand storms. When the series begins, a dictatorial regime is in control of Sweden, and Elin tries to survive in a world where violent family feuds are common. Her aunt, Karin, is the leader of the rebels, who eventually manage to overthrow the current regime. At this point, Elin has killed three people in order to protect her family, including her young daughter Hallgerd, or Gerda. She is celebrated as a hero of the people and becomes a young politician in Karin's regime. Eventually, she becomes the Prime Minister, but at this point she no longer believes in the possibilities of creating an ecologically sustainable world in which human rights are protected to the extent that she strived for as a young politician. The *Blood Rain* series thus follows Elin from her adolescence until she has become an established, adult politician, who regards her younger self as naïve.

A hero of the people or a murderer?

As Christopher Owen and I argue, “[a] cognitive analysis of characters can demonstrate how each character’s cognitive embodiment of their intersectional subject position contributes to the progression of the text’s plot and themes” (Alkestrand & Owen 2018:65). By identifying and exemplifying the steps in the adolescent killer script, this section illustrates how the narrative arc of the series regarding Elin’s position as a killer helps communicate ideologies about her actions and her access to power.

The adolescent killer script is central to Elin’s identity development throughout Wahl’s series. She 1) kills people in order to protect herself and loved ones, 2) experiences guilt, 3) starts questioning the righteousness of her actions, and 4) considers them amoral while being celebrated as a hero. In this section, I will clarify how the script shapes the narrative arc of Elin’s development and her access to power. The script’s relationship to age-related power structures and the young politician script will be highlighted in a later section, where I illustrate how the narrative threads are connected to each other.

The first step of the script consists of the killing of three people: a man who Elin kills in self-defence at the age of sixteen when she and her brother are attacked during a family feud (Wahl 2014b:44–45), and two gang leaders who attack her family at their home, one of which wounds her father (Wahl 2014a:298–307). These actions trigger a sequence of events that consists of guilt, reflections on what constitutes a righteous killing and Elin’s conclusion that her actions are morally inexcusable, even though she acted in order to defend her loved ones; that is, the adolescent killer script.

The second step in the script consists of the emotional repercussions of Elin’s actions: her guilt. However, the media portrays her as a hero of the people who only did what was necessary to protect her own family (Wahl 2015:192). Jessica Seymour highlights that “[p]rotecting the care circle remains a desirable trait [within YA dystopias], even though the behaviors necessary to ensure this protection may involve acts of violence” (Seymour 2016:636). Thus, one important slot in the literary schema of YA dystopias is that killings can in fact be motivated and necessary in a dystopian world that repeatedly puts adolescents in harm’s way. In all cases, Elin kills adults who threaten her safety as an adolescent in a dystopian world, which ties in with the overall tendency of corrupt adults who threaten adolescents to the point of being prepared to kill them and their loved ones. Her killings can hence be regarded as triggered by a dystopian society, where adults threaten adolescents’ lives.

The media celebrates Elin’s willingness to take the protection of her care circle as far as killing the threats to herself and her family, while Elin herself regards her actions as amoral. Consequently, the media’s reactions are in line with Seymour’s argument about how protecting the care circle can make killings a necessity. However, Elin is not convinced that she did the right

thing, and here, other characters' opinions are important in this second step of the script, as they greatly affect how Elin views the killings. Her mother regards her as a murderer (Wahl 2015:94–95, 195), and her younger sister asks her how it feels to be a murderer (Wahl 2014a:322), which increases Elin's guilt.

The narrative establishes a distinction between being a killer and a murderer in relationship to the second step of the script. While Elin admits that she killed the leaders of the criminal gang, she is relieved that she did not kill the son who was carrying dynamite, but ran from the confrontation: "If I had shot the boy in his back that really would have turned me into a murderer" (Wahl 2015:377).¹¹ Hence, to some extent, Elin's actions are justified because she killed in self-defence. This absolves some of her guilt, and foregrounds the question of whether or not she had a valid reason to act the way she did.

As Seymour clarifies, a distinction is established in contemporary YA dystopias between "killing being constructed as occasionally necessary and murder being constructed as unnecessary and self-serving" (Seymour 2016:638). The righteousness of Elin's actions is assessed within the dystopian fictional world. In the text's future Sweden, extreme actions are almost a prerequisite for survival, and manslaughter, which would be punished severely in the real world, is portrayed as more or less necessary. The guilt that is being explored in the second step of the script thus contributes to a discussion about the limits of what a protagonist of a YA dystopia is allowed to do in their confrontations with dystopian regimes and violent adults. It interrogates the relationship of power between adolescents and adults by exploring the guilt connected to Elin's killings.

The moral qualms tied to the third step of the script are present throughout the rest of the series. Thus, they greatly affect the narrative arc of Elin's identity development. They are highlighted and heightened in a number of situations that force Elin to revisit her decision to kill three people. Elin keeps asking herself if she is a murderer after she kills the first man who attacked her and her brother (Wahl 2015:192). When Elin kills the leaders of the criminal gang (Wahl 2014a:298–307), this question is foregrounded even more, as Elin repeatedly asks herself if she is a hero who rescued her family, or if she is a murderer who was wrongly found innocent in court (Wahl 2015:192). Elin's guilt concerning other people's deaths increases when she is almost shot by a sniper who is hired by the criminal gang whose leaders she killed, but another woman is accidentally killed instead (Wahl 2015:487–488, 502–503). She feels responsible for the woman's death (Wahl 2015:494).

The consequences of killing the gang leaders become even more emphasised when Elin is later attacked by the same person who tried to shoot her. Both the assassin and a bodyguard are killed and Elin blames herself: "Nadia [the bodyguard] was about to become a friend of mine. Now she is

11 Wahl's series has not been translated into English. All translations are my own.

dead because of me” (Wahl 2016:421). Although this is not a consequence that Elin could have foreseen, the event contributes to a thorough questioning of the righteousness of the manslaughters, invoking the third step in the script, since Elin’s actions affect people who were not involved in the original confrontation. This third step thus entails an ongoing discussion about whether her actions can be seen as righteous, and therefore excusable, or not. In all these instances, the adolescent killer script is evoked, which illustrates that the script is central for Elin’s characterisation.

While the media quickly assesses her actions as righteous, Elin never stops blaming herself. In the fourth step in the script, Elin matches option B when she concludes that she was indeed protecting herself and her family, but that this does not make her actions morally acceptable. The tension between the media’s view and Elin’s own guilt and moral qualms is never resolved within the narrative, opening up for readers to draw their own conclusions about whether or not Elin’s actions should be viewed as acceptable. The fourth step in the adolescent killer script affects the narrative arc of both Elin and the series as a whole, since it challenges the conception of killings as righteous and sometimes necessary that is present within the literary schema of YA dystopias, as exemplified by Collins’ and Dashner’s series.

Wahl’s series problematises the distinction between killing in self-defence and murder, by thoroughly interrogating when the situation is dire enough for a young protagonist to be allowed to use lethal violence. It balances between portraying Elin’s guilt and depicting her as a saviour of her care circle when she kills people in order to defend her family. Elin’s role as the saviour of the family changes the family’s age-related power dynamic to some extent. She diverges from the average protagonist of realist adolescent literature, who—according to Roberta Seelinger Trites—grapples with identity formation, sexuality, the permanence of death, and adolescent rebellion against social institutions, but ultimately has to accept the power of the institutions (Trites 2000:ix–xv).¹² Instead, Elin moves beyond the limits of her intersectional subject position and challenges her society’s dystopian qualities by killing the people who threaten her family in her role as a saviour. But, the tensions between protecting your family and becoming a murderer are never resolved in the narrative. Instead, the moral qualms become interwoven with Elin’s decision to become a politician.

A powerful politician or a puppet?

The young politician script shapes the overall plot of the third and fourth books in Wahl’s series to a high extent. The first step of the script consists of Elin becoming a popular politician within her aunt’s regime—a symbol for ordinary people who go to the extremes when protecting their loved ones. The rebels’ defeat of the government at the end of book two is initially represented

12 For an analysis of how YA dystopias and fantasy literature display a different type of rebellion than the ones described by Trites, see Alkestrand (2014).

as a political turning point for the dystopian Sweden, since the rebels promote a new kind of politics, for example by removing the surveillance hovercrafts (Wahl 2015:341–342). These changes are portrayed as in line with Elin’s perception of what the society needs. Step one in the script thus transports the protagonist into a new political context, which increases her power over the dystopian Sweden tremendously. As a young politician, she gains remarkably more power than peers of her age. Consequently, the young politician script challenges the division between powerful adults and powerless adolescents that is established at the beginning of this series, as well as in many other YA dystopias, such as Collins’ and Dashner’s.

However, Elin soon realises that her party does not stand for the type of values that she initially thought, which leads to the second step of the script: an experience of feeling like she is used by the party for some unknown purpose. For example, the rebels have created new hovercrafts and produced technology that will not only record footage of people’s lives, but download information about everything a person says, sees, hears, or reads (Wahl 2014a:362–369; Wahl 2015:341–342). While Elin wants to promote the ideals that she initially thought the party stood for, like a democratically elected government, she wonders if this new regime has a hidden agenda. Hence, the power that comes with being a young politician is questioned through the second step of the script, when it becomes clear that she is not sure what values her party really stands for. In relationship to her aunt, she is the young political beginner who is not allowed to see the whole picture of their political endeavours.

As a consequence, Elin gradually starts questioning her role as a politician for this particular party, and this phase represents the third step of the narrative sequence of events that constitutes the script. However, this step is foreshadowed in a conversation between Elin and her brother before she accepts the offer to become a politician. The brother has found out that Karin plans to use advanced technology that controls every aspect of the citizens’ lives and records everything that a person has experienced (Wahl 2014a:368). Elin pursues her political career *after* she has gained this knowledge, and this insight is portrayed as one of the reasons why she decides to become a politician in the first place—she aims to navigate the party’s politics in a less oppressive direction. Thus, she may not be aware of everything that is going on within the party, but her awareness of the existence of flaws in their politics gives her the opportunity to work from inside the party and potentially affect its politics. This invokes option B in the fourth step of the script: to work for change within the system. Elin’s influence is extended when she becomes a member of the parliament (Wahl 2015:431).

The two final books in the series explore whether Elin is mighty or oppressed by touching on the possibilities of political rebellion. Rebellions against several regimes is a common motif in contemporary YA dystopias. Elin is portrayed as someone who will stand up for her beliefs: “I’m not a

doll, puppet, robot, or machine. I'm one of the living, that's the only thing I know for certain about myself" (Wahl 2016:436). Elin's political career is not portrayed as something that she is fully in control of, though. She is constantly oscillating between embracing the power that her position as a famous politician gives her, and being suspicious about whether she is being used as a puppet for some unknown political goal, thereby invoking the second step in the script.

Briefly, Elin participates in a group that monitors the party's political plans, such as forcing half a city to move so that they can sell mining riches (Wahl 2015:189–196). At the end of the fourth book the group stands out as potential rebels against the current regime, which Elin is officially a part of. Its members are not presented as a threat, but as the people who stand up for human rights against an immoral government. But, instead of becoming a rebel force, the group is never mentioned again in the narrative. Thus, option A in the fourth step of the script is only mentioned in passing, and contrary to Katniss and Thomas, Elin never becomes a rebel against the current regime. To some extent she gradually takes on the pragmatic approach of her aunt instead of continuing the fight for equality, extended human rights and a sustainable environment. In this particular dystopia, working within the system thus equals a less overthrowing kind of power than the rebellions of for example Collins' and Dashner's dystopias.

However, while Katniss and Thomas leave their political engagement behind at the end of the respective series, Elin extends her political influence after she has grown up and become an adult. In the final book, Elin is in her late thirties and still represents her party. She does not have a relationship with Hallgerd, who moved away from her during Hallgerd's adolescence, and their world is still not free of random killings and widespread criminal activity. She first becomes the Minister of Justice and later takes on the role of the Prime Minister (Wahl 2017:201, 264–265). Elin is portrayed as an experienced politician who has adjusted to her party's politics. She is anything *but* a rebellious youth and describes her younger self as naïve (Wahl 2017:192). Elin is worried about how powerless politicians have become in dealing with climate change, criminality, artificial intelligence and upholding democracy (Wahl 2017:264–269). Instead of challenging the status quo, Elin protects it. Hence, she follows Trites' description of how a rebellious youth needs to be left behind in order to become an adult (Trites 2000:34, 36). She also matches Nikolajeva's description of how the once oppressed children and adolescents gradually transition into adulthood and thus gain the power that is connected to the normative position of being an adult (Nikolajeva 2009:16).

The final book redefines the tension between being powerful and a puppet, which is a central part of the storyline in book three and four: the adult Elin is indeed a powerful politician, but she is also a puppet. No one else is pulling the strings, but she has accepted the limits of a politician's power and settled for working within the system. This makes Elin in the final instalment of the

series very different from the rebellious adolescent characters analysed in *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction* (Day et al 2016). As an adult, Elin has more official power, but she ironically does not believe in her power to change the world anymore. She also expresses an aetnormative conception of youth when she considers her younger self to be ignorant of political challenges. Her transition from adolescence to adulthood ends the influence of the young politician script. Hence, her changed intersectional subject position due to age affects the plot and quietens the challenge to aetnormative power structures that the young politician script communicates earlier in the series, when Elin is presented as a youth who has the potential to improve her society.

By distinguishing the steps in the sequence of events that constitutes the young politician script, this section has clarified that each step in the script relates to ideologies surrounding the power distribution between adolescents and adults. It has also shown that the option to work within the system in the fourth step of the script, instead of rebelling against the status quo, means that the power distribution in society is reaffirmed and unchanged at the end of the series. Elin does have more political power than most of the people of the same age, but it is not until she is an adult who has left her youth behind that she holds the most significant position of power in Sweden as the Prime Minister.

Mighty or oppressed?

The interplay between being forced to become an adolescent killer in order to survive in a dystopian society and being empowered in the role of a young politician defines Elin's access to power. Thus, the interweaving of the two scripts need to be explored in order to clarify how these two roles relate to each other within the narrative. However, the scripts also need to be related to the intersectional subject position of the protagonist, since it profoundly affects a character's access to power. By incorporating "an intersectional way of thinking about the problems of sameness and difference and its relation to power", I investigate "categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power" (Cho et al 2013:795).

As an adolescent single mother, whose partner was shot shortly after her daughter was conceived (Wahl 2014a:215, 260–61), Elin struggles with bringing up her child on her own. She is constantly prepared to put her child's needs and safety before her own. During the reign of the first regime, Elin and her infant daughter are captured by the government after the family has been in contact with Elin's aunt, the leader of the rebels. Elin is tortured and separated from Hallgerd in order to force Elin to reveal political information (Wahl 2014a:66–84). Eventually, Elin is able to make a deal with her captors and save Hallgerd with the help of an undercover rebel (Wahl 2014a:107–

109). She thus prioritises her daughter's needs when she chooses to save her, even though she risks being severely punished for it.

Being an adolescent mother affects Elin's power position regarding age profoundly. Nikolajeva argues that due to aetionormativity, adults are viewed as normative and therefore have more power than young people in both reality and most children's literature; children and adolescents deviate from the norm, and therefore need to be controlled by adults *for their own protection* (Nikolajeva 2009:16). The power hierarchy of age is thus reinforced by a rhetoric of control for the benefit of the controlled. Elin's position as an adolescent single mother bridges the gap between the generations. As an adolescent she has less power than adults, but in relation to her child she is the number one adult authority; Elin is controlled by adults, but she is also the one who controls her daughter. This highlights the aspects of the power category of age that makes it different from other power categories; the adults who once found themselves at the bottom of the hierarchy of age are now positioned at the top (Ibid). In Elin's case, she is simultaneously viewed as an adolescent compared to adults, and an adult authority in relation to Hallgerd, establishing her in-between position as both repressed and empowered by the power category of age.

Since Elin is an adolescent single mother, she is positioned differently in her fictional world compared to adolescent protagonists who are not parents. She has to fight not only for her *own* right to define herself and make life choices, but for *her daughter's* possibilities to do the same. She is constantly navigating in her world *as* an adolescent and *as* a single mother who is protecting her daughter. Her position as a single mother thus shapes her resistance to the regimes, which in turn makes it important to analyse the connections between the two scripts and her intersectional subject position.

The interweaving of the adolescent killer script and Elin's position as a single mother in the *Blood Rain* series can be exemplified with Elin's following statement: "I smell so much like death that no one wants to come close to me, not even Hallgerd" (Wahl 2016:420). Being a good mother is tied to the question of whether or not her manslaughters were righteous. Since Elin was a mother at the time of the events, and she killed the criminals in an effort to defend her family—her sleeping daughter included (Wahl 2014a:298–307)—her position as an adolescent mother interconnects with the whole issue of the righteousness of killing the criminals. This example illustrates that an investigation of scripts on an intradiegetic level needs to take the intersectional subject position of the character into account in order to specify that particular character's motivations for and reactions to different events within the narrative.

One of the reasons why Elin accepts Karin's offer to pursue a political career is because she will be granted bodyguards. Elin fears for her and Hallgerd's lives after the manslaughters, and by taking on the role of a politician she can protect Hallgerd more efficiently (Wahl 2015:196–197),

while simultaneously reinforcing her hero image. Thus, her decision is an example of the interweaving of the young politician script, the adolescent killer script and Elin's intersectional subject position as an adolescent mother who prioritises the safety of her daughter.

In the diegesis, the manslaughters that Elin has committed are not depicted as a reason why she is unsuitable to become a politician, and Karin does not express any doubts about Elin's moral righteousness. In fact, Elin is not offered the job *despite* her acts of violence, her age, gender, or class. Instead, she is depicted as a perfect politician *because of* these factors. Elin represents an underdog in society, who against the odds becomes famous and is someone whom ordinary people can look up to. Here, the media's depiction of Elin as a hero who went to the extremes to protect her family creates an interweaving of the adolescent killer script and the young politician script, where the former leads up to the latter by being the reason why Elin becomes first a hero of the people and later a popular politician.

The importance of incorporating an intersectional approach in the analysis of the scripts is also underlined by how both the adolescent killer script and Elin's position as a single mother are foregrounded and tied to the young politician script, when Elin connects her feelings of not being the right person for the position of a politician both to her "murderous" background, and her struggles with raising Hallgerd on her own:

I don't know anything, can't do anything, and only understand half of what I say when I answer people's questions. I travel around with the protection of bodyguards and pretend to know things and understand patterns. I'm a fraud, and soon everyone will see right through me. I'm nothing but a fraud, that's the only thing you need to know about me. A murderous fraud who is not even liked by her daughter. (Wahl 2015:192)

As a politician, Elin is unable to spend as much time with her daughter as she wants to and she frequently expresses guilt about being away from her (see Wahl 2015:26). Due to gender expectations, mothers are expected to be the number one caregiver for their child and this becomes even more prominent in the series since Elin is the only living parent.

Elin's experiences of feeling ignorant are a consequence of her not having attended an ordinary school. Due to a requirement for all pupils to take a calming drug, which her parents strongly disagree with, she has been home-schooled instead (Wahl 2014b:129). As a working class family with limited resources, her parents have not been able to hire private tutors; instead, they have taught Elin themselves. Her educational status thus intersects with her social class. Elin often lacks historical and political knowledge that people expect her to have (See Wahl, 2015:321–322), despite the fact that she went to a so-called folk high school—a school for adults and older adolescents—before her political career began (Wahl 2014a:396). Both Elin's young age and her lack of higher education are repeatedly defined as weaknesses in the

political context; she is positioned as less knowledgeable due to an intersection between age and educational background.

Elin herself doubts her political abilities due to her lack of a conventional education and the disbelief concerning young people's abilities to improve society that she has to face (cp. Wahl 2015:318–319). Her working class background becomes part of her official persona as a hero of the people. Her gender is used to target potential female voters, who support and idolise her (Wahl 2015:13). The series focuses on the discrimination and doubts Elin has to deal with due to intersections between her young age, gender, class and educational background, but being a politician also gives her privileges, such as personal bodyguards (Wahl 2015:196–197).¹³

When Elin's abilities to contribute to the parliament are questioned because of her lack of experience, her reply highlights young age as central to both how she and others regard her:

Who is not inexperienced at my age? I want to do what I can in order to live up to the responsibility that people seem to want to give me. I'm a beginner and will make mistakes if I get elected. The important thing is that I really want to learn and become a good representative for those who vote for me. If I fail or misbehave, people can decide to not vote for me in the next election. [...] I can't cause that much harm, but maybe I can achieve something. (Wahl 2015:15)

This quote, and all the suggestions that her young age will make her more prone to make mistakes, adheres to an aetnonormative conception of young people: Elin lacks some of the authority that adults hold simply because they are adults. Regardless of their knowledge of, or level of commitment to, political issues, adults are assumed to be more suitable to be politicians simply because they are older, which highlights a prejudice about young people's limited abilities in a political context.

Elin's own party contributes to undermining her authority. She repeatedly has to answer questions from potential voters without having been provided with vital information about the party's political program (See Wahl 2016:124–128). She is also isolated from other party members (Wahl 2015:289). Elin's female friend and lover believes that Karin wants to be able to control and manipulate Elin and to prevent her from encouraging critical thought in other party members (Wahl 2015:289–290; Wahl 2016:432). A different explanation to Karin's behaviour that is suggested in the narrative is that Elin is only used as a means to an end. She has access to a mechanical device that Karin thinks can be used to set robots free by giving them a will of their own, but Elin pretends that she does not know the password for the device and avoids being used as a political weapon (Wahl 2015:347–348, 408–409, 472–473, 500–501). Both these explanations highlight Elin's

¹³ While the text never emphasises Elin's white privilege, it is still present throughout the series, made invisible in an otherwise nuanced investigation into other power categories related to Elin's intersectional subject position (see Alkestrand 2020a).

feeling of being controlled, manipulated, and used as a puppet to do Karin's bidding. Her young age and limited schooling are presented as the reasons why Elin is afraid that she could be working for unknown political goals. Her gender, however, is never presented as a reason why she is unsuitable to be a politician. On the contrary, she is celebrated as a role model for girls and young women (Wahl 2015:144–148).

Another perspective on being a young politician is presented within the diegesis, which partly contradicts the view of youth as a disadvantage. Karin expresses hope that Elin can represent the adolescent generation, and argues that being young is a strength in the political context, since adolescents care about values, and can contribute with new perspectives (Wahl 2014a:339–340). If this is her way of convincing Elin to pursue a political career is unclear, but regardless it still represents a different view on age-related power: being young means being able to challenge the adults' perspective. Karin genuinely seems to think that she and Elin can change the world by working together (Wahl 2015:499). This alternative view on Elin's young age diverges from aetonnormativity, since it is not described as an issue to be young, but as an advantage.

Karin's belief in the adolescent generation is in line with Clémentine Beauvais' conception of the mighty child. Beauvais promotes a view of children's literature that partly challenges the concept of aetonnormativity: she argues that within children's literature the constructed adult indeed has more life experience, and thus more authority, than the constructed child. But, since the constructed child will be alive long after the adult generation has died, the child holds the future in their hands; they are *mighty* because of what they *might* do with their unrealised potential (Beauvais 2015:3, 19, 57). As a consequence, children's literature—written by adult authors for child readers—aims to teach the constructed child something that the adult generation does not yet know; a knowledge that goes beyond learning facts about life, and focuses on learning how to face an unknown future (Beauvais 2015:3, 100–101). Hence, according to Beauvais, the constructed child is not powerless in accordance with Nikolajeva's description of aetonnormativity; their power is simply of a different kind.

This position is relevant in the analysis of the Elin's access to power, since her young age does not only establish limitations to her power, but is portrayed as a strength. Beauvais concludes that children's literature teaches the constructed child that children actually have the power to make a difference in the world, and in this sense children are not as oppressed or powerless as a strict interpretation of aetonnormativity suggests (Beauvais 2015:101). Karin's conception of adolescents underscores the same potential among adolescents. However, contrary to the rebellious protagonists of YA dystopias such as the *Hunger Games* trilogy, who contribute to the creation of a new world order, Elin gains remarkable political power, but ultimately settles for working within a political system that does not have the ability to

solve the political challenges of this version of a future dystopian Sweden. Hence, she is not depicted as a mighty adolescent like Katniss and several other protagonists of YA dystopias, but she is indeed powerful.

In summation, the adolescent killer script and the young politician script are intertwined in Wahl's series. They are also interrogated and explored in relationship to the protagonist's intersectional subject position. As a consequence, they become a crucial tool for identifying and problematising the relationship of power between adolescents and adults in this particular YA dystopia, as well as in many other YA dystopias that are included in the corpus of my ongoing monograph project.

Conclusion

This article has explored and exemplified the benefits of combining cognitive scripts applied to character interactions within the intradiegetic worlds of YA dystopias and an intersectional perspective. By using scripts not in order to investigate how the scripts ended up in the narrative text or how they are being interpreted by readers, but in order to analyse narrative patterns that are recurrent within a particular genre, the article has showcased that there is a distinct analytical value in applying scripts to an intradiegetic level. This value consists of highlighting how a specific sequence of events is being used to communicate and interrogate ideologies of the distribution of power within a specific literary universe, in this case dystopian worlds where corrupt adults threaten the safety and future of adolescents.

The case study of Mats Wahl's *Blood Rain* series has shown that an analysis of scripts can help identify age-related power aspects in YA dystopias, and exemplified the benefits of combining script theory with an intersectional approach. It has illustrated how the development of the protagonist of the *Blood Rain* series invokes two personal scripts that are thoroughly affected by the power category of age: the adolescent killer script and the young politician script, and how Elin's intersectional subject position interweaves with and affects the portrayal of the scripts profoundly. In Wahl's series, the adolescent killer script leads up to the request to become a politician, which in turn actualises the young politician script. The scripts also intersect throughout the rest of the series.

Contrary to many YA dystopias, Elin works within the system instead of rebelling against the system. This narrative arc exemplifies how the presence of certain scripts shapes the plot and helps communicate an ideological content. Therefore, combining scripts and an intersectional approach is a multifaceted method for exploring power relationships in narrative fiction, which supports the aims of feminist and intersectional narratology to investigate how the form of literary fiction supports specific ideologies. The steps of the two scripts create a narrative arc with a specific outcome that supports certain ideologies regarding the distribution of power between adolescents and adults. Hence, by separating the steps in the scripts in the

analysis, I have been able to thoroughly investigate how they are linked to each other and together constitute a chain of events that communicates an ideological content.

The method of this article can be applied to other genres and focus on different intersections depending on their relevance for the analysed character's access to power. The intersectional approach underlines that even though the same scripts can be found in many YA dystopias, the specific combination of how different power categories affect a character's life changes and nuances the depiction of the scripts. Hence, scripts are helpful for identifying similarities in different works or genres, whereas the intersectional approach illuminates that all characters need to face the challenges of their intradiegetic worlds in their own, individual way due to their specific access to power, or their lack thereof.

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