

# **Anadem**

An Exploration of Queer Representation and Dress in Young  
Adult (YA) Dystopia

*2019*

**Briony Appleton**

1705740

**Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation  
Declaration Form.**

1. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Name Briony Appleton.....

Date 08/05/2019.....

2. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA Creative Writing.....

Name Briony Appleton.....

Date 08/05/2019.....

3. This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references.

A bibliography is appended.

Name Briony Appleton.....

Date 08/05/2019.....

4. I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying, inter- library loan, and for deposit in the University's digital repository

Name Briony Appleton.....

Date 08/05/2019.....

**Supervisor's Declaration.**

I am satisfied that this work is the result of the student's own efforts.

Name: .....

Date: .....

## ABSTRACT

YA fiction has grown in popularity and renown in recent years, becoming a stylised mode of writing in its own right. Divided into a creative and critical focus element, this thesis explores Young Adult (YA) Dystopia's problematic preference for portraying its ruling classes as queer coded and over-indulgent.

Within the creative element I explore how and why a fictional dystopian world order might *result* in its ruling class adopting a queer sub-community's modes of existence. As such the creative element of *Anadem: An Exploration of Queer Representation and Dress in Young Adult (YA) Dystopia* is at its core, a subversive criticism of the sub-genre as a whole.

Using *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (New York City: Scholastic, 2008) and *Legend* by Marie Lu (London: Penguin Random House, 2012) as key source materials, the creative element of *Anadem: An Exploration of Queer Representation and Dress in Young Adult (YA) Dystopia* uses dress to establish its characters as vehicles for political and personal contention.

In the concluding critical element, I evaluate the difficulties and challenges I encountered during the writing process, the way I approached my personal goals for the thesis and consider the methods I applied when describing the clothing and appearance of *Anadem's* characters.

The concluding critical element acts as a means of self-reflection and examination; allowing for a brief analysis of my creative decisions and reasoning, including a brief introduction to the genre and my personal interest in highlighting YA's transformative potential as a genre that prioritises coming-of-age, self-discovery narratives.

## CONTENTS

Anadem	13
The Girl	14
Emprex	28
The Thorn	44
Critical Commentary	49
Introduction	50
Why YA?	50
(Queer) Assimilation in YA Dystopia	52
Playing Dress-Up	53
Key Difficulties & Conclusion	55
Bibliography	56

# **Anadem**

Word Count: 13,195

## The Girl

### 1194 Days

The mirror stared at her; at her thin mouth and grey eyes. Head shaved, her stocky, deep brown frame shrouded by a hooded charcoal shift, her voice the only evidence of her sex. The Girl quickly shut the mirror away when her mother called out.

“When is the meeting?”

“Midday,” the Girl replied picking at her pink, chapped lips.

Her mother’s head poked into the bedroom, the bulb flickering from above - worry was etched in the deep lines of her mother’s face, illuminated by dull hues of yellow light. It deepened the crevices in her dark brown skin, making her seem old and weathered despite being no older than fifty. Her head was shadowed with hair, sprouting upwards in tiny salt and pepper curls. She would need it shaved soon.

“Ready?” She smiled, but it didn’t reach her eyes. They were pitiless, vacant, dull.

The Girl shrugged, kicking her bare feet against the damp and rotting door-frame. Her mother’s face hardened and quick as an arrow, her hands were pressing hard into both sides of the Girl’s face. The Girl could hear the twinkle of jangling silver concealed beneath her mother’s long sleeve. A reminder of the thin silver chain that hung there, adorned with a single opal charm that danced like fire under direct light. Her Mother was never bold enough to wear it openly, so the Girl had never seen it in its entirety; she had instead pieced it together in her mind. The Girl tried desperately to escape her mother’s vice grip.

“Mother stop-“

“No. Not now. Not today. You cannot call me that *word* today. So I’ll ask again and you answer me correctly. Are you *ready*?”

“Yes. But-“

“No,” she shook the Girl’s face as she spoke, though she couldn’t tell if it was deliberate. Her mother was old enough to remember what life was like Before, so fear seeped into her every movement like the dank, suffocating mould creeping through the laminate above their heads.

“You know the rules. You know they’re listening. Especially on days like today; this meeting is *important*. It will define the rest of your life and you *cannot* shrug at your life - *their* life. The life they will have picked out exactly for you.”

“Okay, I get it. Sorry...I’m sorry.”

“Your life depends on this, Girl. Your assignment – it’s what you’ll do for the rest of your days. What they need you to believe, you live for. You have to make them believe it.”

“I know. I know...I will.”

The tension in her mother’s brow softened, drawing her arms around the Girl in an embrace that drowned her in the smell of sweat and honeysuckle nectar. The plants grew through the broken brick walls in front of their complex and when the Girl was small, the two of them would sneak out and harvest the sugars for tea to warm their cold fingers on icy nights. She was grown now though. It was no longer time for tea. Her mother squeezed her. *“When the lights go out and Their eyes are closed...”* *“We speak freely but wander blindly in the dark,”* the Girl finished.

Unlicensed proper nouns had been banned long before the Girl was born, so she had no name and could not call her mother, Mother. Unless it was dark, when the Clerk’s patrols were fewer and the street lights had gone out.

“You’ll be late,” she smiled sadly. “Go, before they send someone for you.”

“I’ll see you later Moth-” the Girl paused. “I’ll see you later.”

The streets were filled but quiet except for the shuffling of feet and hissing of pipelines. Stretched above the quarter, hundreds of metal tubes fed gasoline and burning fuels out of the quayside processing plants and up into the centre of the capital; arteries and veins feeding life into the Bank and its city. Tangled and looming, higher even than the throng of apartment buildings, made from dark corrugated metal and insulation foam that spread as far as the Girl could see.

The city claimed no name, was ruled by no Mayor or Lord like those from the Girl’s mother’s secret midnight tales. There were only the Clerks, in their black Kevlar body suits and faceless white masks.

The Girl raised her hood over her head to shield from the dribble of falling rain, acidic and irritating to the skin. The Girl folded herself into the crowd, adjusting her breathing mask against the smog that rose out of the cracked tarmac beneath her feet.

The Girl quickly found herself at the quayside border gate, tumbling through a crowd that butted together like the shards of sand in an hourglass. Funnelling into queues

guided by chicken-wire railing, the Girl witnessed more than heard the jolts of pain that ran through the Coins unlucky enough to have to press against the electrocuted fencing. It was just enough she had been told, to slow any who might try to run.

Her thoughts rattled at the bellow of speakers sounding out from above her as she moved into the final turn toward the border.

“Have all relevant documentation ready, your arms clean so that your barcode and Currency registration are easily scannable. Please use the water taps provided at the beginning of the queue lines, to maximise efficiency. *A stable foundation of this great institution, gives the Bank the strength to be there, for you.*”

The Girl would have rolled her eyes if the lights had gone out; the slogan of the quarter was equal parts promise and threat, droning on again and again. Everyone knew how the Bank liked to be there for the quayside and mostly it involved batons and riot gear.

Approaching the Clerks who would scan her arm and search for weapons, the Girl presented her papers. Pulling them from her moth-bitten satchel she kept her eyes low, raising her arm when she was told, moving when asked. Polite, submissive, safe. It didn't matter how you looked at the Clerks, it didn't matter how small you seemed or how compliant you were - if they were close enough to clock the colour of your iris you were as good as dead; that's what her mother always told her.

“Eye contact is the most assured death sentence when your skin isn't the colour of peach snow...I wish I could tell you it had been different once,” her mother had said whilst they lay in their shared bed beneath a raggedy knitted sheet and took comfort in the almost-quiet of night. “But it was never different. My mother and her mother's mother before her - they knew the pain and fear too. Today we're called Coins, back then we were slaves. Calling it by a different name doesn't make it different.

Now though, the Clerks don't need to cover their tracks. They don't need to spin stories of black kids pulling knives on cops. Here...now? You're just dead. We knew it then...but when they started turning guns on white folk the truth didn't taste as sweet as we thought it would.”

She wouldn't tell the Girl anything else, not about their past, her family, her father or what it was like Before. Her mother would catch herself and go quiet - afraid of telling too much. The Girl didn't mind when she was small; she preferred her Mother's stories anyway.



“It better not to know,” she would say before turning over to sleep, “about times that were better. Even if they were only better by a little.”

The Bank told them their skin colour didn't matter anymore - that like the coins in a jar on a shelf they were all the same. But when the bodies of black people appeared in the streets of the quayside at night and vanished except for puddles of scarlet in the morning...it was a hard slogan to trust in.

So the Girl kept her head down and shuffled towards the centre district, pretending not to notice the Clerks beating a boy barely old enough to stand above her shoulder for his arm being too dirtied to scan. The sounds of the batons thudding against bruised flesh echoed through the tunnelled brickwork gates long after the boy stopped screaming.

Barbed fences opened out into a grand amphitheatre decorated with slate pavements and tall, dead trees peppered about the edges that seemed to shiver as vehicles chased down the roads ahead. The tight queues of the quayside released with a sigh and the Girl shook out the tension in her hands. The nails of her clenched fists had dug deep into her palm, aching.

Towers of glass stretched high above, reflecting rare orange rays of sunlight that snuck through the thick veil of cloud that never quite released the city from its shadow. Vehicles spit black fog into the sky while the people with masks still concealing their faces quickened their pace and split off onto journeys unknown.

The Girl tried to walk with a gait of confidence: as though she and her grey mud-stained slip belonged to the quarter built from mirrors and steel. The entrance to the office where they held all the quayside assignment interviews wasn't far from the border, as though the Bank didn't want those destined to walk the same path as their kin to stare up at those pristine obelisks and dream of *more*. She had memorised the route perfectly so that she wouldn't be late. She turned left down a lane less kept and cared for than the others she had admired and something bright and unmarred by the muck of the city caught her eye at the far end of the alley. Her steps skipped to a stop, stomach lurching.

A slim and gangly silhouette stood unmoving, their shoulders decorated with a white coat that looked not unlike a cloud that had been pulled from the sky. The Girl's eyes

were wide and doe-like as she waited for the figure to move, speak, do *something* as she readied herself to run.

“It’s feather darling, no need to gawk,” they called out, in a rich but feminine voice. The coat’s waif feathers twisted with the breeze of their steps as they disappeared from view.

The Girl blinked. Unsure if she had imagined it, her urge to follow the alley to see where it and the person in the feather coat led tickled in her gut and turned her meagre breakfast sour. But her mother’s voice echoed through her, singing caution. Instead the Girl knocked on the office building door that seemed to barely hold onto its hinges and waited.

\*

The moment the door creaked open, the Girl’s mother drawled out from her spot at the wobbly metal dining table that occupied the middle of their living space. “How was it?”

Her hands cradled a mug and she seemed to take a consuming interest in its contents. It was her best attempt at mild disinterest yet, but her pale knuckles and the second, now cold mug that sat ready for the Girl on her own side of the table suggested otherwise. Her mother had been sat there for a while. Waiting.

The Girl dropped her breathing mask and satchel onto the table. It was barely a house, comprised of two rooms. Their largest, held a cooking counter and broken fridge in one corner, hidden from the window’s view in case of scrap thieves. Their only an adjoining room was hidden by the remnants of a screen door, and was occupied almost totally by the bed the girl and her mother shared. At the end of it’s frame, tiles had been laid for their sink and barely functioning toilet. It was the only place the girl had ever known to call home.

“It was fine. Y’know - an interview. It was...interview-y.”

“That’s really the best you can come up with? Did they say when you’ll get your results? What do you think your assignment will be?”

“Well you’re a refinery technician. Probably that.” Every day the Girl was grateful that her Mother’s role in the quarter was less physical than most. Arthritis was beginning to set into her mother’s hands and feet; the Girl could see it in the way she

moved. She would last a year or two more if she worked in the mines. No one retired in the quayside.

“Well what did they ask? I heard it’s different questions for the Coins they give the better assignments to.”

“I don’t know. I don’t remember. They were just questions.”

“What do you mean you don’t remember? How can you not remember?”

“Well...what do you want me to say?”

“I don’t *want* you to say anything I just want you to tell me how it went.”

“Every answer I come up with is going to be wrong anyway so what difference does how it went make?”

She flinched as though struck across the face. “That’s not fair.”

“Isn’t it? I won’t get my assignment for another two weeks; how well I did or didn’t do doesn’t matter now. What’s done is done.”

“But-“

“They asked their questions, I gave them answers. Who cares?”

“You should!” her mother snapped. “You should care!”

“Well I don’t, okay!”

Silence fell as the Girl spat out the words like poison. The drip of water from their single, lime scale covered faucet pebbled in a puddle of clouded amber that gathered in the bedroom sink. Despite its colour and the grimace on her face the Girl washed her hands in the pool as her mother watched on unblinking.

“I don’t care, Mother. Not about my assignment, not about how much it will hurt if they tear me to bloody ribbons, not even if this whole complex falls apart and we have to watch as all that we have drowns in ash and ruin. We all end up in the same place anyway; some hole in the ground. Today or tomorrow or a year from now makes no difference. And what will it be for? What will I have done? Who will remember me, or what I did or who I was? Nothing and no one. So no...I don’t care.”

“Girl, *stop*. They will hear you.” The words croaked out of her mother and skittered through their cold little hovel.

“Don’t worry,” The Girl started, because if the walls really were listening they were already on their way. “I’ll leave my house key on the table when they come for me.”

“Don’t say it like that,” she said.

“Like what?”

“Like you’re an inconvenience: like I want you gone.”

The Girl said nothing, and unable to look her in the eyes stared down at the black, worn plastic-leather boots that donned her mother's feet. They were visibly too big for her, held in place with twine instead of the tightly woven laces that donned her own matching pair.

The Girl sighed. "I'll be outside. Just in case."

Just in case They come. Those unspoken words hung between the two women as the door closed behind the Girl. Her mother did not protest.

The Girl stood pressed against the door for long stretched minutes, holding herself tightly against the settling chill. A fog horn sounded, marking the end of the working day shift. The Girl moved from her front door, and found her legs shifting through a stream of quarry workers returning to their homes. She sighed deeply, the sound consumed by the crunch of the grit road beneath a thousand pairs of shoes.

She had never fought with her mother before; the Girl had always been good at masking her feelings, even without a breathing mask to hide her face. In many ways they were allies more than kin; her mother had never espoused affection, the Girl had never heard the song of her mother's voice coax her into sleep. Even when it was safest and the quiet of the night screamed in their ears, their talks of the world Before where rare, her mother's tales of myth and fantasy short.

Although the roads were busy, there was still a risk of being beaten by the Clerks for walking in the wrong direction. She didn't make it far though, because in that sea of muted grey the flash of a familiar white cloud danced amongst the despondent vassals of the quarter, not five meters from where the Girl stopped in her tracks.

"Fancy seeing you again," the undulations of a rich accent foreign to those born in the confines of the Bank's city walls tickled at the Girl's ears. The feather coat belonged to a woman, she realised.

"Had your results? I expect not. Wouldn't get excited though. They can tell you your lot the second they get close enough to see the white in your eyes and it's rarely any different to the shit you're born into."

"What's your Currency?"

The woman shrugged, "depends on who's asking. You however, can call me Charlotte."

"I've not heard of any Currency called a Charlotte."

The Charlotte laughed, pulling the Girl into a quiet outlier, away from the Clerks milling through the streets. "That's because it's not a *Currency* doll."

Up close, the Girl could see the Charlotte's eyes were lined with white chalk. Her lashes too, looked like the legs of spindly white spiders to match the stark gleam of her coat.

"Won't the Clerks see you?"

"Everyone sees me, doll. Nobody touches." She shrugged again. "You ever think about those terms we live under here in the Bank's beating heart? No colourful clothing, no name, no relatives et cetera?"

"Yeah, I guess but what difference does that make..."

"Ever played black jack?"

"What?"

"S'a card game. Dealer always wins. In this place; the Bank is the dealer. He always wins doll. But you play the dealer, you own the game."

"I'm going home now," the Girl rolled her eyes and made for the road. She dealt with enough elusiveness at home; she didn't need some angular, feather-coated wraith causing trouble not fifty meters from her front door.

"Wait. Look, I'm sorry doll. I'm not good at this...let me rephrase? Your clothes - they're regulated by the Bank. Why do you think that is?"

The Girl folded her arms but said nothing.

"Grey is easy; bland as far as they're concerned. You blend with everything in this city - the walls, the pipes, even the road. It's just layers of black and white - the way they want us to see the world, draped across our skin."

"Your point by all means, make it."

"Our terms of existence *as decreed by the almighty Bank*, are given to us in writing at the commencement of our lives. Have you ever bothered to read them?"

"Has anyone?"

"Only those with sense," the Charlotte winked. "The uniform clause states that no individual designated a *Currency* valued at a *Note* or lower is permitted to wear shades beyond the realms of the grayscale shading scheme."

"So?"

"So *doll*, white is at the arse end of grayscale. I'm not breaking any rules."

"You really think some contract we all signed with the blood from our umbilical cords can stop them beating us into the ground just because they want to?"

“No, but that’s why I’m faster than they are. I know all the best hiding places,” the Charlotte held out her hand to the Girl, a wicked half grin oozing from her. “Want to see?”

\*

Charlotte was her *name*. She told the Girl she chose it for herself when she started her transition.

“I was a Clerk before the demoted me to Coin for showing leniency to the quarter I oversaw. Clerks soften all the time of course: they’re given breeding duties, make friends with their bunkmates. Me? A broken stoic soul looked into the mirror in his chambers and saw the woman here before you now, staring back. *That* was the real contract breaker.”

“I’ve never met a trans woman before,” the Girl said, trailing at Charlotte’s ankles, anxious as a mouse.

The pit they now found themselves in reeked of decay and rotting sewage. The Girl kept her arms tucked into her chest. She didn’t want to find out what else mixed with the lime scale that patterned this labyrinth of ancient tunnel walls.

“In this economy we’re few and far between - closeted mostly. It’s safer. This life isn’t kind to the marginalised. Suppose I’m singing your tune there, hey doll?”

The memory of crimson puddles and bodies, still, cold and bruised flashed before the Girl. She nodded. “How much farther?”

“Almost there. We should be right under the city’s centre by now.”

“Where are we going anyway?”

“My favourite place of all; it used to be a bunker. The Bank filled most of them in with cement after The Global Unrest came to its end, but the city has been here for hundreds of years so there are a few slices of heaven that we are lucky to say they missed.”

“The Global what?”

“What do you think happened before the Bank? We didn’t just hand over the whole world to white collars and navy suits. When governments collapse and whole countries are buried in radioactive ash - do you really think those left to clean up house are going to be kind to the survivors they have control of? The Bank tells us

they're doing us a favour. Saving us from ourselves; from opinions, beliefs and personality. That it's what started the conflict off to begin with."

"You sound like my mother."

"A smart woman, clearly...watch your step and mind your head. We're here."

Charlotte seemed to fold into the shadows to her right, her steps fluid and smooth as the dark that cradled their every movement. As the Girl shuffled forward though, she could see the outline of a steel vault door, blended into the curve of the sewer, near invisible unless you were looking to find it.

"Play nice, have fun. Maybe think about picking a name for yourself? Most avoid sharing their Currencies - safety reasons," Charlotte smiled. The glimmer of excitement in her eye was visible even in that dank city gutter. "Welcome to the Tavern."

Charlotte shoved the door with her shoulder and the Girl was rendered dumb by the torrent of light and noise. Undulating patterns of sound that felt almost colourful made her temples throb.

"Don't suppose you've heard music before huh?" Charlotte took the Girl's hand and guided her forward. "Don't worry. Your eyes will adjust."

The Girl didn't know what she'd expected; but a room filled with people, covered in garments of black and white that made the metal bunker seem like a swaying checkerboard hadn't been it. The room was set ablaze by the dance of fabrics that she had only glimpsed in periodicals about the Sterlings and Ingots who lived in the centre of the city. Feather headdresses, top hats and crowns of delicate hand sewn lace decorated the heads of dozens of figures. Faces clad with white chalk like Charlotte's and kohl patterns swirling across their faces like vines, masks like those worn by the Clerks, with monstrous faces painted over their usual pearlescent gleam. It was like nothing she had ever seen before.

Charlotte led the Girl to a counter laden with bottles and jars filled with translucent liquids that even at a distance smelt like anything but water. It stung the Girl's nose.

"Vodka," Charlotte said. "The old-school kind - made with our potato food rations. Help yourself."

"I'm fine. So, what now?"

“Well...I can introduce you to some people or you can head round back to get yourself something more...in keeping to wear? And the Thorn will want to meet you later.”

“The Thorn?”

“She’s the appointed leader of bunkers like these. Leading an unofficial insurgence against the Bank if you will. A handful of us go out and recruit; that’s what I was doing when I found you.” Charlotte smiled. “I had a feeling you might fit here. I’ve got a pretty good tell. First, let’s get you something else to wear.”

They made their way into a cloakroom filled with monochrome textiles of every assortment, tucked away from the boom and bustle of the Tavern’s entrance. Charlotte trotted behind her, cooing at the image of the Girl remade that unfolded in her mind.

“I was a dresser before I signed up for recruitment. Let’s get started.”

An hour of sifting through indiscernible piles of textiles left Charlotte with a thick layer of sweat muddling her brow. With a stiff sense of pride, she planted the Girl in front of the mirror and beamed as she bore into her own reflection.

“My finest work, truly. You’re luminous, doll.”

The Girl witnessed her square form hidden beneath layers of her usual grey quilt suddenly take the shape of waves, rippling in a pool of water. Charlotte had picked out a dress. The skirt was fashioned from vantablack tulle, adjoined with an equally dark, boned corset bodice and thin straps to reveal the Girl’s contrasting sharp collar bones and portly upper arms. A thin layer of fishnet mesh crested the skirt of the dress, decorated with minuscule flakes of silver dust that shimmered as she moved. It was a dress of liquid night.

Charlotte handed her a pair of stark white leather boots. “You’re welcome to take whatever else you like, within reason of course. This is just something bold, to get you out of your sludge coloured comfort zone.”

The Girl nodded, “what about the chalk that you use for your face? Could I have some of that maybe, um...if that’s alright?”

“Of course,” Charlotte said with a smile, leaving her alone.

The Girl stared at herself, dazzled by her skirt’s glimmer. She was so engrossed in the mirror she didn’t notice the short, hovering form watching her from the entryway.



“Let me guess. You’re Charlotte’s new ward?”

The Girl squealed with fright and her skin froze. The stranger seemed apologetic, their face markedly free from cosmetics, except for a mess of blonde curls and the intricate pattern of black crests and whorls that decorated their mouth and chin.

“Sorry. I don’t bite - honest,” the stranger smirked. Their hazel eyes which were so light they almost seemed the colour of amber tree sap, sparkled. “Well...not unless you want me to.”

“Sorry, who are you?”

“The name’s August, I’m one of the chief dressers here - nice to meet you.”

The Girl nodded in greeting but caution still furrowed her brow. August smirked. They wore a fitted tuxedo suit, with a long tailcoat and slim fitting black trousers that had a perfectly ironed crease running down their sides. There wasn’t a single thread out of place. In their hands, the Girl noticed a large spiral scrapbook tucked under August’s shoulder. The pages were dog eared and thick with whatever had been pasted within.

“Before you ask, no I’m not a woman and no, I’m not a man either,” they winked.

Probably mistaking her thoughts about the sketchbook for curious ogling. They didn’t give her a chance to respond. “How do you like the Tavern so far?”

“Well,” the Girl said, habitually picking at her lip. “It’s loud.”

August chuckled. “You get used to it, and there are quieter corners. You just have to know where to find them. Much better for making friends...amongst other things.”

August’s ears dusted with rose. “Picked a name yet?”

She shook her head. “How do I even pick one? And why bother?”

August mulled the question over in their head, although the Girl could almost read their thoughts as they passed across their face. She wondered if August had a hard time hiding their feelings from the Clerks in the city - maybe it was what brought them here. August leant the scrapbook against the mirror and turned to face the Girl.

“I guess...that depends on how much of *you* you want to find down here.”

“That doesn’t make much sense.”

“Neither does picking a sound you like to respond to when people call, but such is life with a name,” they grinned.

Charlotte poked her head through the door and after a brief squeal at the Girl’s first solo introduction to a Tavern native, lacquered her with white. The Girl marvelled at

how her eyes seemed almost black: large and round like a bird's. The contrast was stark against the sheen of chalk now peppering her dark complexion.

"Now that's done," August said, fidgeting impatiently. "Shall we dance? You can meet some of the others and the Thorn afterwards."

"But...I've never...I don't know how to. I've never done it before," the Girl said, downcast.

"Don't worry," August's ears turned red again as they took the Girl's hand and pulled her into the Tavern's thrumming heart. "I'll show you."

\*

The Girl carried the beat of the Tavern with her all the way back to the quayside. Her heart seemed to thump to the rhythm she had left behind those heavy bunker doors buried beneath the city. She and August had danced for hours before wandering long halls shaped like the inside of a tin can. It was the longest she had ever spoken to anybody besides her mother. They shared secrets, stories of their quarters and the Girl had watched August spit out laughter like she had never seen anyone do in all her life. And under the light of a lamp in an empty back room, The Girl's skin had burned hot as they sat in the quiet with their hands tentatively entwined. The Thorn had been and gone by the time they had thought to look for her. Another day, August had said. The Girl would meet her another day.

She smiled again, because she knew she would have to go back – that she wanted to go back. More than she had ever wanted anything.

Charlotte's whisper returned the Girl to the surface of the city. "Be mindful, doll. We're still out past curfew. Get home, lock the door. Hide your clothes when you can. Somewhere outside is best, where they can't be tied to you if they're found." They were hiding one street over from the Girl's grove of crumbling shanties, stacked on top of one another like metal sardine tins.

The Girl nodded. "When will I see you again?"

Charlotte smiled, warm and reassuring. "I'll be back soon if this is what you want. This path...it's not easy and it's dangerous. You have to be sure."

The Girl didn't blink, "I'm sure."

Charlotte's eyes scanned the road ahead. "Three days. I'll come for you then."

"And then what?"

“Then...day one of the rest of your life begins.”

The Girl huffed. She felt she was quite done with Charlotte’s compulsive need to dress everything in vagueness and secrecy.

Charlotte chuckled softly. “*Three days,*” she repeated before folding into the night, leaving the Girl alone.

The Girl skipped between shadows and at the final turning before her home, she breathed deep and closed her eyes. She wanted to savour the night for more time than she had. Her mother was probably sick with fear that she’d been taken by the Clerks but she knew she couldn’t tell her about the Tavern. Apologies first, she decided. She’d figure out the rest as she went.

The Girl snuck to the threshold of her front door, slipped inside and loosed the breath she found trapped in her chest. Collapsed, knees to her head, she sat with her ears straining to hear for any Clerks that might be nearby. But nobody came...not even her mother she realised - even though she would have heard the door.

“Mother?” the Girl whispered, pulling herself up from the floor. “I’m sorry for earlier. I know you were probably-”

The box bedroom had been left ajar. The drippings of lamp oil trickled out beneath the doorframe. The bedsheets were shredded. The Girl found no sign of her mother, only a spattering of blood across the far wall and the glint of a silver bracelet hanging from the inside door knob, the opal charm shaped like a teardrop staggered its sway at her touch. She said nothing, did nothing. She was alone. Her mother was gone.

The flickering of the light above her head brought the Girl in and out of existence. She looked at herself in the mirror, at her grief-heavy eyes lined with chalk, her dark skin and glittering clothes. She thought of her mother, guilty and aggrieved. She decided she was ready.

“Emprex,” the Girl and the mirror said in unison. Inspired by the legend of her favourite Ethiopian queen, given new life by her mother’s carefully woven tales. She pulled the bracelet from the door handle and wrapped it around her wrist.

Emprex: her name.

## Emprex

### 731 Days

Emprex watched Coins flitter about their mornings in the centre district of the city; their feet stamping across the dusty pavement, rumbling like thunder. Pressed against the wall she waited. She dared not blink or check the time. She barely thought to breathe.

*“Patience is the key,”* Charlotte’s voice sang out in her head while she waited. *“Trust yourself.”*

Emprex toyed with the tight coils of dark hair that had grown thick in the year since she had left the quayside to take up permanent residence in the Tavern. It had never grown longer than a few millimetres before her Naming Day, but now she let it curl and blossom around her head. She still hadn’t decided what else she would do with it. August had found some literature on caring for textured hair whilst out scavenging almost a month ago and had hidden it at the bottom of their pack especially for Emprex. She had been mesmerised by the pictures in the pamphlet; women and men with hair and skin like hers, wearing long braids and thick afros. August had offered to help her try to braid it if she wanted.

Emprex shifted slightly, wincing. The grey fabric of her hooded, bank-approved cape twisted like a poorly anchored tent in the wind. The material had been spun with little skill; the wool scratched at the nape of Emprex’s exposed neck.

A sleek, black vehicle slowed to a stop across the other side of the road. Three heads bannered with short cropped silver hair climbed out. If Coins did all that they could to blend with the city, then Sterlings did so to blend into each other. Identical in almost every way, their clothes were fashioned from fine metallic silks and hand sewn laces that shone blindingly.

It almost worked of course. Except for their expressions the Sterlings were indistinguishable. They stepped in time, stalled in time, spoke in tune. They were a mass of legs and arms that crinkled like tin foil, making their way towards her.

Emprex bowed her head, pulling the hood close to her face as they passed, but even from the corner of her eye she witnessed the wince of the rightmost Sterling - easily missed by any other passers-by. It was all she had to go on, but Charlotte had told her that to be a recruiter she had to trust her instincts. Emprex had signed up the

second the Thorn had announced Charlotte's retirement from the position. She wanted to make a difference within the city walls, not on scouting missions or runs for supplies. So the shame teasing at the Sterling's brow was enough, she decided. They were minors as far as she could tell, so they were yet to receive their assignments. A malleable age. Perfect.

She wondered then what it must be like to do an assignment interview as a Sterling. Did they ever have to worry about being delegated work in the quarries or mines? Was it as easy as turning up dressed in silver and flashing the Clerks a smile? Emprex had never turned up to her first assignment as a refinery technician – her face was now amongst those plastered on the walls of those listed as missing and wanted by the Bank at every entrance and port of the city.

Emprex pulled off her cloak and dumped it at the side of the road, following her beacons of shining silver. She smirked, her footsteps hard but swift. The Tavern would welcome its first Sterling, and Emprex would be the one to hold open the doors.

The Sterlings disappeared into a building not two streets over. The massive structure stretched high into the grey sea above, the entrance monitored with barcode scanners which not even the Sterling's were above having tattooed across their forearms. So Emprex waited. She'd been following them for days - getting a feel for their movements and habits. The three of them were always together and never left the confines of the centre quarter. Their influence didn't extend far. Emprex hoped that their status as upper-middle Currencies would work in her favour; fewer ears for the Sterling to whisper into if her plan went south.

An hour passed before any glint of them appeared but Emprex was ready. She wore the same outfit every time she crossed their path just as Charlotte told her to.

"They need to remember you. Curiosity is a human's most powerful weakness and only those bold enough to take a personal interest will openly pay you any mind. Wait for them to make the first move. The ones who approach you will rarely be the kind to report you to the Clerks - it's the ones who steal glances, brows stained with sweat that you really need to watch for."

She had more or less been right, except for one instance a month after Emprex's Naming Day when a horde of mineworkers ambushed Charlotte for causing trouble

on her way back from the tenement quarter. She barely made it out with her life and took weeks to recover in the Tavern's infirmary.

The Sterlings were arm in arm and marched to a tune only the three of them could hear, but Emprex's target faltered as she glanced across the street and their eyes locked. Emprex had opted for a hooded jumpsuit fashioned from fine white velvet, making her glisten like a rare fallen sheet of snow. She had improved upon Charlotte's love for white chalk and fashioned a set of long, fluttering false lashes made from the down feathers pulled from pillows in her room. The kiss of the soft barbs tickled her cheeks when she blinked.

The first two Sterlings scrambled into a waiting car, its windows tinted black. Emprex watched her target's mouth move and she smiled wide as the vehicle drove away without her. The Sterling stood there alone.

Emprex waited for her to make the first move, which didn't take long - the Sterling seemed waif-like and small without her elbow cousins. As she crossed the pristinely kempt street and approached Emprex, the annoyance in her voice could not stop fear from raising the skin on the Sterling's stiff, hairless arms.

"Currency?"

Emprex said nothing, her half grin unwavering under the Sterling's gaze.

"I said what is your *Currency*," the Sterling repeated, no longer a question. This close Emprex could see the slight hook in the Sterling's nose and her eyes were a polished shade of silver. It was as though all pigment had been drained from her the moment she was brought into the world.

"Whatever you need it to be," Emprex smiled. "You can call me Emprex though, if you like."

"There is no Currency in this vicinity designated Emprex."

"No," she smiled. "There's not."

The Sterling's pallid face turned pink with frustration, "Why are you following us? You dare look at us; do you not fear the Clerks?"

Emprex watched the Sterling's brow crease and contort – her tight control quickly unwinding without the wall of her comrades to keep her. "They can't hurt me, and neither can you. Though I get the feeling you wouldn't want to, even if you could."

"What do you want from us?"

She shrugged. “I don’t want anything from *them*, but I might have something for you.”

Curiosity stained the creases of her eyes. “What could you possibly give me that I don’t already have?”

Emprex closed the space between them and whispered in the Sterling’s ear. Her target’s body went stiff with icy fear. “Come see.”

\*

“You brought one of them *here*,” Charlotte seethed. “Have you lost your damn mind?!”

Charlotte’s eyes were sharp with rage as she yanked Emprex back into the sewers and shut the vault door behind them, leaving the Sterling with August in the dressing rooms.

Emprex kept her palms open like she was trying to coax a fluttering bird back into its cage. Or more accurately, trying to calm an incensed wild boar.

“I know what I’m doing Lottie. You said to trust my instincts on this, and they’re telling me that the Sterling is one of us.”

“Your instincts will get us all killed, do you know how many people you’re putting at risk?” she said. “You might as well put a target on the Tavern’s front door. You *cannot* trust a Sterling. The only thing they enjoy more than beating down on Coins is serving us up to Ingots, dusted with salt and ready to roast.”

“You’re wrong about this one Lottie, I’m telling you,” Emprex pushed. “The way that Sterling is in the city, it’s not the same.”

“What difference could be so significant that she deserves a place here? Does she shed her jewels to feed Coins who die of starvation and overwork in the mines and quarries? Does she speak for the voiceless and elevate those the Bank would see ground to dust?”

Emprex stilled. Charlotte was sounding more and more like the Thorn with each passing day. The Thorn would be due to the Tavern next week; it was her usual cycle between safe houses to keep one step ahead of the Clerks that had been assigned to apprehend her after her giant smoke bombs had gone off all over the city two weeks ago. Smokey plumes of blue and pink and yellow had drowned the city in colour for days. She and the other Tavern natives had even dared to visit the

surface and play music openly in the streets. The act had single-handedly united every known effort to oppose the Bank.

Emprex's days of wearing dresses and dancing through the night were coming to an end. Tensions were rising. The Bank was getting more violent; desperate even. They had put up giant electronic billboards that played public executions on repeat in almost every district, along every roadside. Giant black tele-blimps broadcasted raids on safe-houses, sometimes as they were happening. They floated overhead like dark, thunderous clouds.

They were constant reminders that the target on the back of the Thorn was larger than ever, yet she still hadn't picked a successor. Emprex was sure Charlotte would be the one to take up the mantle; she was made for leading.

Charlotte turned for the vault door and spoke without turning to face her.

"She doesn't care about *us*, doll."

"You're wrong. I'll prove it."

Silence stretched out between the two of them, separating them further than they had been since that first day in the centre district. Charlotte sighed, drawing breath from deep within her chest. "I hope for all our sakes, you do."

\*

The Sterling spent hours in the Tavern's small library, leaping from book to book as though she needed the written word to survive instead of oxygen. The room was round and small. Emprex had never been sure you could call putting some books on a table in a glorified tin can a library, but it was enough for August and the others.

"What are you looking for exactly?" Emprex said, leaning over the Sterling's shoulder, close enough that their shadows mingled.

"You said I'd need a name. This seems like the best place to find one."

"You don't need one straight away. You'll find the right fit when you're ready."

"How did you choose yours?"

Emprex heaved onto the floor beside the Sterling, drawing her knees up close. "My mother used to tell me stories, in the dead of night when it was safest to talk about Before – folktales and legends mostly. My favourite was about an Empress named Amanirenas. She ruled over Ethiopia – where my grandparents were born. It's said



that she was so skilled a general that when Alexander the Great came to her lands (in an attempt to travel through to sack an ancient civilisation called Egypt) she only had to stare his army down, her lance of diamond and gold held high above her head before they scampered away in terror.”

“You had a mother? And she...she told you these things?”

Emprex nodded, and the Sterling’s eyes remained wide and glossy. “But it is...it is such recklessness! Did the Clerks not find you?”

“They came, eventually. Though I think they were meant for me – I put her in danger, the last day we saw one another. She’s gone and it’s my fault but...all I can do is remember her. Honour her.”

“You miss her?”

Emprex bowed her head solemnly in answer. “I wish she could have seen this place.”

“We are told that we are a part of everything; that Sterlings are one being, one unit – moving, living, *being* together like fingers on one hand. So perhaps...perhaps she *is* here, as a part of you.”

Emprex picked at her lips. “I should check on August. We might be waiting here another week if someone doesn’t hurry them along.” She left the Sterling to her tomes.

Evidently she didn’t have far to look. August was in the dressing room, building an outfit together for their guest. Though it would be more accurate to describe the ordeal as spraying together an outfit; the room was swathed in black and white. Clothes carpeted every ledge and surface except for one immaculate corner where August’s scrapbook fell open. They were hunched over it, their small nose almost pressed flat against the paper.

Sweat beaded their brow and dribbled onto the pages as they heaved upright and approached the crisp, white blazer hanging off the door knob, muttering to themselves about contrast and broad shoulders.

“What was wrong with the other jacket?” Emprex asked pointing to a discarded, frilly dog-toothed number, her smile dripping with sugary sweetness. There was nothing in the city she loved more than the look August painted upon them when they worked.

August shook their head, “The Sterling is too slim; she’ll get lost in it.”

“It’s just a jacket, love.”

August turned to Emprex, eyebrows raised. “It’s not just a jacket, Ex. It’s *the* jacket. The one that will represent the day she discovered who she is outside of the role she was given by the Bank. It’s the first time she’ll see herself in the mirror and think about everything she could be, everything she could aspire to, to see her inside on the outside - to weaponise herself with identity and *be*.”

“Okay,” Emprex conceded. “Not just a jacket. Why don’t you lay out both, and she can pick one?”

The crease in August’s brow subsided slightly, but they continued their frenzy around the room.

Rather than aggravate the issue, Emprex slid away from the fray of flying fabric and found the Sterling hunched over a large coverless volume, her face hidden by the hardcover.

The Sterling spoke without looking up, “Ferrow.”

“What?”

“This book is a Latin dictionary. My name will be Ferrow.”

“What does Ferrow mean?”

She shrugged and quickly shut the book away, “I like the sound of it.”

“Well then Ferrow, if you’d follow me - all of us here at the Tavern have a gift for you.”

The two trailed back to August, Emprex slowing their pace to give her partner as long as she could to prepare.

“You’ll have to forgive August for the mess,” she added, just in case they were walking into a warzone. “They’re...enthusiastic.”

They had little to worry about; though the room was unrecognizable to Emprex, Ferrow’s jaw hung low as she fixed her view upon the ensemble August had lain across the floor for her. She said very little beyond mumbled thanks and disappeared into the curtained changing room, leaving August to wring her hands together and chew her lip raw. Emprex took her hand and squeezed it; gentle and reassuring, she hoped.

Ferrow emerged, her thin shoulders curled inwards as though shrinking would somehow pull her further away from her clothes.

“I don’t know about this. It’s not...they’re not silver. It’s not...not proper.”

“You look fantastic,” Emprex beamed, pointing Ferrow toward her reflection. Her complexion seemed almost rosy against the blue-white of the blazer August had been grappling with. She had added beneath, a matching corset bustier cinching her stomach, and instead of the matching finely tailored trousers that had been flung into the corner of the room August had accented the suit with a grey, pleated chiffon skirt. Unlike the usual shine embossed upon a Sterling’s uniform, Ferrow’s skirt was matte and dull. She rubbed the fabric beneath her fingers. August handed her a hair fastener made with lace in the same muted grey for her hair and revealed a small collection of grey buttons. “It’ll take a day or so, but I’d like to add these to the blazer. Accents are everything,” they grinned sheepishly.

Ferrow said nothing and turned to Emprex. “May I speak with you privately?” August’s smile dropped, but they didn’t protest when Emprex apologetically waved them from the room.

“What’s wrong?”

“You all just...it’s all of you. You *look* at me. It’s still...disconcerting.”

“Not used to being watched?”

“I’m always watched. Just never...seen I suppose.”

“I hope it’s a good thing. It was for me.”

Ferrow’s brow furrowed as she eyeballed her reflection. “I haven’t decided yet.”

Ferrow continued to finger at her skirt and Emprex covered the mirror with a worn linen sheet. “Baby steps then. You can change back if you want; it’s still a gift though. You can take it back with you.”

“Before you go,” August said, as though they’d been listening eagerly for their cue to re-enter, their steps skipping like a child whose hands have yet to be calloused by picking through quarry skips for stray gems and geodes, still eager to go out and play chicken with the acid rain. “There’s someone who wants to meet you.”

This time, it was Emprex’s brow that creased. “Who?”

“I was passing through the sewers headed for a suburb at the edge of the Blight Zone to discuss the private...acquisition of some extra special materials for the cause - when a distressed Charlotte almost knocked my wig into a rather foul smelling pool.”

Stood in the doorway, in a long, fitted black velvet coat with gleaming silver buttons climbing up her abdomen, the Thorn waited. Her gloved arms folded across her

chest with long, silver hair hanging like straw around her equally pale face, enhancing the aging plump of her round cheeks. Eyes a piercing blue like an unsoiled ocean, the corners of her eyes tilted up as she smiled, demure and devilish.

“Don’t stare too long at the sun darlings, you’ll go blind.”

The Thorn’s boots clacked against the concrete floor like the beat of a metronome as she approached the trio. Before Emprex could really process the shock that suffocated her face with rouge, her hands clenched into fists abreast her heart and she stacked them atop of one another in greeting.

“Thorn,” Emprex bowed her head, “This is-”

“I know who this is dear,” Thorn’s bright blue eyes bore into Emprex with a pitiless intensity. “We will speak of this later. Family talks are not for a guest’s ears. You must be Emprex’s Sterling ward,” the Thorn waved toward Ferrow who, like a feral cat under a lamplight shook and stared unblinking.

“You’re...you’re The Thorn.”

“Most just call me Thorn, the ‘The,’ is silent. A title our little collective acquired for the chief-in-command many years ago.”

“I know what you are.”

The Thorn’s smile was feral and wide, the ocean hidden in her eyes shimmering even under dank artificial light. “Have you selected a name?”

“...Ferrow.”

“Interesting; atypical even. Much like our sister Emprex. Did you know the story behind her name? Her mother used to sneak whispers of fables into her ears at night; tales of queens and proud rulers of faraway kingdoms. Where does yours hail from?”

“I found it...in a book.”

“Interesting,” The Thorn repeated. “I wasn’t aware They taught your Currency to read. Servants to the Ingots are you not? No time for reading when you’re wiping a Gold One’s arse.” She circled Ferrow like a beast surveying its next meal. It was all for show of course, but Ferrow didn’t know that. The Thorn had a reputation to uphold and protect - she was the voice of the underground. She removed the mask only for those closest to her. Charlotte especially and Emprex only more recently. Emprex feared that perhaps that steel wall would climb its way back up between them after bringing Ferrow to the Tavern without permission from her or the other settlements. Despite the hunger for violence lacing the Thorn’s eyes, Emprex could

only think of her honey-sweet laugh and the chorus of lines that danced across her ageing face as she purred at prodded Ferrow like a new toy.

“Literacy is a necessary skill for those of us whose role with the Bank is less...menial.”

“I’d hardly call being worked to death *menial*,” August muttered.

“You’ve picked a name,” the Thorn continued. “You’ll have time to pick your place amongst our people if you so wish. I trust in Emprex’s decision to bring you here, however short sighted it might be. You, Ferrow are welcome but I implore you to remember that if you leave this place a Sterling you may not return. We might live simply beneath the city - your end will be anything but, should you put anyone in this family at risk.”

Ferrow said nothing, nodded and stared down at The Thorn’s muddied leather boots. The Thorn’s icy eyes met Emprex’s. “Find me when you’re done,” she said before striding from the room.

Ferrow seemed to crumple as she exhaled.

“Well that went well,” August chuckled. Emprex gave them a look that cut their laughing short.

“Her bark is worse than her bite,” Emprex explained to Ferrow, now huddled on the floor. “She’s got a lot of people counting on her – to keep them safe.”

“She’s a *monster*,” Ferrow spat. “Her title is nothing but a cruel joke – we are the thorn in her side as she is the thorn in ours. She will undo everything we have done to keep what remains safe. To keep order and peace. It is unseemly. It is corrupt...it is *wrong!*” Ferrow bellowed. She pulled at the cuff of Emprex sleeve, her eyes wild with fear and desperation.

Emprex didn’t know what had changed – what had snapped in Ferrow, but the unhinged look of madness that set her silver eyes wild said enough. It had been too much too soon.

“I cannot do this. I will not do this. We cannot...I *cannot*...We must to go now! Before they...before we-!” She wailed, her words becoming a tangle of desperate, pained noises like that of a dying animal. Ferrow sprinted from the dressing room.

“Ferrow! Wait! You find Thorn, I’ll deal with this” August said, charging through the door after her, the echo of Ferrow’s sobbing entombed by the Tavern’s thick, bunker walls.

Emprex found the Thorn in the surveillance room, watching August and Ferrow play a rather spectacular game of cat and mouse. It was little more than a storage cupboard, filled from ceiling to floor with small television screens that monitored every corner of the Tavern.

“Your recklessness is almost worth the entertainment,” she said smirking, without looking over.

Emprex bowed her head. “I should have consulted you.”

“Yes. You should have...but what’s done is done. Now, all we can do is make the best of it – starting with calming your new pet.”

“Understood,” Emprex said, turning to leave.

“I’m not finished,” the Thorn turned, placing her arm on Emprex’s shoulder. “Do you know what it means – to wear the Anadem?”

The Anadem was a symbol of the underground – a wreath of thorns and budding white flowers. The idea at the time of its creation was that it would represent the return of something better, like the renewal of the seasons. The Thorn wore the Anadem whenever it was needed, so that the symbol would be kept alive and bright in the hearts of anyone who needed it. It was little more than brown plastic and white linen fashioned to *appear* like a wreath – even where it was safe past the Blight Zone few flowers grew.

Emprex said as much and the shadow that passed over the Thorn’s leathery features told her that that was not the answer she was looking for.

“It’s not just a symbol. It carries its own weight; the responsibility for others, the strength it represents and the power it wields. We have to respect every part of it, to truly understand why symbols like the Anadem matter.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“So that you know,” Thorn started, squeezing her slightly. “What it means to relinquish all that you are in favour of being something *more*. I was not much older than you when the banner of the Thorn was passed down to me by my predecessor. So many years ago was it, that I barely remember my own name. Wearing the Anadem is a symbol of hope, and of sacrifice.”

“I don’t understand?”

The Thorn’s smile was bright as sunlight. “You will when you’re ready.”

Emprex was ready to interrogate her further, but the two had been turned away from the screens long enough that they hadn't noticed August barreling down the hall towards them.

"She's gone! The vault doors were thrown wide open by the time I got there."

Emprex blinked and the Thorn's calculating mask settled in place as she whirled through the plans now shuffling through her head. "Look everywhere, to be sure. I'll send a party out to check the sewers. It's unlikely she'll get far. We can't have her hurting herself or revealing this place to the Bank."

"What can I do?" Emprex said, her hands wringing together. "Let me go out to find her. She's my responsibility."

"No. Stay here. You will be needed if she returns."

With that, August and the Thorn stormed away, leaving Emprex to stare at the flickering screens, the sewers beyond them beckoning.

\*

Ferrow never returned and August had lost their scrapbook. Emprex was not sure which troubled her more; mostly because of August's incessant moaning. It had been more than a week, and they were still convinced one of the other dressers had stolen it.

In an attempt to lift the cloud that had permanently attached itself to August's head, Emprex had joined a city borough scavenging operation in the hopes of scrounging up some art supplies for them as a surprise. Detaching from the group had been easy enough, but as Emprex snuck from one abandoned building to the next, she had the distinct feeling that she was being followed.

Hiding beneath a dilapidated underpass, she waited – ears straining for any sign, ready to run at a moment's notice.

There in the corner of her eye moved a shadow. She heard the shuffling of feet that weren't hers. A cough.

"Emprex."

Staring at her polished boots, Ferrow stood in open view. Her eyes darted to and fro, Emprex could almost smell her fear seeping through the lavender perfume she'd been sprayed with. Her outfit was Bank approved; no evidence of Ferrow's time in the Tavern remained. She was trying and failing to conceal a parcel behind her back,

wrapped in brown paper. The hair on Emprex's arms prickled. A black metal band had been wrapped around her wrist; its screen told the time, the temperature and indicated for sudden weather warnings in case of rain or radioactive storms. Her eyes darted towards it.

"What are *you* doing here?"

"I've been following you...tracking you." she said pushing the parcel into Emprex's fumbling arms. "I felt it time I return these."

A tickle of matte grey fabric brushed against Emprex's fingers. "These were a gift," she started, but Ferrow shook her head.

"I don't need them. We don't...I don't want them."

"Ferrow-"

"No. It was a mistake, going with you. I am a *Sterling*. To be a finger on the hand of the Bank is better than whatever...whatever *you* are."

"Why did you come here then? Why not just throw it away, burn it, turn me in and be done?"

Ferrow...the *Sterling* Emprex corrected herself, stared down at her feet and picked at her perfectly manicured nails, her hands smooth and uncalloused. She fixed on the black metal wrapped around her arm and breathed - like that small piece of cold metal was the only thing anchoring her in place.

"You were kind to me. Kindness is...it is something that should be returned."

"Well," Emprex gestured to the parcel in her arms. "Consider yourself free from the burden."

The *Sterling* let out a laugh then, cold and hard. There was no humour in it. Its cool echo bounced menacingly around the underpass. The *Sterling* looked to her metal band again.

"By all means," Emprex said coldly. "If you have somewhere to be don't let me keep you. I have things to do and a home to be getting to." Emprex turned to leave.

"Wait," the *Sterling's* eyes turned wide with panic. "Please, wait. Just a minute longer. Please."

"Why? I have your parcel - message received. Now if you don't mind I'm going to-"

The city began to shudder, and deep in its centre a deafening, thunder-like crack roared out. It was so loud it made Emprex's head ache. The *Sterling's* hands lifted to cover her ears and she pressed herself against the side of the underpass as the concrete above their heads crumbled.



“Move!” Emprex shouted, charging into the Sterling, throwing them into the open air. The structure they had been under disintegrated into dust. The two girls choked for breath. Before Emprex could calm herself enough to think, a klaxon rang out from every direction and a tele-blimp that floated idly high in the sky above, sprung to life.

A podium of limestone waited, stark in contrast to the dark reflective glass building it stood in front of. Doors slid open, to reveal eighteen figures, clad in gold. Ingots. She had only ever seen them in passing glances in pamphlets. The Nine that shared rule over this Bank sector, and their respective heirs at each of their heels.

Like Sterlings, they were almost indistinguishable. One with honey rich skin and a carefully barbered beard stepped up to the podium, a young girl stood meekly at his side. She couldn't have been any older than thirteen. His eyes even on the tele-blimp, where a rich orange-yellow: the colour of an egg yolk. He held something in his hands that Emprex couldn't make out.

“Currencies, it is a momentous day for all. The insurgence is quelled, by the will of the Bank it is done.” The Ingot lifted the object in his hands for all to see; a large, black-covered sketching pad, opened wide.

“That's August's,” Emprex choked, even though the dust around them had already settled like a film upon her skin. The Ingot flipped from page to page, revealing August's swatches and sketches and notes. Rage, white and hot settled into the pit of Emprex's stomach. She turned to the Sterling who sat cross legged next to her, staring into concrete. “What have you done?”

“He's not finished,” she said plainly.

True enough, the Ingot settled the sketchbook onto the podium before him and spoke again. His voice carried into every corner of the city. “This is the first step, one of many ensuring the longevity of the Bank. Those of you who uphold our vision, who make enemies of dissent and disorder shall be rewarded.” The Sterling shifted then, and something like shame or embarrassment flashed across her face. The Ingot continued. “And those of you who do not submit, who risk all that we are in favour of,” he gestured to the book before him and spat out the words like they were poisonous, “reckless *individuality*...shall have your fate assured.”

The tele-blimp cut to a makeshift wooden platform. Dust blew and fire raged in the background. Two people were held down by dozens of Clerks atop it, their heads bagged in burlap sacks. The Ingot's voice echoed over the top of the video footage.

“You are seeing this live, from one of the exit points of the sewers. Intelligence has led to the successful raid and capture one of the insurgency's most prolific hiding quarters. Like frightened mice, they have scattered. We, however have a prize far greater than mere vermin.”

The hoods lift, and Emprex is unable to contain the wail of horror that escapes her when Charlotte and the Thorn's bruised and bloodied faces stare back. Their clothes had been torn from them - their bodies dressed in grey linen shifts. Charlotte's eyes were red and tears streamed down her face. The Thorn, even as panic tightened her face, was quiet, calm and unyielding. She didn't struggle against the Clerks like Charlotte.

“You may have been disturbed not minutes ago by a rumble beneath your feet. Fear not. We have dealt with the infestation as we would any other. Termination; complete and total.”

As though awaiting a signal, one Clerk pulled from the fray of pristine black uniforms and aimed a gun toward the two women. Emprex's scream was almost as loud as the bullet that fired through Charlotte's skull.

Tearing herself away from the tele-blimp and abandoning every sense of reason she'd managed to hold onto, Emprex sprinted towards the storm drain that would lead her back to the Tavern. That would take her *home*. Her eyes stang, her face and heart ached with grief and fear and loss. What if August had been caught too?

Arms, wraithlike and shimmering wrapped around Emprex as she began to tug at the drain-cover. Bone connected with cartilage as she kicked and screamed and fought with everything she had. Emprex heard the Sterling screech in pain, cradling her nose in her hands. Blood rich and scarlet trickled through her pale fingers.

“*You did this,*” Emprex seethed. “You did this!”

“No,” the Sterling said through streaming eyes. “You did this. All of you. And her.”

The Sterling pointed up toward the tele-blimp. Charlotte's body lay limp on the platform, her blood soaking into the wood. The Thorn had been pulled up to her feet. While quiet tears trickled down her cheeks, still she said nothing.

Charlotte's executioner raised the gun, pressing it hard against the Thorn's temple. As the Clerk cocked the pistol, the Thorn raised her hands, clenching them into fists abreast her heart. As best she could under such heavy restraint anyway. The

Tavern's greeting; her final farewell. Emprex couldn't watch as the bullet flew. Her knees buckled.

"All I did was keep my people, this city, our very way of *life* - safe. So too, did I have to save you," the Sterling said from above, a glossy stoicism settling into her face.

"Your kindness..." her eyes glazed. "Consider it repaid."

Then she was gone.

Emprex's body wracked with noiseless sobs that escaped from deep within her chest. Again and again, she pummelled her head into the concrete floor, the grief all-consuming as she wished for the nightmare's end. As her head bruised and crusted with blood, she did not watch the screen return to the Ingots who had overseen her family's execution.

She did not watch as the man with a beard of sunlight lifted a golden copy of the Thorn's Anaden above him and placed it atop his head, his golden companions quickly following suit with their own shining replicas. And she did not hear the distant chorus of cheers thrumming from the heart of the city.

All she knew was the taste of salt that filled her mouth as her tears poured endlessly. Like the blood that spread out in warm, dark pools beneath the Thorn and Charlotte's lifeless bodies.

## The Thorn

### *0 Days*

The Girl with Two Names ran. Her breath was ragged and sharp, like knives in her chest from long days with no breathing mask to keep the air in her lungs clean.

The Clerks had been tipped off, their battalion of black and white marched after her like a mismatched set of chess pieces. She weaved between sullen alleys pockmarked with street lamps, illuminating the deep, foggy dawn. She thumbed at the knife she carried at her waist; she would not be taken alive. She didn't care what orders her forebear had given them.

The Rat, They called her. Vermin. Traitor. *Wretch*. Her forebear included; the man who raised her. She could still see his bristled flaxen beard, his lips pursed as the Clerks pulled her from their home at the peak of the highest building in the city, ready to hoist her before the world to be made an example of. To show that even Ingots were not above the wrath of order and law. Her progenitor's embarrassment shone like a beacon, his progeny now his greatest shame. She was no longer a shining disciple of gold.

So she ran, as she had done for weeks. Though as time droned on and her stomach ached for a meal better than rotten waste salvaged from whatever bin she could rifle through, she found fewer and fewer reasons to keep going.

Ever since the Nine had ordered for heavier monitoring of the more obscure parts of the city two years ago, there was no places to run or hide.

She couldn't blend with any crowds either, use their former identical uniforms to her advantage. Sterlings and Ingots had been granted a degree of creative freedom; colouring was confined to silver and gold still, but design and shape and style were free to take any form they chose for themselves. That too had been her progenitor's idea. As a result, most every insurgence had been wiped away, their power and individualism stolen and stripped bare. They were scattered like the pieces of a broken mirror. She could not get out of the city, and there was no one left to beg for help. There was nowhere else, for the Rat to scurry.

A whimper escaped her as she tumbled into a foul smelling puddle. She tried to lift herself up but exhaustion snatched at her ankles and kept her on the wet, cold ground.

She surveyed her surroundings, looking for something, *anything* she could use to conceal herself. Cables tangled above her head like a spider's web; the quiet hum of an electric current singing through the fibres. She had found her way into the west quarter, where electricity generators and power plants thrummed without end. The shuffle of the Clerks grew louder and louder. Soon she would be wrapped in chains and beaten - even if she went willingly. Even if she didn't resist. Her shoulders shook with fear.

"This is hardly time for sleeping."

The Girl with Two Names let out a startled yelp. The face of the stranger hovering over her was concealed by a breathing mask. Their hair a tangled mess of damp, ash blonde curls. They held out a hand.

"Come now, Redeemer. I'm no enemy of yours."

Her second name rolled off the stranger's tongue like a prayer; wholly different to the usual vitriol she had heard it spat with by her forebear and the other Nine.

"Who are you?"

The stranger's eyes glittered, and she could tell they were smiling even in the smoggy din of morning.

"My name's August. Now come on. Names won't matter if our lifeless bodies are broadcast on tele-blimps before the sun is done rising."

She had nothing else to lose, so the Girl with Two Names took August's outstretched hand gratefully, and let herself be hoisted back onto her feet.

\*

"Mind your step, Redeemer. We're almost there," August whispered as they crept through the factory allotment zone. The sting of chemical fertiliser and tilled soil filled their noses, and the glass ceiling above their heads rippled as the light from August's torch danced across its surface. A Clerk's nearby snoring rumbled through the open space.

The fearful look on the Girl with Two Names' face gave August reason enough to pause.

"The patrols are weaker here than anywhere else in the city. This place grows fibre, like cotton. Not food. No currency has a reason to steal from here. The Clerks of this quarter are the best slept in the whole city, I recon," they said with a smirk. August

ducked beneath a water trough and lifted a leaden metal grate with careful, practiced hands.

“Don’t think, just fall.” They whispered sharply, before diving into the soupy shadows.

The Girl with Two Names’ breath hitched in her throat as she dangled her legs in after August, shins and feet eaten whole by the darkness. She couldn’t see a ladder to climb back up. Wherever they were headed, no path would lead her back here. She unleashed her breath and fell.

The sound of air crashed against her eardrums and the sting of wind whipping at her face consumed what little she might have seen, her eyes watering. Her arms spread out wide in panic. Her body convulsed ready to scream, but a massive cocoon opened out from underneath her like a giant spider web. A net.

She bounced, trampolining onto a cold and damp floor.

“Certainly not the most graceful of landings, but you’ll get the hang of it,” August said, icy humour lacing their words. The Girl with Two Names groaned, the pain from her landing delayed by adrenaline. Her bones ached, her muscles twinged. August pulled her up, unceremoniously yanking her by the shoulders.

“Let’s see if you’re allowed to get the hang of it first though, eh?” They smiled sheepishly. August gestured for her to follow them, and they scuttled through the blue-dark tunnels.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I’m not some random hermit who lives alone underground y’know? There are others.”

“Like who?”

“Like us,” a hard, faceless voice called out.

Flood lamps blinded her, dousing the space with hot, white light. They had made their way into a wide open cavern, decorated with metal shanty houses stacked precariously atop one another, half built and open to a central space they were now stood fifty yards from.

Dozens of tired faces dusted with grime poked out to watch. Their clothes carried the distant echo of extravagance, worn by age and dirt. Top hats were torn and moth bitten, lace gloves laden with holes, dress skirts and blazers were covered with murk and grime.

Some pointed daggers and swords and guns at her, their weapons marbled with rust. They hid their faces behind Clerk helmets, the usually blank faces of the masks painted over with the caricatures of monstrous smiles and sneers.

One, however did not conceal her face. Her skin was a deep brown that shone under the harsh light, her dark hair was bound in long braids, like ropes falling around around her freely. Her plump, hourglass figure was dressed in a long red leather coat. Her black khaki pants were wrapped with throwing knives and petit grenades and wreaths of wire with retractable barbs. A crown of thorns sat atop her head, interleaved with small white flowers.

“Who are you?” the Girl whispered, awestruck. “All of you?”

“Why don’t you tell us who *you* are Ingot...the Girl with Two Names.”

“I am no one.”

The stranger scoffed. “We all saw what you did with your golden diadem. You broke it into pieces and threw it into a crowd of starving Currencies awaiting their ration tickets. You fed those people, clothed them with your gold as payment. So tell us...are you Rat, or Redeemer?”

“I don’t know,” she answered honestly. Eyes pierced her from every angle, her shoulders slumped. “Until a month ago I had no name at all. Truthfully...if you told me before it had happened that this would be my lot if I broke that crown into pieces...I can’t say I’d do it again...but I can’t say I *wouldn’t* do it either.

I was supposed to be one of the Nine someday. I was to be the Bank’s issue. But what good did it all do? I might have filled a few stomachs but I didn’t change anything.”

“No,” August interjected with a smile. “You changed *everything*.”

“They,” the stranger pointed upwards. “Are afraid. You were a Gold One’s Heir and you changed; you *saw*. You saw when They want the world to stay blind, especially those who have their hands on the wheel.”

“Who are you?” the Girl with Two Names repeated.

The stranger smiled. “I chose a name for myself once; a lifetime ago. Now, like you my title has been given to me right at the moment I was least prepared for it. You can call me the Thorn.”

“The Thorn is dead,” the Girl with Two Names’ voice was laced with confusion. “I saw it with my own eyes, two years ago.”

The Thorn nodded. "The Thorn is a title, an idea - not a person. She who carried its mantle *did* die. But the Anadem was passed on." The Thorn gestured to the wreath of thorns worn atop her head. It was jagged and worn, its thorns broken off from years of wear and many of the tiny flowers were barely holding in place. The replicas the Nine had designed for themselves and their issues far exceeded it in intricacy and extravagance, but none looked at the Ingots and their crowns with the reverence the people that surrounded the Thorn bestowed upon her.

"What do *you* want from me?"

The Thorn shrugged. "I want you to choose a name. And I want you help me to make others see."

"It's what we all want," August said.

The Girl with Two Names surveyed the cavern she stood in. Heavy gazes, littered with hope and fear and distrust shrouded her like a second shadow. A small boy with his arms hugging an elderly man's nobbled leg, clutched in his hand a tiny sliver of gold, the gleam of it a beacon in the gathering dark.

Determination set itself within her, and the Girl with Two Names smiled. "Where do we begin?"



# **Critical Commentary**

Word Count: 2,013

## Introduction

Drawing on Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*<sup>1</sup> and Marie Lu's *Legend*<sup>2</sup> as source material, this commentary will critically explore *Anadem*'s relationship to three key questions I have posed:

- How can I creatively explore and challenge the use of queer coded ruling classes in Young Adult (YA) dystopian narratives?
- How might I effectively explore the experience of those communities subjected to the consequences of queer assimilation during the rise of a dystopian world order?
- Is there a way I might interrogate the problematic tropes of the YA genre through subversive use of the genre itself?

This essay is particularly concerned with how my source materials use dress as a means of building identity as stipulated by Deirdre Byrne: that the use of fashion and clothing enact 'the regulation of the construction of the self.'<sup>3</sup>

I will establish that each novel codes how their protagonists exist as vessels for the will of their respective states, and subsequently their rebellion allies and explore how dress upholds the idea that ruling classes are queer coded in YA dystopian fiction. Subsequently I will analyse critically the ways that I have attempted to implement these ideas in my own work, and I will examine each of my thesis questions through the lens of dress - by detailing the ways that I have highlighted the importance of clothing in *Anadem*.

## Why YA?

YA fiction narratives have a particular penchant for championing self-discovery because of their focus on the experience of coming-of-age; this is still the case for

---

<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (New York City: Scholastic, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Marie Lu, *Legend* (London: Penguin Random House, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Deirdre Byrne, 'Dressed for the Part: An Analysis of Clothing in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* Trilogy,' *Journal of Literary Studies*, Vol 31.2 (2015), pp. 43-62 (p. 47).

those novels like *The Hunger Games* whose speculative and fantastical nature provides a unique backdrop to such narratives.

A large criticism of the genre however, is that its lack of diverse representation results in the publishing industry prioritising the promotion of white, heterosexual narratives leaving many youths feeling underrepresented and fundamentally unseen: evident by the fact that in 2017, only 1% of children's books published in the UK featured a BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) protagonist, with 4% including BAME background characters.<sup>4</sup>

I wanted *Anadem* to centre underrepresented marginalised identities – so that I can interrogate the problems that are typical of the genre itself and use the opportunity to centre an alternative narrative to those that are prioritised by large publishing houses. As a result many of my characters are both people of colour and could easily be identified as queer; including Charlotte who is a trans woman and our protagonist Emprex, who is black.

One obstacle relating to this that I encountered in my writing involved issues surrounding assumed identity. The descriptions of my characters needed numerous revisions to ensure that there was no way their races would be assumed white, or identities assumed straight or cis gender (that is, identifying with the gender one is assigned at birth). As Beth Younger explains, 'white often serves as a default for race; that is, when the race of a character is not specified, white is assumed.'<sup>5</sup> This kind of Othering is present throughout Young Adult fiction, so I *had* to ensure this didn't occur in *Anadem*.

Sign-posting identities was an important part of the revision process. Initially, my descriptions of Emprex were too vague, so her identity as a young black woman became lost. Her initial introduction cited her as having a 'stocky frame shrouded by a hooded shift.' I then rephrased part of this sentence to 'her stocky, deep brown

---

<sup>4</sup> Melanie Ramdarshan Bold, 'The Eight Percent Problem: Authors of Colour in the British Young Adult Market (2006–2016)', in *Publishing Research Quarterly* (2018), pp. 385-406 (p. 386).

<sup>5</sup> Beth Younger, 'Pleasure, Pain, and the Power of Being Thin: Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature', *NWSA Journal*, Vol 15.2 (Summer 2003), pp. 45-56 (p. 47).

frame,<sup>6</sup> and throughout the piece make references to her blackness. At the end of the piece for example Emprex is adorned with 'long braids, like ropes falling around around her,'<sup>7</sup> – a reference to hairstyles specific to black culture.

### **(Queer) Assimilation in YA Dystopia**

Another key reason behind my choice of genre includes wanting to explore why, as is the case in many YA dystopian novels ruling classes are presented as over-indulgent and queer coded. Why are themes of excess so intrinsically tied to the reconfiguration of queer culture in YA dystopia?

In *The Hunger Games*, members of high society challenge typical modes of gender conformation; male characters wear cosmetics for example; their physical behaviours and their dress are camp and avant-garde. Susan Sontag describes camp as being, 'a vision of the world in terms of style - but a particular kind of style. It is the love of the exaggerated, the "off," of things-being-what-they-are-not.'<sup>8</sup> Their physical exuberance translates through every mode of their being; as their clothes represent their passion for excess so too does their behaviour. Perhaps that then, is why queer coding and excess are so inexorably linked in YA dystopia? Either way, I wanted to explore how a fictional world might reach that point; why would a ruling class decide to assimilate a subculture into its own?

My goal with *Anadem* was to explore this – to create a dystopian world order set during the period at which high society would adopt the traits of a sub-community, in order to defuse their power. As such, I've focussed on three key narrative points; firstly Emprex joining the Tavern's community; secondly Emprex's attempt to welcome a member of high society, Ferrow, into the Tavern and the consequences associated with Ferrow's betrayal. Finally, Emprex's meeting with the Girl with Two Names, who in a traditional YA setting would go on to be our primary protagonist and lead the revolution against the state.

---

<sup>6</sup> Briony Appleton, *Anadem* (2019), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Appleton, *Anadem*, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Sontag, *Notes on Camp* (London: Penguin Modern, 2018), p. 8.

It's important to note that it took me a while to come to this narrative. While I had a very clear vision for the beginning of *Anadem*, the ending of the piece evolved wholly out of the work I conducted whilst drafting. I wasn't sure how to represent the concluded moment of assimilation. A particularly interesting development was my choice to frame the final chapter around the Girl with Two Names, rather than Emprex. I still felt that *Anadem* should be a story that follows Emprex, her journey of self-discovery and the eventual redemption she obtains in bringing about the beginning of the revolution. Framing it through a second pair of eyes however, helped with not only shifting the reader's perception of Emprex to one of authority rather than youthful naïvety, but also gave me the opportunity to establish for the reader, the stakes involved in the Tavern's loss of identity.

Their costumes transform, from a 'dance of fabrics that [Emprex] had only glimpsed in the periodicals about the Sterlings and Ingots who lived in the centre-most reaches of the city. Feather headdresses, immaculate top hats and crowns of delicate hand sewn lace,'<sup>9</sup> to their carrying 'the distant echo of extravagance, worn by age and dirt. Top hats were torn and moth bitten, lace gloves laden with holes, dress skirts and blazers were covered with murk and grime.'<sup>10</sup> Witnessing this through a character who is less emotionally intertwined with the result of assimilation gave me room to show the results of the Ingot's manoeuvres, without needing to get bogged down with the exposition that would have been necessary had I done so using Emprex's point of view.

## Playing Dress-Up

I've briefly introduced what I wanted to explore and how I wanted to frame *Anadem* as a creative piece. But as I've started to show, my primary concern throughout was exploring how I might use dress to signpost the ways my characters act as vehicles for those ideas.

In *The Hunger Games*, Collins uses dress to establish the protagonist Katniss as both a vehicle for the revolution when dressed by the rebellious Cinna, and figure of

---

<sup>9</sup> *Anadem*, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 46.

subordination when moulded by her manager Effie. So too in *Legend* Lu uses Jude's dress to create a figure of spectacle when she wears an elaborate white ball gown for her brother's funeral, and vassal of the state when dressed in her military uniform.

So, how might I use the dress of my characters to explore queer assimilation? Well firstly I had to establish that dress was a key component of the story overall. I've explained already one way I've used dress to represent this, especially through the description of unnamed characters. With my central characters, particularly Emprex, I wanted to make sure my descriptions established how they positioned themselves within or in opposition to the status quo; how did their clothing conform to or challenge the rules set by the Bank? Did their dress evolve at all, and why? For example, with Emprex – her hair is clean shaven, grows in length, and eventually becomes styled in an effort to embrace the remnants of her culture. Or the use of plain grey shifts to represent the power the Bank has over individuals, and Charlotte and the Thorn's return to the plain outfit once they are presented for execution.

Dress is a key aspect of description within YA, but is disproportionately used to give women characters a tangible shape. Younger explains this focus on women and their bodies well:

Authors rarely describe male bodies, but female bodies are continually looked at in what becomes a powerful enactment of the male gaze...readers are encouraged, even directed, to examine characters from the perspective of a judgemental voyeur.<sup>11</sup>

I've already said I wanted to subvert problematic tropes of the genre, including this one.

Many of *Anadem's* characters are women; only August and our bearded member of the Nine are explicitly not. So I had to make sure that the way I described them was egalitarian; interrogating their appearance as much as I did my women characters especially.

To also ensure that I didn't "other" those characters who were BAME, queer or fat I made sure to describe their opposites in equal measure; paleness is as explicit as

---

<sup>11</sup> Younger, 'Pleasure, Pain and the Power of Being Thin', p. 47.

darker skin, Charlotte's 'slim and gangly'<sup>12</sup> thinness is referenced in the same way that Emprex's 'plump, hourglass figure'<sup>13</sup> is. Description is a key aspect of *Anadem*, but it is so for every character, not just those who might be subjected to a view shaped by male desire.

## Key Difficulties & Conclusion

Overall I'm pleased with my attempt at grappling my thesis questions. However, if I was to approach the task differently I think I would reframe the first two chapters slightly, to give the final chapter, *The Thorn* a larger word count. My one concern with this chapter is that its shorter nature left less room for world building – especially since the rules of the world have shifted significantly because of the dissolution of the insurgencies that were moving against the Bank. As another example, I think I would have preferred to show the Girl with Two Name's act of defiance to the reader instead of telling them about it through an exchange of dialogue, in order to contextualise why her behaviour is so out of keeping with what is expected of her as an Ingot Heir.

I feel a slightly longer chapter would also have given me room to further explore the rules of the new world Emprex is moving through and a chance to further interrogate how the Bank might have used assimilation to subjugate and control.

*Anadem* was a piece meant to challenge the YA genre. I'm pleased to discover that it gave me room to explore all the things I love about it as well as to exhibit its potential as a transformative and reflective genre.

---

<sup>12</sup> *Anadem*, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47.

## Bibliography

- Byrne, D. 'Dressed for the Part: An Analysis of Clothing in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* Trilogy,' *Journal of Literary Studies*, Vol 31.2 (2015), pp. 43-62.
- Collins, S. *The Hunger Games* (New York City: Scholastic, 2008).
- Hagen, J. J. 'The Revolutionary Possibilities of Online Trans and Queer Communities', *Gender, Sex and Politics: In the Street and Between the Sheets in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2015), pp. 141-154
- Lu, M. *Legend* (London: Penguin Random House, 2012).
- Ramdarshan Bold, M. 'The Eight Percent Problem: Authors of Colour in the British Young Adult Market (2006–2016)', in *Publishing Research Quarterly* (2018), pp. 385-406.
- Schildcrout, J. 'Introduction: Beyond Queer Villainy', *Murder Most Queer The Homicidal Homosexual in the American Theater* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2014), pp. 1-15.
- Sontag, S. *Notes on Camp* (London: Penguin Modern, 2018).
- Younger, B. 'Pleasure, Pain, and the Power of Being Thin: Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature', *NWSA Journal*, Vol 15.2 (Summer 2003), pp. 45-56.