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Table of contents

1. Introduction	1
2. The postmodern movement - a theoretical background	3
2.1 Definition of postmodernism	3
2.2 Context of postmodernism.....	5
2.3 Philosophical key assumptions.....	7
2.4 Postmodern fiction.....	10
3. YA literature- a new genre for exploring postmodernism	14
3.1 Defining YA literature.....	14
3.2 Late trends in YA literature	18
3.2.1 Sociohistorical context	18
3.2.2 Incorporation of new topics	20
3.2.3 (Re)emergence of new and revised genres	21
3.2.4 Experimentation with viewpoints	23
3.2.5 Structural fragmentation.....	24
4. Postmodernism in <i>Monster</i> and <i>After the First Death</i>	26
4.1 Introducing <i>Monster</i> and <i>After the First Death</i>	26
4.2 Analysis of postmodern features	27
4.2.1 Form-related features	28
4.2.1.1 Genre-eclecticism	28
4.2.1.2 Multiplicity of perspectives	31
4.2.1.3 Nonlinearity.....	35
4.2.2 Content-related features	37
4.2.2.1 Ontological questions.....	37
4.2.2.2 Blurring of fact and fiction	42
4.2.2.3 Metafictional references.....	46
4.2.2.4 Indeterminacy	48
4.2.3 Co-authoring	50
5. Postmodern YA literature in the Austrian EFL classroom	55
5.1 Postmodern YA literature and the Austrian curriculum for EFL teaching.....	55
5.2 Adolescents' familiarity with postmodern texts	58
5.3 The educational potential of postmodern YA literature	64
5.4 Teaching implications	67

5.4.1	Reader-response criticism	69
5.4.2	Ways of reading	71
5.4.2.1	Intertextual reading	71
5.4.2.2	Aesthetic reading	73
6.	Teaching <i>Monster</i> and <i>After the First Death</i>: A selection of teaching material.....	74
6.1	Justification of choice of books	75
6.2	Suggestions for classroom activities.....	77
6.2.1	Pre-reading activity for <i>Monster</i>	77
6.2.2	Pre-reading activity for <i>After the First Death</i>	78
6.2.3	While-reading activities for <i>Monster</i>	78
6.2.4	While-reading activities for <i>After the First Death</i>	81
6.2.5	Post – reading activities for <i>Monster</i>	83
6.2.6	Post-reading activities for <i>After the First Death</i>	85
7.	Conclusion	87
	Bibliography.....	90
	Appendix	96

1. Introduction

Young Adult literature, short YA literature, is a highly dynamic genre, which has been subjected to considerable innovations and changes throughout the last decades. While the issues addressed have become more serious and harsh, the genre has also developed into a more complex direction as far as the novels' narrative situations and formats are concerned. Interestingly, YA literature has increasingly incorporated unique features, such as nonlinearity, genre-eclecticism and a shift of perspectives, thereby considerably complicating the reading processes.¹ In fact, these new trends in writing clearly represent the emergence of postmodernism in the genre of YA fiction (see Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 65).

Given the growing exploitation of postmodern traits in contemporary YA literature, the question arises whether this complex type of fiction is suitable for its intended target audience. Apart from the rather brief and perfunctory articles by Groenke & Youngquist (2011), Knickerbocker & Brueggeman (2008) and Yearwood (2002), this issue has been widely underexplored so far. As a future English teacher, I have always been fascinated by the rising complexity adolescent readers have to face in a multitude of contemporary YA narratives, wondering in how far the EFL classroom would be a valuable place for familiarising the young readership with the postmodern complexity. Inspired by this enduring and deep fascination, my thesis primarily seeks to investigate the value of implementing postmodern YA literature into an upper-secondary Austrian EFL context. A further major point of interest will concern the methodological dimension of this issue. More specifically, I will examine how postmodern YA literature should be introduced to young readers in order to support them in successfully coping with the texts' complexity. For answering these questions Walter Dean Myers' *Monster* (1999) and Robert Cormier's *After the First Death* (1979) have been chosen as representative examples of postmodern YA narratives. The analysis of these works will, on the one hand, serve as an illustration of the challenges the postmodern elements pose to the readers and, on the other hand, of the substantial educational benefit they can derive from reading postmodern fiction.

¹ See Gillis 52-55; Glasgow 41-49; Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 69; Koss & Teale 565-570.

In order to fully understand the nature of postmodern literature, it is necessary to offer a theoretical introduction to the postmodern movement. Hence, the first section of my thesis is concerned with an interdisciplinary examination of postmodernism. After a consideration of various definitions and of the sociohistorical circumstances of postmodernism, fundamental postmodern philosophical assumptions will be introduced, as they considerably shape the postmodern way of thinking. Finally, chapter two will shed light on how postmodern literature responds to these assumptions by radically breaking with literary conventions.

Since my thesis investigates the presence of postmodern traits in YA narratives, chapter three is dedicated to a consideration of the genre 'YA Literature' and its distinctive characteristics. Apart from that, what is even more relevant to this thesis is the concise overview of late literary trends occurring on the contemporary market for adolescent fiction in the last few decades. A closer look at these trends will reveal that YA literature has already started to embrace postmodernism.

By means of an in-depth analysis of postmodern elements inherent in *Monster* and *After the First Death*, chapter four serves as a demonstration of the variety of ways postmodernism can be exploited in YA literature. For this purpose, I will focus on eight content- and form-related postmodern features, which are very prevalent in both novels. More specifically, I will concentrate on the use of genre-eclecticism, nonlinearity and multiple perspectives as well as on the novels' preoccupation with ontological questions and the prevalence of indeterminacy, metafictional references, the blurring of fact and fiction as well as on the resulting demand of co-authoring processes. I restrict my analysis to these exemplary postmodern characteristics, as they most distinctively distinguish the novels from more traditional YA works and most decisively contribute to the creation of its postmodern atmosphere.

Chapter five eventually establishes a connection between postmodern YA literature and its place in the Austrian EFL classroom. After examining the national curriculum for second language teaching and the *CEFR*, I will provide several teaching implications for reading postmodern narratives in upper-secondary EFL classes. Furthermore, the so-called reader-response theory as well as intertextual and

aesthetic reading practices will be introduced as suitable ways of approaching the postmodern texts.

Finally, the last chapter of my thesis serves to provide a selection of teaching material, which has been specifically devised for the reception of *Monster* and *After the First Death*. It aims at offering a variety of tasks, which, firstly, support learners in coping with the complex postmodern elements and, secondly, exploit the enormous potential postmodern narratives entail in familiarising adolescent readers with indispensable reading skills as well as with the spirit of the postmodern world they are living in.

2. The postmodern movement - a theoretical background

This section serves as an introduction to the postmodern movement. It is aimed at familiarising readers with the contextual circumstances and key assumptions that shape the culture of the postmodern period. This theoretical examination is a vital prerequisite for a thorough comprehension of the nature of postmodern YA literature, which constitutes the major object of investigation of this thesis. Before turning to an analysis of the sociohistorical context of postmodernism, I will attempt to define the complex and fuzzy concept.

2.1 Definition of postmodernism

As has been admitted by various scholars, defining postmodernism is an utterly challenging endeavour. The term 'postmodernism' is considered, among other things, as a "notoriously slippery and indefinable term" (Nicol, *Postmodern Fiction* 1) as well as a notion that "suffers from *semantic* instability" (Hassan qtd. in *Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* 212). Despite the difficulties in defining the term, a major distinction between the consideration of postmodernism as a distinct era and as a cultural movement can be observed. Contrary to Mayer (589), for instance, who mainly regards postmodernism as a historico-cultural period of the twentieth century that succeeded modernism, the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* emphasises that the term is more commonly used for referring to "a cultural condition prevailing in the advanced capitalist societies since the 1960s" (201), which is characterised by a set

of cultural features. In fact, also for the purpose of my thesis the latter definition of postmodernism as a cultural movement consisting of distinctive cultural properties proves to be the more suitable approach.

While initially, in the 1940s, 'postmodernism' denoted the reactionary movement against modernism in the discipline of architecture, it attracted wider attention only twenty years later. In the subsequent decades the term 'postmodernism' entered the academic discourse of a variety of disciplines, such as philosophy, literature, arts, history, and cultural and media studies. Thereby it remarkably expanded its meaning, designating also diverse social, economic, political and cultural features of the twentieth century (see Nicol, *Postmodern Fiction* 1). The expansion of the term's meaning, which goes beyond the common designation of contemporary artistic and cultural products, is successfully expressed in the definition of postmodernism presented in the *Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*. According to this entry, similarly to 'modernism', the term 'postmodernism' "describe[s] artistic and cultural artefacts and attitudes of (mainly) the twentieth century" (211). Above that, it is stressed that "*postmodernism* can, further, be used to refer not just to art and CULTURE but also more comprehensively to a wide range of aspects of modern society" (ibid.). In other words, apart from the purely artistic and cultural dimension, the term 'postmodernism' also encompasses the social dimension by also including the state of society and of human life of the twentieth century in general (ibid., 216).

Since most of the chosen definitions point to a certain interrelatedness of modernism and postmodernism, it may be valuable to look at the relationship between these two movements and investigate, in particular, what distinguishes them. According to Ma (1339), postmodernism can be considered as both a succession of and a reaction against modernism. While the movement clearly emerged from modernism, having also adopted various modernist ideas, principles and features, especially in the field of literature, it equally constitutes a break with the typically modernist universalist views, such as the belief in the existence of an objective reality (ibid.). Comparing modernism and postmodernism on the example of literature, one can observe that both make use of literary experimentation and fragmentation by means of genre-mixing, self-referentiality, discontinuity and a variation of narrative situations (see Barry 82-83). In this respect, postmodernism can be clearly perceived as a

continuation of modernist trends (*ibid.*). Yet, modernism and postmodernism mainly differ in the way they respond to the overly radical beliefs of the twentieth century. Interestingly, postmodernism welcomes and celebrates the fragmentation and anti-representationalism of the postmodern world, considering them as signs of liberation, whereas modernism rather approaches these aspects with negative, pessimistic and hopeless attitudes (*ibid.*, 84). Moreover, while modernism favours simplicity and “ascetism,” postmodernism promotes “excess,” playfulness, “gaudiness” and the experimentation with different tastes and generic features (*ibid.*, 84-85). In Nicol’s terms, postmodernism can be characterised as “ironic” and “playful”, contrary to modernism, whose attitudes are rather “sincere” (*Postmodern Fiction 2*). Nicol further contrasts modernists’ dedication to “formalism”, “rationality” and “authenticity,” with the common association of postmodernism with the pastiche of genres and style as well as its equation of high and low culture (*ibid.*).

Apart from the definition of postmodernism and its distinction from modernism, the two derivatives, ‘postmodernist’ and ‘postmodernity’, should be taken into consideration as well. Niccol explains that while ‘postmodernism’ and its related adjective ‘postmodernist’ denote “a set of ideas developed from philosophy and theory [being] related to aesthetic production,” ‘postmodernity’ rather designates the contextual changes of the period, which were triggered by political, social, economic and technological innovations (*Postmodern Fiction 2*). In other words, the terms ‘postmodernism’ and ‘postmodernist’ describe the essence and style of the literary period, ranging approximately from the 1950s to the 1990s, which is strongly influenced by the context of ‘postmodernity’ Nicol, *Postmodern Fiction 2*).

2.2 Context of postmodernism

The emergence of postmodernism is widely regarded as a result of the political, social and media-related changes occurring in the United States in the 1960s (see Mayer 590). As Harvey puts it, “postmodernism is memetic of social, economic and political practices” (qtd. in *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* 217). Taking this inextricable connection into account, I have chosen to briefly describe the contextual circumstances of postmodernism in order to offer a better understanding of the movement and of the nature of its literary products. Nicol (*Postmodern Fiction*

3) identifies a close link between postmodernism and the socio-economic as well as the political ideas of late capitalism. He outlines that after the first two stages of capitalism, 'market capitalism' and 'imperialist capitalism', the economic and political landscape following the Second World War, which is known as 'late capitalism', eventually expanded its influence on "every possible area of society" and "into every corner of the globe," including media, arts and education. As a result, these areas started to be shaped by capitalist concerns and a preoccupation with ideas of the market, which resulted in a rising orientation on growth and profit as well as in the development of a so-called globalisation of consumerism. (ibid.)

Based on McCaffrey, Nicol argues that the globalisation led to a so-called 'cultural eclecticism', a selective combination of various cultural practices, lifestyles, products or concepts from diverse cultures. He suggests that the processes of globalisation are closely linked to the expansion of technology taking place in the twentieth century. More specifically, he outlines that the remarkable technological developments of the computer, TV, the internet and the mobile phone have introduced not just new means of international communication, but also new possibilities for accessing, sharing and producing information, which have become indispensable for the competition on the global market in terms of production, marketing and research. Apart from these capitalist market-driven purposes, the technological innovations constitute new consumer items as well as the entrance into a new era of digitalisation. (see Nicol, *Postmodern Fixtion* 2-3).

As will be shown throughout this paper, especially the digitalisation of the postmodern society represents a prevalent concern of postmodern fiction, being frequently addressed and mirrored both on the level of content and form. Yet, despite the highly positive influences of the immense technological innovations on contemporary life, a closer consideration of their impact in the light of Baudrillard's theory of the loss of reality, which I will introduce in the subsequent section, alludes to the fact that certain developments of the cultural movement should be regarded critically, rather than just being celebrated and accepted by postmodernists' commonly embracing attitudes towards innovation and change (see Barry 84). Within the examination of postmodernism from a philosophical perspective, the following

section will outline Baudrillard's theory in more depth while introducing two further key figures who have shaped postmodern thought.

2.3 Philosophical key assumptions

Philosophy, in particular recent French philosophical movements, assume a major role in postmodern discourse. Following Sim, philosophy represents "a prime site for debate about **postmodernism** and a source of many theories of what constitutes postmodernism" (3). Having this in mind, I chose to introduce influential key figures of postmodern philosophy, who are perceived to constitute distinctive "landmarks" in postmodernism (see Barry 85). Before turning to individual philosophers in more depth, I will provide a more general picture of the poetics of postmodern philosophy.

The most decisive feature of postmodern philosophy is its deep scepticism towards universalist assumptions of knowledge and truth as well as towards cultural and political norms and authoritarian viewpoints (see Sim 3). More technically speaking, postmodern assumptions are of an "anti-foundational" nature (ibid.). Haynes elaborates that modernists' beliefs in the possibility of a truthful representation of reality, in a scientific objectivity, rationality and universality have been replaced by sceptic, narcissist, cynical and fatalistic attitudes of postmodernism (45). The awareness of these key assumptions is particularly relevant for this thesis, as they are mirrored in a highly interesting way in arts and literature. Having established the underlying principles of postmodern philosophy, I will now take a closer look on the French philosophers Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Derrida in order to find out in which ways they have responded to the key assumptions that shape postmodern thought. My selection of postmodern philosophers has to be restricted to these three very influential key figures, as their theories are particularly relevant for the comprehension of several postmodern literary features of the primary texts. As will become obvious in later parts of this thesis, being aware of these philosophical assumptions is of great importance, since several features of postmodern literature are deeply rooted in some of these philosophical approaches.

One of the most influential philosophers, who is also most closely associated with the term 'postmodernism', is Jean-Francois Lyotard, whose central ideas are concisely

outlined by Sim (7-8) and Barry (86-87). In his work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), Lyotard strongly challenges Enlightenment ideas, such as rationality and universality (see Barry 86). His definition of postmodernism as an “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard (73) has attracted wide attention, representing the most original and influential definition of postmodernism so far. Lyotard uses the terms ‘grand-narratives’ or ‘metanarratives’ for referring to the very static, superordinate and authoritative discourses that dominate our knowledge, our society and our way of life, assuming that they could explain everything (see Sim 7). Examples of such metanarratives are, according to Lyotard, for instance, Christianity, Marxism, the “myth of scientific progress” and “human perfectibility” (see Barry 86-87). Lyotard argues that these metanarratives do not correspond to reality; they rather represent “ideological illusions” and one-sided approaches, thereby concealing the heterogeneity and plurality of our society (ibid., 86). Having this antiauthoritarian standpoint in mind, the philosopher calls for the dissemination of knowledge by means of ‘little narratives,’ generated by individuals or small groups who try to pursue certain goals (see Sim 7-8). These ‘little narratives’ are contingent on a certain time span and place, and eventually aim at breaking with the authority of the ‘grand narratives’ (see, Barry 86-87; Sim 7-8).

Jean Baudrillard is a further French philosopher deserving considerable attention in the consideration of postmodern philosophy (see Barry 87-88). In his work *Simulations* (1981, translated into English 1983) Baudrillard argues that, given the predominance of images from TV, paintings, film and advertisement, the contemporary society is to a great extent surrounded only by representations of reality, by a so-called virtual reality, rather than by the actual reality itself. He further outlines that these representations trigger a blurred perception of reality among people. While, according to Baudrillard, reality has been replaced by these representations, also the capacity to differentiate between reality and imagination has been lost. As a consequence, Baudrillard concludes that the contemporary culture is embedded in a state of a so-called hyperreality, a culture that is purely constituted by simulations. In Baudrillard’s terms, “[i]t is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (Baudrillard 91). More specifically speaking, the philosopher considers the signs by which the postmodern society is surrounded as empty symbols, “simulacra,” which lack any underlying reality to which they refer.

Thus, he denies the signs' inherent function of representation and exchanges the term 'representation' with the notion 'simulation' (see Barry 87; Baudrillard 95). What is particularly interesting about his theory is that our contemporary society is hardly aware of this hyperreal condition and simply accepts and engages with it as if it dealt with reality. He further explains the phenomenon of simulation by arguing that the signs entail a certain "code," which eventually leads to the duplication of reality (see Nicol, *Postmodern Fiction* 5). Nowadays, these duplications or "simulations" can be of such a precise manner that they cannot be distinguished from the original anymore. (see Barry 87)

Even though Baudrillard wrote his work *Simulations* (1981) way before the computer age set it, his theory is particularly relevant in view of the immense technological innovations of the last few decades, such as the invention of hypermedia. Apart from the multitude of images circulated by contemporary media, today even the interaction among people is to a remarkable degree of a virtual nature, considering the widespread use of email, chatroom interactions and communication via social networks (see Nicol, *Postmodern Fiction* 4). Taking into account today's immense influence of the media on contemporary life, I would argue that Baudrillard's theory undoubtedly has a point in depicting the world as an overly hyperreal condition. For the purpose of this thesis, it is of great value to be aware of the simulating effect of the postmodern media-driven and digitalised world in terms of creating a wrong or, as I would argue, a blurred image of reality. This aspect is especially apparent in *Monster* and will, therefore, be illustrated on more concrete examples within the analysis of the respective primary text.

Finally, I want to shed light on a further philosophical strand, poststructuralism, which also expresses a deep scepticism towards authority, for which reason I decided to include it in my consideration of postmodern philosophy, as suggested by Sim (4). The movement of poststructuralism is closely associated with postmodernism. Yet, despite several correlations, poststructuralism constitutes a separate movement, which should not be equated with postmodernism (see Nicol, *Postmodern Fiction* 6). What poststructuralist approaches have in common with postmodernist attitudes is, among other things, their denial of an influential authoritarian intellectual movement, more specifically, of structuralism (see Sim 3). Poststructuralism rejects the

structuralist belief that the world is governed by an inherent structure, or a so-called internal grammar and can, therefore, be entirely understood through the deconstruction of these structural systems (ibid., 4). While structuralism propagates the determination of everything by its inherent structure of signs, poststructuralism rather emphasises indeterminacy, unpredictability and difference (ibid., 4-5). Jacques Derrida, the most prominent philosopher of this tradition, illustrates the unpredictability and instability of systems, like language, by means of his concept of deconstruction. He challenges de Saussure's idea of the composition of signs by a signifier and a signified, and their assumed "perfect conjunction" (ibid., 5). Conversely, Derrida emphasises the indeterminacy and instability of linguistic meaning (ibid.), an idea that particularly permeates postmodern fiction, as will be shown within this thesis. Resulting from this indeterminacy of meaning, poststructuralism believes in the multiplicity of meaning (see Nicol, *Postmodern Fiction* 6). In fact, indeterminacy and the multiplicity of meaning are central concerns of the novels under discussion and will become more closely investigated within the analysis part of the thesis.

This section has served as an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of postmodernism and provided basic background knowledge of the postmodern ethos, which strongly shapes postmodern literature, as I will demonstrate in chapter 4.2. Still, the readers of this thesis should keep in mind that the selective examination of philosophers was adjusted for the upcoming discussion of postmodern literary features apparent in the primary texts. Thus, there are numerous other remarkable philosophers that are of great relevance for the postmodern movement, who cannot be introduced due to a limitation of space.

2.4 Postmodern fiction

Having considered the contextual circumstances and major principles of postmodern thought, I will finally turn to a general discussion of postmodern fiction, which does not just constitute the primary interest of my thesis, but, as Connor puts it, "one of the most important laboratories of postmodernism" (62). As will be shown, postmodern fiction has been hugely affected by the overly radical postmodern assumptions outlined above, to which it responds in a uniquely experimental and playful manner.

Mayer (590) identifies a remarkable tendency towards experimentation and innovation within literature while emphasising the new preference of experimentation over literature's initial primary concern with conveying meaning. Since the analysis of the two selected postmodern novels, *Monster* and *After the First Death*, in section 4.2 will illustrate the characteristics of postmodern literature in great detail, this section should only provide a preliminary outline of the nature of postmodern fiction.

Dating the origin of postmodern fiction, Ma (1339) reports that some of its features have already appeared in literature in the 17th century or even earlier. For instance, prominent works, like *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne (1759) and *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes (first part 1605, second part 1615), already exhibited typically postmodern properties at a time which clearly preceded the postmodern period (ibid.). Yet, postmodernism did not gain wide-spread recognition as a distinct literary movement until the 1950s and 60s. Postmodern literature finally reached its peak in the 1970s and 80s (ibid.).

After the brief discussion of the contextual circumstances of postmodernism, it can be said that postmodern literature is largely shaped by the historical and cultural background from which it emerged (see Lewis 168; Ma 1339-1340; Nicol, *Postmodern Fiction* 17). In addition to the socio-historical conditions discussed in 2.2, Ma (1339) further describes the period after the Second World War as being characterised by a considerable degree of confusion, indeterminacy and disorder. As suggested earlier, Ma considers the technological and scientific innovations of the twentieth century and their effect on a changing perception of reality and authenticity as triggering factors of the considerably chaotic and indeterminate postmodern condition as well (ibid.).

Being aware of the sociohistorical factors of postmodernism, one can observe that postmodern fiction responds to these circumstances through the use of non-traditional, challenging and often confusing literary techniques, such as intertextuality, genre-eclecticism, playfulness, irony, pastiche and non-traditional narrative forms (ibid., 1340). Mayer (590) further elaborates on the experimental character of postmodern fiction, adding features such as parody, metafiction and language games while emphasising the playful break with conventions, which aims at

an active engagement of the reader in reading and meaning-making processes. Lewis' study of postmodern fiction mentions a few additional characteristics, like fragmentation, discontinuity, a sense of paranoia in terms of a disbelief in fixity, such as in fixed and stable identities, as well as the fusion of fiction and reality, to which he metaphorically refers as "vicious circles" (178) (ibid., 171-178). According to Lewis (170), these postmodern features are not restricted to the writing of American novelists, they are widely represented in postmodern works by international authors from all over the world. Well known representatives of postmodern literature are, for instance, Umberto Eco and Italo Calvino (Italy), Salman Rushdie (UK), Günter Grass and Peter Handke (Germany), Kurt Vonnegut, Don DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon (US) as well as Georges Perec (France) and Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Columbia) (ibid.). To name a few concrete examples of postmodern narratives, many of the postmodern features mentioned above are highly prevalent in prominent works, such as *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) by John Fowles, *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* (1967) by William Gass, *Naked Lunch* (1959) by William Burroughs, *Mason & Dixon* (1997) by Thomas Pynchon, *Waterland* (1983) by Graham Swift and *Gerald's Party* (1986) by Robert Coover (ibid., 171-179).

The lack of consensus regarding a common set of characteristic literary features, as shown by the list of features taken from three different scholars, points to the fact that the vagueness and slippery nature of postmodernism emphasised at the beginning of this thesis is highly apparent in postmodern fiction, too. In fact, while postmodern literature is characterised by a multitude of properties, postmodern narratives usually do not exhibit all features, but rather a selection of them. Therefore, they considerably vary from each other, which makes it utterly difficult to make general statements about the characteristics of postmodern fiction that fully account for its diverse nature. By implementing these elements, the conventions of literature get severely destabilised. Moreover, they attribute a considerable degree of chaos and complexity to the work and thereby mirror the prevailing condition of the postmodern society.

Above that, McHale identifies a new preoccupation with ontological questions in postmodern fiction, instead of the epistemological nature of modern fiction (see McHale 10). Contrary to the previous foregrounding of knowledge and of the

comprehension of what happens in a literary work, postmodern fiction is rather concerned with questions of being, more precisely, with the “creation and interrelation of worlds of being” (Connor 66). In other words, postmodern fiction focuses on questions about the self and its existence in the world, thereby putting the individual human being into the centre of its work. Having pointed to this considerably abstract shift, I will illustrate it more clearly on the basis of *Monster* in section 4.2.2.1.

Apart from the ontological shift, postmodern fiction renounces nineteenth-century’s tradition of realist writing (see Nicol, *Postmodern Fiction* 18). Nicol refers to Lyotard’s well-known definition of postmodernism and applies it to the description of postmodern literature, claiming that postmodern fiction would express an “incredulity towards realism” (19). He explains that, while postmodernist fiction does not entirely reject the mimetic representation of reality via fiction, it rather emphasises the impossibility of doing so without pointing to its fictionality more explicitly (ibid.). As a result, postmodern fiction exhibits a great degree of self-consciousness about the writing and construction processes of the work as well as its fictionality and thereby strongly questions the possibility of a truthful representation of reality within literature. The technical term for this self-conscious and self-referential way of writing is “metafiction,” which constitutes one of the most pervasive and intriguing features of the postmodern literary landscape (ibid., 35).

As will be demonstrated in section 4.2.3, what all these postmodern literary properties have in common is their effect on the reader in terms of a more active involvement and the development of new reading skills. By continuously shattering readers’ expectations of readers by disrupting the reading process and by reminding them of the fictional status of the work as well as of the complexity of fictional worlds, in general, postmodern narratives require a highly active readership (ibid., 39). In fact, especially the metafictional devices draw readers’ attention to their relation with the fictional world, which they are supposed to critically rethink (ibid., 40). This impact of postmodern writing on its reception is nicely summarised by Nicol, as follows: “Self-conscious writing [...] produces self-conscious reading” (ibid., 40).

This section has provided a concise overview of postmodern literature and its distinctive properties. As I will elaborate on the most dominant postmodern features

of the two YA novels under discussion in great detail in the analysis part of the thesis, I decided not to go into more depth within this introductory section. Prior to the analysis of the chosen postmodern YA novels, the subsequent chapter should, however, provide further theoretical information on the genre of YA fiction, which will be examined as a potential medium for the exploitation of postmodern features.

3. YA literature- a new genre for exploring postmodernism

As in my thesis I am arguing for the incorporation of postmodern YA fiction into the EFL classroom, it is important to, first of all, define the genre of YA literature. Within this section, I will identify inherent properties of YA literature and demonstrate its dynamic nature by taking into account its experimentation with innovative trends in terms of form and content. Based on my overview of the genre's literary developments occurring in the last few decades, I will argue that postmodern tendencies are widely apparent in contemporary youth fiction, thereby attributing a more sophisticated quality to the genre. Thus, the section aims at merging postmodernism and YA fiction in order to illustrate the potential of the genre for exploiting postmodern ideas and features.

3.1 Defining YA literature

Deciding on one definition of YA literature is, in fact, a challenging task, given the multitude of circulating definitions and the wide age span the term 'young adults' comprises, designating teenagers ranging from 10 to 19 year-olds (see Glaus 408). Although there are diverging opinions as to which age group exactly falls into this category, YA literature is most commonly considered to be targeted at 12 to 18 year-olds, as has also been suggested by the so-called Young Adult Library Service Association (YALSA) (see Cart, "From Insiders to Outsiders" 96). Bushman & Haas avoid pinning down the genre's audience to a specific age group. They rather broadly and simply define it as "literature written for and about young adults," thereby leaving some scope for different conceptualisations of adolescence (2).

One approach to defining the genre, which I find most elaborate, has been adopted by Kullmann, who differentiates between two types of definition. Apart from defining

the genre by its intended target audience, which appears to be the most prevalent approach, Kullmann (13) suggests that YA fiction can also be defined as an actual type of literature that is characterised by a common set of inherent properties, which distinguishes it from other genres. He draws attention to the problems that arise with the definition of the genre through its target audience, pointing out that by purely defining the genre through its adolescent readership, the fact that also adults do read adolescent fiction is entirely disregarded (ibid.). Moreover, the definition would equally encompass adult fiction read by adolescents, which, however, significantly deviates from fiction specifically designed for young adults (ibid.). Taking the irritating nature of the widely shared definition of YA literature into account, I consider the second type of definition as a far more sophisticated approach to defining the genre, which suggests regarding YA literature as a distinctive category of texts that is characterised by a variety of inherent features (ibid., 14). In order to illustrate the genre in more depth, I am now going to examine some of its most decisive features. At this point, it needs to be mentioned that, compared to children's literature, YA literature has received minor scholarly attention, particularly with regard to the characterisation of genre-specific features (see Hilton & Nikolajeva 8). Yet, a comprehensive overview of traits and motifs is provided by Kullmann (30-83), which will serve as a profound basis for my examination of YA literature. However, in contrast to Kullmann's extensive characterisation of YA literature, my analysis will only include a selected list of genre-related features which are also present in *Monster* and *After the First Death* and, thus, relevant for the upcoming analysis.

One prominent feature of teen literature that also appears in the selected novels constitutes the representation of the audience's age-group by the use of young adult protagonists (see Bushmann & Haas 2; Kullmann 30). Essentially, this characteristic is aimed at facilitating the identification of readers with the respective protagonist. However, given the different contexts in which readers and the protagonists are embedded, Kullmann rather speaks of a "substitutional experience" (31), which is supposed to provide readers with valuable insights and to encourage them to reflect on issues, such as childhood, adolescence and adulthood (ibid., 34). Bushman & Haas (2) add that, since the protagonists are adolescents themselves, YA fiction generally revolves around themes, experiences and conflicts with which adolescent readers are familiar and required to cope in the real world.

A further characteristic element of YA fiction is the incorporation of fundamental questions concerning the boundaries of human existence, the possibilities of human perception as well as people's place in the world (see Kullmann 84). As chapter 4.2.2.1 will outline in great depth, Steve and Ben, the protagonists of the selected novels, experience several events which make them reflect on such deep-rooted existentialist questions (*ibid.*, 90). More specifically, Steve Harmon struggles with the question of who he actually is and which life and place he deserves in society, whereas Ben, the protagonist of Cormier's novel, even questions his actual existence, pondering over suicidal thoughts. Kullmann (90) explains that at the centre of such existentialist questions, there is often a preoccupation with death. While death is extensively considered by Ben, also Steve thinks about it several times, albeit to a slighter degree, admitting that he would prefer death over a life imprisonment. Even though Kullmann (90) claims that these almost philosophical questions concerning the protagonists' existence are usually represented in fantasy narratives, this is not the case with the two selected YA novels. Both stories are situated in a realistic, contemporary context, which is fairly consistent with the world of contemporary readers. Since Kullmann (78) also mentions quest as a distinctive feature of YA fiction, claiming that this motif yields a clear structure of rising tension and ultimate release to the work while probing the protagonist's character, I want to emphasise that the quest motif in the novels under discussion is essentially entailed within the existentialist questions. Both protagonists embark on a quest for their identity and their past. However, contrary to Kullmann's theory, neither the ultimate goal of the quest, in other words the finding of a coherent self, is achieved, nor are the protagonists' "hidden qualities" thereby revealed.

Closely linked to the ontological questions and search for their selves is a further motif enlisted in Kullmann's characterisation of YA fiction, the examination of good and evil (79). Generally, YA literature opposes good and evil by representing them within a strong polarisation. The established dichotomy of good and evil generally facilitates the comprehension of the considerably complex moral concepts (*ibid.*). However, the distinction of good and evil is not as straightforward in the chosen novels. In fact, Steve demonstrates remarkable self-doubts by challenging his perception of himself as a good person. The distinction between good and evil, which

in Myers' work refers to being innocent or a "monster," is not clearly defined, as the protagonist is even unsure whether his role as a lookout constitutes an active participation in the robbery. In *After the First Death*, the distinction between good and evil is slightly blurred, too. Although common sense suggests that terrorism clearly represents the evil, the terrorists regard their involvement as a positive act of patriotism, serving the sole purpose of liberating their homeland. The indeterminacy of these two concepts, thus, requires readers to make their own interpretation of what constitutes good and evil and to judge the protagonists' behaviour, respectively.

A final characteristic of YA literature, on which I would like to comment, is the simplified use of lexical range and syntactic structures (see Bushmann & Haas 2; Kullmann 51-53). More specifically, Kullmann (58) argues that the language of YA literature is supposed to conform to the linguistic repertoire of adolescents. Therefore, adjustments are usually made on the level of lexis and syntax, aiming at a lower level of complexity than exhibited in adult fiction. For this reason, also abstract and technical terms are to be reduced or even avoided (ibid.). Interestingly, Kullmann (55) emphasises that, nonetheless, YA narratives frequently exhibit a fairly complex narrative situation. While he illustrates this complexity by the example of the stream of consciousness, which is widely used in contemporary YA works (ibid.), I want to stress that the novels under discussion exhibit an even more diversified complex narrative structure, as will be outlined in section 4.2.1. Apart from that, as far as the narrative structure is concerned, explicit references to language as well as to the act of narration by means of metanarrative comments constitute a further relevant feature of YA fiction (ibid., 56, 58), being highly present in both *Monster* and *After the First Death*. Yet, this feature strongly challenges the idea of YA literature's use of a simplified narrative structure as well.

Taking into account the characteristics of YA literature, I will demonstrate within my thesis that postmodern YA narratives break with some of these traditions by exploring new experimental techniques for dealing with essentially more complex subject matters. Within the following section I will examine various literary trends shaping YA fiction of the last three decades.

3.2 Late trends in YA literature

Michael Cart, an influential scholar from the field of YA literature, considers the market of YA fiction as an “excitingly vital, rapidly growing and changing genre” (“YA Literature” 788). In accordance with Cart’s characterisation, it has been observed that in the last few decades, YA literature has undergone substantial changes as a response to socio-historical and technological developments (see Dresang & McClelland 160-166; Koss 76-77). A number of scholars have conducted studies, in which they have examined prominent trends that have been appearing in YA literature since the late twentieth century.² The studies used for this survey were conducted between 1980 and 2009 with the majority of them referring to the YA fiction market of the early twenty-first century. Unfortunately, no study investigating the literary trends of the 70s, the period in which *After the First Death* was written, could be found. Thus, taking into account Cormier’s early publication of *After the First Death* in 1979, one will realise that the novel already exhibits several literary patterns which have been identified as prominent trends of later periods, as I will outline throughout my thesis. Generally speaking, the results of these studies are very similar, pointing to highly interesting innovations and a growing degree of experimentation and complexity in terms of form and content. Based on Koss & Teale’s survey (2009), I will categorise these literary patterns into four dimensions and supplement their results with findings from other scholars from this field. In order to embed the trends in a wider context. I will begin with a brief outline of the socio-historical circumstances, which influenced these changes.

3.2.1 Sociohistorical context

In her comprehensive study Koss examines various factors that contributed to the radical changes in YA literature of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century while primarily focusing on the emergence of “multivoice” novels (see Koss 76-77). She states that one decisive reason leading to these late literary trends is rooted in the changing landscape of texts in general. More specifically, she argues that the

² See Apseloff (1987); Cart, “From Insider to Outsider” (2001); Cart “Young Adult Literature” (2005); DeLuca (1979-1980); Dresang & McClelland (1999); Gillis (2002); Koss (2009); Koss & Teale (2009); Knickerbocker & Brueggeman (2008); Sick (2005).

growing experimentation in adult literature and the rising representation of various perspectives within texts eventually inspired also YA authors to follow this trend (*ibid.*, 76). Koss (76) points out that these textual changes can be linked to the increasing acceptance of various populations and viewpoints among the contemporary Western society.

Social changes among teens can be considered as a further factor beneath the changing nature of YA literature (*ibid.*). Koss (76) observes that today's teenage society exhibits more open-minded attitudes towards multiple opinions and perspectives and tends to more readily accept various viewpoints, instead of adhering to one single truth or one single way of interpreting an event. In Dresang & McClelland's terms, they are "both emotionally and intellectually open as well as generously inclusive and accepting of diversity" (163). Without doubt, this social phenomenon made room for multivoice literature and can, therefore, be regarded as a necessary prerequisite for the acceptance and appreciation of fiction that exhibits multiple perspectives (see Koss 76). What is especially beneficial about exposing adolescents to a multiplicity of perspectives on particular subjects in literature is that it enables teenagers to become aware of various viewpoints and opinions on a respective issue. Apart from that, it ideally encourages them to also consider alternative perspectives when forming their own standpoint (*ibid.*, 77). Furthermore, Koss (76-77) argues that the rising numbers of YA fiction publications invite authors to take more risks, since a greater variety of works is being accepted for publication.

The by far most influential and decisive factor leading to the altering landscape of adolescent fiction, however, is said to result from the innovations in technology. More precisely, the impact of the remarkable technological developments and the emergence of a pervasive media culture on the literary market as well as on the required literacy skills have been widely regarded as further reasons for the textual changes (*ibid.*). Over the last decades, the internet has become one of the most influential media of information, shaping today's communication and the way information is presented and read. Moreover, also TV, notebooks, and smart phones have become irreplaceable gadgets in everyday life, representing new sources of information and means of communication. As a consequence, also the language has been adapted to these technological developments as well as the form of writing and

reading, which co-occurs with the requirement of new literacy skills (ibid.). In fact, hypermedia texts tend to present chunks of information from various perspectives and sources while frequently employing multiple modes of representation, like written texts, visuals, sounds, videos, etc. As a result, linearity is rarely provided (see Dresang & McClelland 62; Koss 77). Today, it rather depends on the readers to synthesise the fragmented information in order to achieve a coherent meaning (see Koss 77). Dresang & McClelland conclude that what is most obviously represented in more recent YA works is exactly this interactivity, connectivity and the pervasive access to information provided by our digitised world (160). Given the predominance of the digitalised world as well as teenagers' familiarity with the technological innovations, it is not surprising that YA literature responds to these textual changes by mirroring them in contemporary works for making literature more attractive and up-to-date for the young adult readership (see Koss 77).

While these findings can be seen as representative of the sociohistorical context of Myers' novel, I want to stress once more that they do not account for the contextual circumstances of the period in which *After the First Death* was being published. In fact, Cormier's novel clearly preceded the era of technological advancement and of the predominance of hypertexts. Its overly innovative features can, therefore, not be linked to the technology-related innovations. Still, the survey has shown that Robert Cormier can be considered as a noteworthy precursor of a considerably more complex YA literature or even as one of the leading figures initiating the development of YA literature into a more challenging and experimental direction. The subsequent discussion of late literary trends will now illustrate several patterns that can also be identified in the select primary texts.

3.2.2 Incorporation of new topics

Having outlined the socio-historical circumstances, I would like to begin my examination of late literary trends with a consideration of the altering subject matters addressed in contemporary YA novels. It has been found that since the 1960s young teenage fiction has started to exhibit a growing concern with realistic subject matters which are of considerable relevance to the teenage readership (see Cart, "From Insider to Outsider" 96) while addressing very recent national and international issues

(see Apseloff 397). Resulting from the increasing preoccupation with current topics, the scope of subject matters addressed in YA literature has expanded, including rather serious issues like AIDS, different types of violence, mental diseases, eating disorders, homosexuality, race and abuse (see Apseloff 397-411; Koss & Teale 567). With the incorporation of these new topics, the tendency evolved to deliver a more honest, and, thus, often a more brutal portrayal of reality and to reject the once so commonly used happy endings (see DeLuca 125; Dresang & McClelland 165; Glasgow 47). Apseloff (411) argues that the more accurate depiction of these overly controversial or harsh facets of reality did not come surprisingly, since today's adolescence is constantly confronted with rough and serious aspects of everyday life by all sorts of media. Moreover, she emphasises that it is in the interest of young adults to be presented with a truthful picture of today's world (ibid.). As far as the content of contemporary youth fiction is concerned, Koss & Teale (567) further identify the tendency to incorporate more general issues of teenage life, such as finding their identity, friendship and family than the previous main focus on the adolescents' "coming-of age."

Apart from the subject matters as such, Glasgow (47) identifies changes in terms of setting occurring in youth literature from the early twenty-first century. As it is the case in Walter Dean Myers' *Monster*, a growing number of contemporary adolescent fiction takes place in untraditional contexts, which were strongly disregarded in earlier works for young adult readers, such as prisons, gangs or detention centres (ibid.). Although genre-specific concerns, such as ontological questions of teenage identities, as established in the previous section, are still dominant in postmodern YA novels, it has been shown that they are, nowadays, often explored on the basis of more complex subject matters. Above that, the introduction of topics that were previously considered as unsuitable for adolescents have eventually found their way into contemporary adolescent literature (see Glasgow 47; Sick 601).

3.2.3 (Re)emergence of new and revised subgenres

Further changes in the field of YA literature concern the type of subgenres available on the market for YA fiction. While in the last few decades new subgenres have emerged, old ones have also been rediscovered (see Cart, "YA Literature" 786-788;

“From Insider to Outsider” 97). According to the corpus of YA fiction analysed by Koss & Teale in 2009, the majority of youth fiction still constitutes realistic prose fiction (565-566). Yet, the market has been enriched by other noteworthy contributions. To mention a few examples, new short story collections as well as revised and simplified old short story collections have been reintroduced (see Cart, “From Insider to Outsider” 97; “Young Adult Literature” 786). Apart from short stories, also fantasy and science-fiction novels have significantly flourished in the last few decades, assuming a highly prominent place on today’s literary market for young adults (ibid.). In fact, the great appreciation of this subgenre is likely to have been triggered, among other things, by the enormously successful *Harry Potter* series by J.K Rowling (see Cart, “From Insider to Outsider” 97). Moreover, Cart (“YA Literature” 786) emphasises that the (re)emergence of old and new subgenres co-occurs with new narrative techniques, like the implementation of texts in the format of e-mails, letters, journal entries, handwritten notes and instant messages. A further noteworthy innovation of YA literature is the growing number of graphic novels and cartoons, which mirrors the remarkable importance of visual representations for contemporary adolescents (see Cart, “From Insider to Outsider” 97; “YA Literature” 786; Glasgow 42).

Above that, I want to draw particular attention to the reinvention of the picture book as a new subgenre which has opened up to adolescent and adult readers (see Cart, “Young Adult Literature” 786). Interestingly, postmodern features have recently been implemented into picture books, thereby creating a “new subgenre”, the ‘postmodern picture book, as Goldstone calls it (“New Subgenre” 198; “Postmodern Experiments” 321). In fact, contrary to the lack of scholarly attention to postmodern YA literature, the subgenre of the postmodern picture book has already been examined by a variety of scholars.³ Similarly to postmodern adult and YA fiction, elements of playfulness, self-referentiality, multiplicity of perspectives and nonlinearity have become features of the new type of picture book, familiarising also the youngest generation with these concepts (see Goldstone, “New Subgenre” 198-201). What Goldstone considers as most striking about the postmodern picture book is its

³ See Anstey (2002); Goldstone, “Postmodern Experiments” (2009); Goldstone, “New Subgenre” (2004); Goldstone, “Changing Picture Book Codes” (2002); McClay (2000); Serafini (2010); Sipe (2011); Wu (2014).

reconsideration of space and the nature of the page, which turns into a “dynamic, interactive surface that permits movement” (Goldstone, “Postmodern Experiments” 326). In more concrete terms, she outlines that in postmodern picture books characters often intrude the audience’s area and vice versa, allowing them to even leave the picture frames and physical pages. (ibid., 322). Two well-known examples of postmodern picture books making use of this tradition are *The Three Pigs* (2001) by David Wiesner and *Black and White* (1990) by David Maculey. While in *The Three Pigs* one pig is blown out of the picture and another one enters the story by stepping into the picture frame, *Black and White* visualises the readers’ involvement and entry into the story world through the depiction of a human hand that removes a crucial element of the story (ibid., 323-324). As can be seen, the dynamic character of the page enables both readers and characters of the story to switch between various spaces, entering and exiting both story world and real world, thereby blurring fiction and reality (ibid., 324). As a consequence, vivid interactions between readers, viewers, characters, texts and illustrations emerge (ibid., 322). A further particularity of the postmodern picture book, which I want to emphasise, is that text and illustrations are pushed onto the same level, being considered as “inextricably intertwined” (ibid., 326). As a result, the temporal chronology decreases in importance in postmodern picture books. Rather than paying attention to the sequence of events, it is more important to focus on the spatial dimension by examining where objects are situated. What results from the interactional nature and the characteristic features of the postmodern picture book is the requirement of co-authoring processes, which Sipe (248) regards as a highly beneficial intellectual activity that encourages readers to also actively consider the cognitive processes involved in reading. Within the analysis of the selected primary texts, I will return to the concept of co-authoring and elaborate on its decisive role in the reception of postmodern literature in more depth.

3.2.4 Experimentation with viewpoints

The exploitation of multiple voices and perspectives within one work constitutes a further innovative trend, which has been frequently identified in studies on YA

literature from the late 90s and early twenty-first century.⁴ Even though the common use of first-person narratives in YA literature, in which the adolescent protagonist acts as an internal focaliser, still prevails, Koss & Teale (568) have found out that this tradition is gradually overcome by the insertion of additional voices. In other words, there is a rather new tendency of representing various continuously altering perspectives within one narrative, thereby providing readers with multiple perspectives on the story (see Gillis 53). While on the one hand, the incorporation of various perspectives makes the narration more vivid and diversified, on the other hand, it makes it considerably more difficult for readers to follow the story line. Apart from that, a further side effect of this trend is that narrators and voices more frequently differ in their degree of reliability, which readers are required to critically evaluate (see Koss & Teale 568). Despite the increasing complexity, which should still be seen as a great challenge for readers, Glasgow (45) emphasises its positive repercussions, arguing that the implementation of new and additional voices is likely to empower voices that were previously silenced as well as teenagers in claiming their own voice (see Dresang & McClelland 164; Glasgow 45).

3.2.5 Structural fragmentation

The experimentation with multiple perspectives in the field of YA literature has a considerable impact on the structure of the texts, which leads me to the final trend in recent YA fiction, which is relevant for this thesis. Koss & Teale (569) observe a remarkable degree of nonlinearity within literary works labelled as YA fiction. In other words, they have found out that the chronological order of many contemporary YA narratives of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century is disturbed by means of various literary features, such as alternating perspectives. Due to the frequent shift of perspectives, the respective story line is constantly disrupted in such texts through the adoption of another viewpoint, which presents the story from a different angle. However, apart from that, the nonlinear, fragmented organisation can also be the result of writing devices, like flashbacks and flashforwards, which are highly prevalent in YA fiction of the last decades, too (see *ibid.*). Moreover, nonlinearity can also be established through the combination of multiple genres. Interestingly, many

^{4 4} See Dresang & McClelland 164; Gillis 52; Glasgow 43-45; Koss 74; see Koss & Teale 568.

contemporary authors tend to break with the traditional organisation of novels by combining various genres, or by inserting text fragments, such as poems, song lyrics or visuals into a coherent narrative (see Glasgow 42; Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 69). In her study on the radical developments of YA fiction, Glasgow (42) particularly emphasises the wide-spread presence of visuals depicted alongside verbal texts. While constituting a further prevalent feature that contributes to a work's structural fragmentation, the implementation of visuals into YA literature adds important additional layers of meaning (ibid.). In her contribution, Glasgow uses Dresang's term of 'digital age books' for referring to narratives that exploit some of the trends outlined in this section. She argues that books exhibiting these features essentially mirror the nature of the texts of the digitalised world, which force readers to combine different types of textual, visual and audiovisual information into a coherent whole (ibid.). In fact, this trend poses very relevant challenges to young readers, which Gillis promotes as follows: "If adolescence is all about finding ones way – sorting through cacophony for a sense of meaning, an identity, a truth - perhaps its reality is best represented in multivoice or multigenre styles" (52).

By offering highly diversified and fragmented YA narratives, the literary trends, which have been occurring in YA literature since the last few decades, underline once more that the assumed simplification of syntax and narrative structure in YA literature, as established in 3.1, becomes severely challenged by these considerably complex tendencies. Interestingly, a range of these innovations has been explicitly identified to represent typically postmodern influences (see Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 65; Puhr 64; Yearwood 50). This connection between late literary trends and the influence of postmodernism will now be more firmly established within the next part of the thesis. Considering the prevalence of these significantly challenging experimental features, I would like to conclude that adolescent literature has eventually become a prominent place for exploiting aspects of postmodernism. This phenomenon should now be more clearly illustrated on the basis of the following analysis of prevalent generic features of the postmodern in the selected postmodern texts, *Monster* and *After the First Death*.

4. Postmodernism in *Monster* and *After the First Death*

In the survey of the postmodern movement and of the late trends in YA literature, it has been established that the genre exhibits clear tendencies to embrace postmodernism. By means of an in-depth analysis of the postmodern traits inherent in Walter Dean Myers' *Monster* and Robert Cormier's *After the First Death*, the following chapter is supposed to precisely illustrate the nature of postmodern fiction. Both YA novels entail a great variety of very prominent postmodern characteristics on the level of form and content. However, as indicated earlier, I chose to focus only on the most prevalent elements, which are apparent in both novels and which contribute most substantially to its postmodern atmosphere. Before turning to the analysis of these experimental works, however, I will briefly introduce the novels.

4.1 Introducing *Monster* and *After the First Death*

Walter Dean Myers' *Monster*, which has also been defined as a "complex high-stakes moral drama" (see Schneider 20), features a sixteen-year-old African-American teenager, Steve Harmon, who is accused of felony murder due to his minor role as a lookout in the robbery of a drugstore, which eventually led to the shopkeeper's death. In the novel the protagonist decides to record his trial in the format of a film script. While proving deep insights into his psychological state of mind, his fears and self-doubts are depicted within highly personal and emotional diary entries. Interestingly, these entries do not just present Steve Harmon's personal stance on the crime and his dreadful experiences in court; they primarily shed light on his desperate search for his own identity. Even though the precise documentation of the court proceedings in the form of a screenplay might suggest that the novel is primarily concerned with Steve's verdict, it turns out that over the course of the novel the protagonist's quests for his self as well as the numerous considerations of his moral responsibility clearly prevail.

Robert Cormier's structurally highly complex novel *After the First Death* also revolves around a crime, which is again recounted from diverse perspectives. In the novel, a school bus full of children is hijacked by terrorists, who try to get across several demands for reasons of liberating their homeland. The ruthless and brutal proceedings occurring on the bus as well as the incredible terror experienced by the

captives are mainly explored through the perspective of the young female bus driver, Kate, and the junior terrorist, Miro, whose task of killing the bus driver constitutes a formal precondition for being accepted as a fully valid member of the terrorist gang. The second strand of the story is represented through several journal entries of Ben Marchand, son of a general from the anti-terrorism institution called Inner Delta, to which the terrorists' demands are directed. In these journal entries, he reflects on his involvement in the hijacking in retrospect. As it turns out towards the end of the novel, Ben's role in the terrorist event was to deliver a stone to the place of the hijacking, where he eventually got severely tortured and shot. The final diary entries represent Ben's father's viewpoint, his justifications for abusing his own son as well as the entire background to the terrorist event. These accounts eventually end in an imaginary conversation between the father and his dead son, who has committed suicide after his fatal experiences. Yet, I would like to point out from the beginning onwards that this interpretation constitutes only one possible reading of the novel; an alternative one will be additionally presented throughout this chapter. Thus, in accordance with postmodernists' rejection of a single truth, Cormier's highly ambiguous work is open to a multitude of interpretations. Moreover, the novel thereby emphasises the postmodern belief in the multiplicity of meanings.

4.2 Analysis of postmodern features

The following analysis of the selected novels is aimed at identifying the traces of postmodernism inherent in *Monster* and *After the First Death*, which will essentially mirror several of the literary trends in late YA literature, as discussed in 3.2. The analysis of the selected YA novels will not just demonstrate in what ways and to what extent postmodernism is represented in adolescent fiction, but also what challenges are thereby presented to young readers. For this purpose, a distinction between form-related and content-related features will be made.

4.2.1 Form-related features

4.2.1.1 Genre-eclecticism

Genre-eclecticism is considered as one of the most distinctive features of postmodern literature, which also constitutes the most striking aspect of the chosen novels' formats (see Groenke & Youngquist 506; Knickerbocker & Brueggemen 69). As the term suggests, genre-eclecticism refers to the mixture of multiple genres within one work (see Nikoajeva qtd. in Knickerbocker & Brueggemen 69). Following Groenke & Youngquist (506), this feature represents postmodernists' scepticism towards any kind of fixity. Thus, similarly to the denial of fixed identities, postmodernism also denies fixed notions of texts (ibid.). Interestingly, this feature has already been identified as a prominent trend on the YA literature market of the last few decades and will now be demonstrated by the examples of the selected primary texts.

In *Monster* the story of Steve Harmon's trial over his involvement in the robbery of a drugstore is presented within two different genres. While the court proceedings are documented in form of a film script written by the protagonist during the trial, Steve's inner feelings of fear, doubt and utter despair are reflected within numerous personal diary entries (see Engles & Kory, "Incarceration" 54; Yearwood 52). In these diary entries Steve Harmon portrays himself as a remarkably soft and sensitive young man, who admits to frequently cry because of his dire circumstances. In fact, the representation of himself as a highly sensitive person is established straight from the beginning. The novel starts with the first entry of his diary, stating that "[t]he best time to cry is at night, when the lights are out and someone is being beaten up and screaming for help" (Myers 1). Contrary to the personal diary entries, the screenplay presents the court proceedings in a rather neutral way, depicting the actual conversations as they took place during the trial. What is particularly interesting about the film script is the high degree of expertise Steve shows in the field of film studies. Prior to each scene detailed instructions about filming techniques, camera angle, setting and cuts are provided, which are described by means of technical terms and abbreviations, such as "[l]ong shot (LS)" (Myers 20), "[f]ade in" (Myers 65) and "MS" for mid-shot (Myers 67). This considerably detailed filmic description of each scene yields a very accurate and precise picture of what the actual film will be like.

As several interviews with the author reveal, Myers' choice of this format was influenced by an interesting insight he had gained while conducting interviews with prisoners. In these conversations he observed a clear tendency among prisoners to distance themselves from their criminal behaviour by representing themselves as separate identities who are not related to the crime (see Rochman 1101; Myers, "Escalating Offenses" 701). In terms of language, this separation was achieved by the use of the passive voice when referring to the crime, whereas the active voice was used when talking about their personality (see Miller, Parker & Myers 688; Myers, "Escalating Offenses" 701; Rochman 1101). Likewise, a similar pattern can be identified in Myers' novel. In his journal Steve portrays himself as an innocent and sensitive boy, for which purpose he uses the first-person pronoun 'I'. The format of the film script, by contrast, enables him to create a certain distance to the crime by representing himself as someone who is performing a role in a film (see Groenke & Youngquist 506; Latrobe & Hutcherson 71; Rochman 1101). In fact, Steve even openly admits this sense of separation, arguing, "[i]t's funny, when I am sitting in the courtroom I don't feel like I am involved in the case" (Myers 97). Considering the underlying reason for using this particular format, the genre-eclecticism inherent in the novel becomes even more interesting.

Apart from the combination of the journal entries and the screenplay, the genre-eclecticism apparent in *Monster* gets additionally enhanced through the insertion of mug shots and both clear as well as blurred photographs of the protagonist in jail, depicting him during the holdup, during his arrest as well as in liberty (see Groenke & Youngquist 507). Apart from that, also a drawing of the final courtroom scene is embedded at the end of the novel. These visual representations, which accompany the text of Myers' novel are of great importance in terms of providing additional information about the robbery as well as about the protagonist. However, at the same time, they require an additional reading skill, namely the decoding of images (see Yearwood 53). Relating the combination of both visual and verbal texts to the current reading demands of our postmodern world (see chapter 3.2.), I would suggest that *Monster* offers excellent opportunities for developing necessary reading skills. In their analysis of the "interplay between word and image" in *Monster*, which Groenke & Youngquist (507) identify as a further distinct characteristic of postmodern literature, they refer to Serafini, who emphasises that verbal and visual representations often

express contradictory information, as it is also the case in *Monster*(54). According to Serafini (57), an “additional layer of meaning” is conveyed by synthesising these different pieces of information and types of representational modes. As far as the novel under discussion is concerned, the interplay of text and images undoubtedly increases the complexity of Myers’ work, which is, however, of great value, considering today’s literacy requirements, which will be more extensively discussed in 5.2 and 5.3.

Finally, I want to point out that genre-eclecticism also refers to the experimentation with typography and layout (see Knickerbocker & Brueggemen 69). In fact, *Monster* exhibits a high degree of typographic variation (see Bean & Harper 22). To illustrate, the screenplay is written in a rather common typewritten font, whereas Steve’s journal entries represent his own handwriting, including changes in font size, handwritten marginalia, like crossed-out words, underlined words and multiple expression marks, which serve as a means of emphasis, as in the following example: “I hate, hate, hate this place!!” (Myers 46). Bean & Harper (22) argue that these font changes underline the juxtaposition of two dominant spheres, between which Steve constantly switches. More specifically, they suggest that the private space established through his handwritten journal allows him to provide deep insights into his inner feelings, while in the public sphere, which is represented by the transcript of the typewritten court proceedings, his emotional involvement would be inappropriate. This is also mirrored in the continuous use of a rather neutral font. A further variation of typography can be identified within the various description of filming techniques, camera angles and cuts, for which a different font is used as well. Above that, at the beginning and at the end of the film script, the author graphically visualises the rolling down of film credentials over the screen. These credentials, which provide information about the producer, director, characters and the place of the film set, including a brief teaser, exactly mirror the beginning and end of an actual film.

Compared to Myers, who exploits the entire range of features identified with genre-eclecticism, Cormier only makes use of the mixture of various genres or rather of various narrative modes. More precisely speaking, *After the First Death* consists of journal entries, a third-person narrative as well as of a dialogue. A closer consideration of the novel’s structure reveals, however, that, as far as the novel’s

eclectic nature is concerned, in *After the First Death* eclecticism rather concerns the novel's narrative modes, combining first-person narratives with the third-person narrative about the hijacking as well as with the depiction of a surreal conversation in a dialogic structure. As far as the combination of these narrative modes is concerned, their distribution is worth considering, too. While the even-numbered chapters relate the event of the terrorists' hijacking of the school bus, whose interesting alteration of perspectives will be examined later, the odd-numbered chapters represent first-person narrative journal entries written by Ben Marchand and, in the second half of the novel, by General Marchand after the hijacking has taken place (see Myszor 80). Interestingly, the penultimate chapter, eleven, constitutes a deviation from these two narrative modes. Although it is difficult to strictly categorise the rather confusing chapter into a specific subgenre, it is worth mentioning that it breaks with the first-person narrative situation of the remaining odd-numbered chapters by presenting an imaginary conversation between Ben Marchand and his father (see De Luca 142). The imaginary conversation, in which their thoughts are depicted verbatim, revolves around General Marchand's struggle to ask his son for forgiveness, for which reason he constantly conjures up the presence of his deceased son. In my opinion, this utterly confusing conversation must be spiritual, as the protagonist has already committed suicide at that time, to which his suicidal thoughts have alluded from the beginning onwards:

I do not consider this [writing] as a suicide note either. Or even a prelude to one. When the time comes to perform the act, I will do it without any prelude or prologue, walk up River Road [...] [to] Brimmier's Bridge and let myself plummet to the river bed below. (Cormier 6)

As has been shown, the typically postmodern use of genre-eclecticism as well as the mixture of various narrative modes is represented in both novels under discussion. Apart from its unique format, this feature has a considerable impact on the use of perspectives, which will be the next point of investigation in my analysis.

4.2.1.2 Multiplicity of perspectives

As already indicated above, the combination of various genres is closely linked with the depiction of multiple perspectives (see Koss 75; Koss & Teale 570). The use of multiperspectivity in fiction does not just constitute one of the late trends in YA

fiction,⁵ but also a further prominent property of postmodern literature (see Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 69). Gillis examines the remarkable effect of multiperspectivity on the plot development, comparing “[t]he quick jumps from perspective to perspective” with “a cinematic montage, creating atmosphere, revealing relationships, and building tension” (53). Having this impact in mind, I am going to examine how the various narratives presented through the adoption of multiple perspectives in the primary texts both complement and contradict each other, thereby enhancing the novels’ complexity as well as their suspense (see Gillis 56; Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 69; Koss 77). Above that, I would like to refer to Glasgow at this point, who claims that the use of multiple perspectives also leads to the empowerment of “previously unheard voices” (45). The novels under discussion, for instance, shed light on the perspective of a black protagonist as well as of a terrorist, which are both perspectives that have been rarely presented in earlier literature. Relating these insights to Lyotard’s theory, I would argue that the representation of their perspectives represents a break with authoritarian grand-narratives by giving voice to social groups which were usually silenced or considered as ‘taboo-subjects’ in literature. Moreover, the depiction of various stances to one story can be interpreted as a result of the postmodern disbelief in a single truth (see Sim 3).

While Walter Dean Myers’ *Monster* makes use of a variety of perspectives, the technique is deployed in a rather straightforward way. Steve Harmon’s journal entries purely present his point of view in a very immediate and direct manner, providing readers with a very deep insight into the protagonist’s inner feelings and mindset (see Latrobe & Hutcherson 71; Rochman 1101). Above that, the journal presents readers with Steve’s own version of the story, in other words, with an account of the events from first-hand experience. Given the very personal account of his story, it is, however, important to question the validity of his story as well as the reliability of himself as a narrator, which will be examined throughout the analysis (see Schneider 20; Yearwood 52). In fact, his reliability remains rather questionable due to several inconsistencies. Apart from Steve’s perspective, the screenplay offers a multitude of additional viewpoints, including those of people involved in the robbery, relatives and acquaintances of the accused as well as the viewpoints of the prosecutor and of the

⁵ See Gillis 52; Head 28; Koss 73; Koss & Teale 568; Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 69.

attorneys. In the screenplay the change of perspectives is clearly marked by the indication of the person's name speaking. Therefore, the identification of the multiple shifts of viewpoints should not constitute any difficulties to young readers. What is more challenging, however, is that the pieces of information provided by various perspectives often do not comply with one another. Indeed, they frequently provide contradictory information about Steve's involvement in the robbery, which, on top of that, also diverge from Steve's personal notes (see Yearwood 52). For instance, while one witness, Lorelle Henry, declares not to have seen Steve Harmon in the drugstore at the time of the robbery, who also rejects his involvement during the trial, his notes state the contrary, admitting that he "walked into the drugstore to look for some mints, and then [...] went out" (Myers 140) (*ibid.*). This statement is eventually verified by a photograph taken by the security camera of the store accompanied by Steve's handwritten notes "What was I doing?" (Myers 220) (see Yearwood 52), which confirms his presence in the shop. Considering these contradictions established through the multiplicity of perspectives, I would like to refer to Knickerbocker & Brueggeman's argument that "multiple voices [can] provide a heightened mystery as the reader must determine the veracity of each voice" (69), which definitely applies to Myers' *Monster*. Without doubt, the multiplicity of perspectives poses additional challenges to young readers, which will be outlined more explicitly within the discussion of co-authoring processes.

Turning to Robert Cormier's *After the First Death*, one can identify a highly sophisticated alteration of perspectives, which has been intensively analysed by Myszor (80-86). As far as the more easily accessible first-person narratives presented in the journal entries are concerned, the only noteworthy aspect is the shift of perspectives from Ben's to his father's viewpoint. While chapters 1, 3 and 5 represent Ben's writing, chapters 7 and 9 are written by General Marchand as a response to his son (*ibid.*, 80). This shift of perspectives is of symbolic importance, as it marks Ben's suicide, the protagonist has apparently committed between the events of chapters 5 and 7 (*ibid.*). The third-person narratives of the even-numbered chapters, by contrast, exhibit a considerably more complex variation of perspectives. In these chapters, the events on the bus are mainly related through the perspective of Miro and Kate, being alternated at regular intervals (*ibid.*). Myszor (82) points out that, in Genette's terms, Miro and Kate act as the primary "focalisers" of the story,

meaning that “the events of the story [are] witnessed within the story’s world from the constrained perspective of a single character” (*Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 98). Gillis (53), by contrast, refers to this narrative technique as an “over-the-shoulder narrative,” which she strongly associates with Robert Cormier’s writing in general. As an example, Kate’s realisation of her own fate is reported by a third-person narrator, who, however, adopts the limited perspective of the female bus driver:

When Kate heard the sound of the helicopter, she has been sitting despondently on the driver’s seat [...]. She knew she was doomed. She had known it the moment she saw them put on the masks (Cormier 55).

Interestingly, the alternating pattern between Kate’s and Miro’s perspective is interrupted when the perception of two children, Raymond (chapter 6) and Monique (chapter 8), are being revealed (see Myszor 84). The adoption of their perspectives is particularly worth considering not just due to the highly interesting insights into the mindset of the child victims provided, but also due to the passages’ narrative structure. While both passages shed light on the children’s terrified emotional state during the hijacking, a clear contrast between the two sexes can be observed (*ibid.*, 84). Despite his natural fear of the hijackers and his considerably sensitive personality, Raymond represents male strength, courage and resistance by refusing to take the doped candy in order to stay alert and help Kate, whereas Monique clearly personifies the stereotypical female anxiety, helplessness and dependence on others. Contrary to Raymond, she desperately wishes her parents to help her: “She wanted her daddy to stop the man. She wanted her mummy to stop him, too” (Cormier 133). Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the narrative style of both focalisations undergoes considerable changes, becoming more “childlike,” as Myszor (85) puts it. In more concrete terms, the sentences are clearly shorter than in the focalisation of Miro and Kate, while the syntactic structures are simpler. Apart from that, childlike descriptions are used, such as “the big man” (Cormier 133) and “the bad men” (Cormier 94). Without doubt, the depiction of the children’s voices does not just contribute to the diversity and complexity of the novel’s narrative situation, it equally emphasises the multiplicity of discourses of the postmodern era.

Generally, the focalisation of Miro and Kate covers several pages, being usually explicitly introduced by remarks, such as “Miro’s assignment was to kill the driver” (Cormier 16) and “[s]he was furious with herself” (Cormier 28), which indicate the shift of perspective (see Myszor 85). However, complicating matters, Kate’s viewpoint

is sometimes also interrupted by brief interjections of Miro's consciousness and vice versa (ibid., 82). The shift of perspectives eventually reaches the climax of complexity in chapter 6 and occasionally in chapters 8 and 10, where Kate's and Miro's viewpoints alternate in a highly rapid manner (ibid., 83). Myszor (83) compares this pattern with the so-called cross-cutting technique in filming, suggesting that, as a result, the novel's tension is considerably increased. For instance, in the scene in which Kate tries to seduce Miro, a cross-cutting of perspectives occurs several times. Shortly after Kate's thoughts are narrated (e.g. "Maybe it hurt him to talk about his parents [...] [m]aybe her instincts were correct [...] and she was on the right track" (Cormier 109)), they are replaced by Miro's viewpoints (e.g. "Miro blushed with pleasure. But like so many things there was pain in the pleasure. The girl's statement also made him think again of Aniel" (Cormier 109)).

As has been shown, both novels, exhibit the use of numerous perspectives, albeit to a varying degree of complexity. As a consequence, a highly vivid and exciting presentation of the story from various angles is provided, which requires a particularly careful readership.

4.2.1.3 Nonlinearity

Nonlinearity constitutes the final form-related postmodern element apparent in both selected novels (see Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 68), which I would like to discuss within my thesis. Knickerbocker & Brueggeman explain that "nonlinearity means that the narrative text is interrupted or veers in a different direction rather than following a straightforward series of events" (68). As will be demonstrated, both *Monster* and *After the First Death* include several disruptive features, which contribute to the temporal distortion and the nonlinear presentation of events.

The most evident interruption of the plot in *Monster* is created through the insertion of Steve Harmon's diary entries. Although one might argue that these entries should not be considered as interruptions, I would suggest that they still represent one means by which the underlying chronology of the trial is impeded. More importantly, however, there are nine instances of flashbacks, which interrupt the court proceedings documented in Steve's film script even more severely (see Groenke & Youngquist 506). Even though these flashbacks are marked as separate scenes in the

screenplay through the indication of a film cut, they create considerable confusion, as they introduce an event that happened earlier in the past without explicitly indicating the switch further back into the past. Generally, flashbacks are very useful tools for providing background information about a story and its characters, as they shed light on their behaviour in scenes that are temporally unrelated to the actual plot (ibid., 507). However, rather than providing a clearer image of the protagonist, the flashbacks in *Monster* enhance the confusion and uncertainty of the novel. As Groenke & Youngquist put it, the flashbacks “act recursively in the novel, drawing readers deeper into doubt and uncertainty rather than toward near conclusions” (507). The irritating effect of the flashbacks in *Monster* results from the presentation of very contradictory pieces of information about Steve, which constantly destroy readers’ efforts in ascribing one identity to the protagonist (ibid.). For instance, one flashback shows Steve as a diligent and ambitious student in a film class (see Myers 19), whereas another one reveals Steve’s acquaintance with King, a participant of the robbery, while introducing Steve to the plans for the holdup (see Myers 149-151). Furthermore, several other flashbacks present newscasts about the robbery, to which the protagonist reacts in “absolute shock” when seeing them on TV for the first time (Myers 121). In fact, these flashbacks provide information that stays in stark contrast to the innocence Steve asserts both in his journal as well as in court.

Likewise, nonlinearity is a prevalent feature in *After the First Death*. What is most striking about the novel’s nonlinearity is that the two basic strands of narratives, the events on the bus in the even chapters and Ben’s narration in the journal presented in the odd chapters, take place at different times. Yet, readers are constantly reminded of the temporal shift of the events by means of numerous references to the past event on the bridge (e.g. “My father is scheduled to visit me today. His first visit since the Bus and the bridge last summer “ (Cormier 59), “I wondered how much she knew about what happened on the bridge” (Cormier 7)).

Especially in Ben’s journal entries, the establishment of a chronological order is impeded by frequent shifts in time, switching from the past to the present as well as to the future, (see Myszor 86). For instance, in chapter one Ben writes about his present perceptions while writing the journal entry until he abruptly switches from the present to a recent past event, his mother’s visit. At the same time, he also inserts a

flashback of the scene on the bridge, which is explained only at a later stage (ibid.). As this example illustrates, various consecutive past events are narrated in a random order without providing any indications regarding the order of the actual happening. Similarly, chapters seven and nine, General Marchand's first-person narratives, consist to a large degree of lengthy flashbacks (ibid., 87). Apart from that, also in the third-person narratives, extensive digressions, mostly in form of flashbacks, also disrupt the focalised narration. These digressions provide deep insights into the characters Kate and Miro while relating (often trivial) issues, which lack a strong connection to the actual event. For instance, on page 59 Kate's performance in a drama club is related in great detail after mentioning her growing panic and desire to escape from the bus.

As has been shown, both novels exhibit a considerable degree of nonlinearity, albeit to a varying extent and complexity. Without doubt, the disruption of linearity represents a central element in both novels, which clearly contributes to the novels' complexity and the ambivalence of its content (see Myszor 86). As far as the postmodern atmosphere established is concerned, I would argue that the highly complex and disturbing narrative situation mirrors the confusion and chaos that permeates postmodern times (see Ma 1339).

4.2.2 Content-related features

After a thorough consideration of the form-related features of postmodernism inherent in the YA novels under discussion, I am now going to demonstrate that the novels also express typically postmodern ideas on the level of content. By exploring the search for one's identity, by exploiting metafictional references as well as by conveying a great degree of uncertainty and a blurred image of reality, the novels address concerns of the postmodern world, which are of great relevance for today's adolescents.

4.2.2.1 Ontological questions

Identity development has always had an important status in children's and YA literature and constitutes a major concern of postmodern YA fiction, too (see Groenke

& Youngquist 506; Kullmann 34; Yearwood 53). In her analysis of three postmodern YA works, Yearwood (50) identifies the postmodernist preoccupation with the self while relating her findings to Mc Hale's theory of postmodern fiction, in which he reports a shift of concerns from an epistemological nature in modernist fiction to ontological ones in postmodern fiction (see McHale 9-10). In other words, McHale suggests that postmodern fiction particularly addresses questions about the self, more precisely, about the human being, his or her existence and role in the world (10) as well as the desire to comprehend one's past (see Yearwood 52). Above that, he argues that the majority of postmodernist formal characteristics, as introduced in 4.2.2.1, reinforce and mirror these current ontological concerns. More specifically, he is of the opinion that the formal features are ideally suited for the examination of postmodern ontological concerns (see McHale 10). Likewise, also Yearwood (51) claims that the unique nature of postmodern literature brilliantly lends itself to the exploration of the self as well as of the processes of self-fashioning. Based on these insights, I am going to closely examine how this quest as well as the postmodern concept of identity is addressed in both *Monster* and *After the First Death* and mirrored in the novels' postmodern structure. Before turning to the analysis, I want to clarify that the concept of the self has undergone remarkable changes throughout time. Contrary to modernists' belief in a coherent and stable identity, the postmodern self is considered as a dynamic, unstable and fragmented concept, consisting of multiple selves that are constantly being shaped and modified by the individual (see Abrudan 23). Taking this new conception of the self into account, I will illustrate Mc Hale's and Yearwood's argument more clearly within my subsequent analysis.

In Myers' novel, the protagonist Steve Harmon is obsessed with finding out who he really is, which is severely aggravated by the several racist perceptions of his fellow human beings, with which he gets constantly confronted (see Engles & Kory, "The White Gaze" 56; Yearwood 53). Although racial relations do not constitute postmodern concerns as such, they represent one decisive factor contributing to Steve's ontological search (see Engles & Kory, "The White Gaze" 49; Engles & Kory, "Incarceration" 55). Considering the given circumstances, Steve Harmon's imprisonment and status as a suspect of felony murder as well as the contradictory versions of his identity, it can be observed from the beginning onwards that these conditions cause him to question his actual identity and his place in society (see

Engles & Kory, "The White Gaze" 50). In his attempt to acquire a better understanding of himself and of his past, the novel exhibits a variety of examples representing his ontological quest (see Yearwood 52-53). Engles & Kory go even further in referring to Steve's preoccupation with his identity as a "full-blown Identity crisis" ("The White Gaze" 49). To illustrate, from the beginning onwards, Steve demonstrates a considerable degree of uncertainty towards his own self. He states, "[w]hen I look into the small rectangle, I see a face looking back at me but I don't recognize it" (Myers 1). Moreover, he also fills one page of his screenplay with the handwritten words "Monster", which encourages his attorney, Mrs O'Brien, to alert him of the necessity of believing in oneself (see Myers 10). As these examples demonstrate, Steve obviously does neither have a clear conception of, nor a grounded belief in himself. This can be supported by various other instances of self-doubts, in which he openly admits that he is uncertain as to who he is and whether he is "fooling himself" (Myers 148, 270).

Even after the trial, Steve seems to be still preoccupied with the quest for his true identity (see Engles & Kory, "Incarceration" 55). For this reason, he has started producing films about himself. The protagonist explains in his journal, "I want to know who I am. [...]. I want to look at myself a thousand times to look for one true image" (Myers 281). As Yearwood (52) sees it, Steve practices a way of "self-fashioning" in his movies, "tell[ing] the camera who [he is]" (Myers 279). What severely aggravates readers' attribution of a coherent self to the protagonist are the multiple and contradictory images of the protagonist, which are created by individual testimonies, flashbacks and Steve's diary notes. On the one hand, he is presented as a dedicated student, a caring brother and sensitive son, and on the other hand, he is shown to be acquainted with criminal people from the neighbourhood (see Groenke & Youngquist 506). A further dominant image of Steve is conveyed through the wide-spread social prejudices of black men as being inclined to criminal behaviour (see Engles & Kory, "The White Gaze" 50; Groenke & Youngquist 506), which will be further investigated in section 6. As the various images of the protagonist mentioned above indicate, Steve Harmon clearly conforms to the concept of the postmodern identity. He does not just have one single and coherent identity. his self, rather, consists of multiple, inconsistent and unstable facets, which are manipulated by his practices of self-fashioning. Thus, his desire to find a "true" and stable image of himself, as expressed

in the novel, cannot be fulfilled according to the postmodern conception of identity (see Abrudan 23).

Taking the multifaceted nature of his identity into account, I want to emphasise that Steve's "ontological maze" (Yearwood 52) is severely influenced by the perception of others. Indeed, he pays much attention to what others, particularly his parents and his attorney, think of him (see Engles & Kory, "Incarceration" 55). What especially bothers Steve is to appear innocent to his attorney, who seems to be rather doubtful about that. At one point, Steve powerfully expresses this concern as follows: "I wanted to open my shirt and tell her to look into my heart to see who I really was" (Myers 92). Steve's preoccupation with his image upheld by other people reaches its climax at the very end of the novel, where Steve wonders what his attorney thinks of him when coldly turning away after the announcement of the verdict (see Engles & Kory, "Incarceration" 55).

Thus, as has been shown, not just the readers are confronted with a variety of images of Steve, also the protagonist himself ponders about his split identity and the racial discourse, which contributes to the destabilisation of his self. As is typical for postmodern fiction, the protagonist is, indeed, unable to find a unified self. The ontological question is thereby left unresolved and open for various interpretations (see Groenke & Youngquist 506).

Applying these insights to Cormier's work, similar ontological questions can be identified in *After the First Death*. In fact, ontological concerns are most explicitly addressed by Ben Marchand, who appears to have a considerably unstable identity. His diary entries include various statements that express severe self-doubts about his actual existence. To illustrate, at the beginning Ben reflects on a short encounter with colleagues, after which he "feels invisible again", adding that he even "looked to see if [he] left footprints behind [him] in the snow" (Cormier 11). Moreover, Ben introduces himself in a very exceptional and morbid manner, stating, "I am a skeleton rattling my bones, a ghost laughing hollow up the sleeves of my shroud, a scarecrow whose straw is soaked with blood" (Cormier 10). As these examples demonstrate, Ben's conception of himself is highly unusual, exhibiting a great sense of uncertainty as well as a considerable mistrust in his own proper identity and in his existence in general.

Contrary to Steve Harmon, Ben is even more severely preoccupied with his past. Throughout his entries, he tries to cope with his tragic experiences on the bridge he had to endure as a messenger of the secret service, which he never fully reveals to the readers in his notes. Yet, it becomes clear from the beginning onwards that Ben struggles incredibly hard to accept his past and to reconcile his identity. In fact, his encounter with the terrorists has damaged the young boy so strongly that he is convinced to commit suicide in the near future. In his notes, Ben continuously alludes to his suicidal thoughts, stating, “[I] do not want to do anything rash so soon after seeing [my father] because then he would blame himself” (Cormier 72). While reflecting on his past, Ben also frequently sheds light on his difficult relationship with his father, about whom he only knows little. As Ben’s father represents a key figure in the terrorist event, being the actual cause of Ben’s tragic experience, the revelation of his profession constitutes an important part in his query of the past as well. Apart from that, also Ben seems to be not just concerned about who he actually is and whether he exists (e.g. “Let us pause here for a second [...] for another kind of identification: where I am, who I am” (Cormier 80)), but also about how he is perceived by his father (see Cormier 81). Having examined various instances of Ben’s ontological concerns, I will reconsider them later within the discussion of an alternative interpretation of the story, which questions Ben’s actual existence and role as the writer of the journal entries as a whole.

Apart from Ben, also Kate and Miro express ontological questions about their identity and their past in the third-person narratives. Yet, they are less prevalent and significant to the plot. To illustrate, Miro realises at one point that he actually lacks a proper identity, having been attributed a pseudonym as well as a random birth date (see Cormier 113; DeLuca 141). In fact, Miro has no identity apart from his role as a terrorist (see DeLuca 140). He ponders about his mask, regarding it as a symbol of his lack of identity, realising that “[w]ithout the mask he was Miro Shantas, the boy without even a real name to identify him to the world. With the mask he was Miro Shantas, freedom fighter” (Cormier 38). Especially in chapter six, Miro is heavily engaged in recapitulating his past while reflecting on his childhood, the loss of his family and his education in the camp. Finally, also Kate seems to be aware of her fragmented and multifaceted identity, which incorporates “a lot of [Kate Forresters] mixed together,” instead of representing “simply one person” (Cormier 58).

Given the preoccupation with typically postmodern ontological questions addressed in both novels, I believe that the reception of the novels can contribute to a better understanding of the postmodern concept of fragmented identities, which are considered to be in a constant process of construction and modification, influenced by various discourses, performances and socio-cultural circumstances (see Abrudan 23). The awareness of this issue can eventually also have a beneficial impact on the adolescents' understanding of identity formation and, therefore, on the way they can refashion their own identities through respective performances (see Engles & Kory, "Incarnation" 55, 58). Apart from that, I agree with McHale's statement that the fragmented identities of postmodern fiction, as apparent in both selected novels, are nicely underlined by the fragmented structure of the narratives.

4.2.2.2 Blurring of fact and fiction

A closer look at the ontological maze apparent in both works under discussion reveals that the protagonists often experience a sense of uncertainty, as far as the reality of their existence and environment is concerned. This vagueness of reality is underlined by a so-called "blurring of fact and fiction," which can be observed at several points of the novels (see Yearwood 52). In fact, as will be shown below, the usually dividing line of fact and fiction becomes destabilised in various ways throughout *Monster* and *After the First Death*. Embedding this feature into a wider postmodern context, I would argue that it constitutes a clear reference to Baudrillard's theory of the world as a simulation, as introduced in section 2.3. In other words, a resemblance to several aspects of Baudrillard's conception of the world as a hyperreal state, in which people are confronted with sole representations, which they can hardly distinguish from reality (see Nicol, *Postmodern Fiction* 4-5), can also be identified in the selected primary texts.

Beginning with *Monster*, Steve constantly challenges the realness of his presence in jail, arguing that many aspects simply appear to be fake to him. In his journal, he points out that "[i]f your life outside was real, then everything in here is just the opposite" (Myers 3) and comes to the conclusion that "[in order] to get used to this I will have to give up what I think is real and take up something else" (Myers 4). His decision to abandon reality in order to cope with his experiences in prison leads him

to the arts of filmmaking. From the beginning onwards Steve compares his existence in court with the presence in a movie, claiming that in both environments one's existence feels unreal. He admits, "[s]ometimes I feel like I walked into the middle of a movie [...]. It is a strange movie with no beginning and no plot" (Myers 3). Even though writing his film script already helps Steve to distance himself from the crime and from reality, he additionally confronts himself with the blurring of fact and fiction within the production of actual films about himself, as soon as he is acquitted. However, the protagonist becomes almost lost in the production of his movie, as he perceives it to be more real than his actual life: "The movie is more real in so many ways than the life I am leading" (Myers 159). Yet, he is aware of his illusionary impression and reminds himself, "[n]o, that's not true. I just desperately wish this was only a movie" (Myers 159).

Taking a closer look at the implicit function of his screenplay, I would like to explain in how far Steve's transformation of his experiences in jail into a film script can be seen as an allusion to what Baudrillard has described in his theory of simulation. In my view, the screenplay clearly represents the role of contemporary media as a simulating device of reality, which conceals the distinction between fact and fiction, in other words, between reality and illusion (see Nicol, *Postmodern Fiction* 6). Steve's quote explicitly expresses the way he deals with his reality. By incorporating his experiences into his screenplay, he consciously drafts his own version of reality, which, as it is likely in films, remarkably deviates from the original. Thus, due to the fictional nature of films, the chosen medium ascribes a sense of fictionality to his actual experiences, from which he can thereby more easily distance himself. Moreover, the representation of his experiences in the form of the screenplay challenges the readers to differentiate between reality and illusion.

Apart from the movie's symbolic function of representing the "blurred fact/ fiction line" (see Yearwood 52), the destabilisation of fact and fiction is also achieved by the prevalence of contradictory pieces of information, by the imaginary scene in which Steve envisions his death penalty (ibid., 52-53), as well as by several metafictional comments of the narrator, in which the fictional world and the readers' world merge onto the same level (see Myszor 86), as I will further illustrate in the subsequent section.

In *After the First Death*, reality and fiction are most obviously blurred in chapter 11. As has already been outlined, the chapter represents a lengthy conversation between Ben and his father. It derives its “surreal” character from the fact that Ben has already committed suicide at this point (see De Luca 142). It is, therefore, very likely that the conversation only takes place in General Marchand’s mind. Taking these aspects into account, one can conclude that this chapter clearly constitutes an example in which the line between fiction and reality is considerably blurred.

Above that, similarly to Steve, also Ben strongly challenges his existence and the reality of his environment, stating, “[e]verything is fake out there; even Hollywood, which isn’t really Hollywood but a lot of other places. Just as I am fake, here, sitting at the typewriter” (Cormier 70). As this example suggests, Ben’s numerous metafictional comments clearly contribute to the vague distinction of what is real and what is fictitious. Similarly, also Kate reflects on her identity and realises that both various disguises and real facets fuse, between which it is rather difficult for her to differentiate (see Cormier 58).

The consideration of the blurring of fact and fiction leads me to outline an alternative interpretation of the novel, to which I have already alluded at the beginning of chapter four. In fact, this particular reading is heavily concerned with the merging of various levels of reality. According to this alternative interpretation, fact and fiction are most obviously blurred through the mixture of various levels of reality within the novel. More specifically speaking, instead of considering Ben’s first-person narratives as personal journal entries, they could be regarded as pure instances of hallucination of Ben’s father, who is institutionalised in the mysterious place “Castle”. This way of reading suggests that Ben is not alive anymore and that the entire first-person accounts are imaginary events that occur in Ben’s father’s mind, whereas the events on the bridge from the third-person narrative constitute the actual reality. Without doubt, this interpretation of the novel is very plausible, too, given the novel’s title and the intertextual reference to Dylan Thomas’ epigraph (“After the first death there is no other,” which I will discuss in more depth at a later stage. As the quote and the title suggest, it is also likely that Ben has already died after having been shot during his involvement in the hijacking as a messenger. However, it would still be wrong to automatically consider the title as a mere reference to Ben’s death, as the expression

“first death” is also often used in the novel for referring to Miro’s first murder, which is supposed to be accomplished by shooting the bus driver. What also supports this alternative interpretation are Ben’s numerous strange encounters with people, who cannot be strictly ascribed to either Ben’s or his father’s past. For instance, it remains unexplained whether Nettie Halversham, who is initially introduced as a young girl Ben has had a crush on, is, in fact, an acquaintance of Ben or of his father. Even, General Marchand seems to be unsure of this issue, asking himself, “[i]s it mine or yours?” (Cormier 200). Similarly, an old acquaintance of his father, Dean Albertson, seems to be present during Ben’s time at Castle as well. Interestingly, at the end, it is indicated, in addition, that his father mixes up Dean Albertson with a doctor. Undoubtedly, fiction and reality are blurred in this respect, too. Admittedly, these particularly weird encounters can only be satisfactorily explained to be part of General Marchand’s mere hallucinations.

Yet, the lengthy first-person accounts, which I initially defined as Ben’s journal entries, are of such great detail and of such a subjective nature and personal content that I cannot entirely agree with the second interpretation by regarding them purely as the father’s acts of imagination. Moreover, the numerous clear references to Ben’s suicide combined with his urge to leave and hide from his father enhance the probability that Ben has committed suicide, indeed, after having seen his father for the first time after the hijacking, rather than having died in the hijacking before. Above that, the passages of General Marchand’s first-person accounts entail various explicit references that Ben has actually written the letters after the terrorist event, which can be regarded as a piece of evidence of his actual presence and survival from the coma after the shooting. All in all, it has been shown that both interpretations can be supported by various arguments; none of them is entirely conclusive, though. Given the ambiguity regarding the plot of the novel and Ben’s existence and the exact point of time (“*And **then** I died*” [emphasis added] (Cormier 198, see De Luca 143) and reason of Ben’s death, it is indispensable to accept various different readings of *After the First Death*.

The blurring of fact and fiction has been established as a frequent pattern inherent in both novels. Given the inextricable link between this feature and Baudrillard’s postmodern theory of simulation, the novels prove to be highly successful in

conveying a characteristically postmodern atmosphere by addressing a major postmodern phenomenon. Moreover, the blurring of fact and fiction contributes to the playful character of the novel, which can be considered as a further typically postmodern feature (see Mayer 590). In fact, especially the mixture of the various levels of reality in *After the First Death* yield a considerable degree of playfulness to the text, leaving it unexplained what really happened. Similarly, also in *Monster* the main event, around which the novel revolves, remains mysterious, since it is never revealed whether Steve Harmon actually participated in the robbery of the drugstore. In this respect, the novel clearly exhibits a playful quality as well.

4.2.2.3 Metafictional references

As metafiction has already been introduced as a decisive factor triggering the blurring of fact and fiction, it should be further examined as another distinctive feature of postmodern literature (see Head 28; Nicol, *Postmodern Fiction* 35; Waugh 21-22). Self-reflexive writing challenges the possibility of a truthful representation of reality in fiction, which postmodernism rejects, as mentioned earlier (see Lewis 178). Although metafictional devices are strongly associated with contemporary writing, I want to point out that they have already been used in literary works at earlier times, albeit to a smaller extent (see Waugh 5). Patricia Waugh, who is considered as a key figure in the area of metafictional theory, defines metafiction as a form of “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (2). In other words, the self-conscious writing raises the readers’ awareness of the fictionality of the work by deliberately commenting on the construction processes of the fictional work and by emphasising the author’s role in these processes (ibid., 6). To put it simply, in metafictional works, the theory of fiction is investigated within the act of writing (ibid., 2).

Considering the selected primary texts under discussion, the use of metafiction is more extensively exploited in *After the First Death*. Particularly in the first-person narratives of the journal entries, Ben appears as a very self-conscious narrator (see Myszor 87). In fact, he inserts numerous comments in which he reflects on his writing process as well as on his role as a writer. For instance, Ben mentions, “[i] am typing this in the room at Castle and it’s beautiful here as I write this” (Cormier 6). To name

a further example, he indicates, “[i] am typing very slowly now, one word at a time [...]” (Cormier 50). Moreover, Ben continuously comments on the duration of his writing while explaining the use of asterisks, which are supposed to indicate the time span that has passed during writing the journal entries (see Cormier 11). What is most noteworthy to consider, however, is the established relationship to the readers by means of direct address, as in the following quote: “Don’t ask what I was doing those two and a half (more or less) hours. But I’ll tell you anyway” (Cormier 11). Within these comments Ben draws attention to the triangular relationship between the writer, the fictional work and the readers, which, following Knickerbocker & Bruggeman, “destroy[s] the audience’s suspension of disbelief” (68). This specific relationship is taken into account by Ben in a particularly bold, but equally hilarious way: “Who the hell are you anyway, out there looking over my shoulder as I write this?” (Cormier 15). All these metafictional examples, combined with the frequent insertion of comments by the overly obtrusive narrator Ben, contribute to the self-referential nature of *After the First Death* (see Myszor 87).

Even though the self-reflexive devices of Steve’s diary notes are not as prevalent and of a lesser relevance to the story than those in Ben’s journal, there are still several traces of metafiction in *Monster*, too. In fact, the passage in which Steve reflects on his idea of transforming his court experiences into a screenplay is clearly metafictional. This passage reads as follows:

Maybe I could make my own movie. I could write it out and play it in my head. [...] The film will be the story of my life. No, not my life, but of this experience. I will write it down in the notebook they let me keep. I’ll call it what the lady who is the prosecutor called me. *Monster*. (Myers 4-5)

Although Steve Harmon’s personal story, which the protagonist is going to rewrite into a film script, is assumed to be based on real events, the quote stresses the fictionality of the screenplay, considering Steve’s involvement as an author in choosing the medium, the title and the scope of his movie. Moreover, within his journal, Steve Harmon also openly comments on selected scenes (e.g. “I like the last scene in the movie” (Myers 60)), on its construction processes (e.g. “I keep editing the movie, making the scenes right.” (Myers 271)) as well as on the therapeutic effect of writing the movie (e.g. “I looked over the movie again. I need it more and more” (Myers 158)).

Apart from that, as McCallum suggests, marginalia and footnotes, of which plenty can be found in *Monster*, increase the metafictional character of the novel by emphasising the materiality of the text (see Mc Callum 105). Examples thereof are the handwritten crossed-out words “Monster” on page 24 and the handwritten question “What was I doing?” on page 220.

The examination of these examples has shown that the metafictional references do not just occur more rarely in *Monster*, but that they are also of a different nature compared to those in *After the First Death*. Contrary to Ben’s metafictional references in his journal, Steve Harmon does not reflect on the writing process of his diary entries itself, but rather inserts metareferential comments on the construction of another textual medium, the screenplay, which constitutes the second genre of the novel. The metafictional elements, therefore, relate to the production of a movie, which is rather uncommon in metafictional writing. Similarly to the other postmodern features analysed above, these metafictional elements establish a distance between the readers and the text and thereby require a more active engagement of the readers, as will be illustrated in the final section of this chapter.

4.2.2.4 Indeterminacy

Throughout the analysis of the selected novels, several examples have already been provided which exhibit a substantial degree of indeterminacy. Taking into account the prevalence of indeterminacy in postmodern works, I chose to examine indeterminacy as a further intrinsic property of postmodern fiction within my analysis (see Ma 1340). While referring to Ian Hassab’s postmodern theory and conception of ‘indeterminacy’, Ma (1340) outlines that several concepts are entailed within the notion of indeterminacy, such as pluralism, ambiguity and discontinuity. In this section, I am going to investigate how indeterminacy is apparent in the novels’ themes, characters and plot, which Ma introduces as the major categories affected (1340). However, as I have already commented on some examples of indeterminacy and uncertainty throughout the discussion of form-related postmodern features, I will only give a brief overview of the feature’s distribution in the primary texts in order to provide a clear framework for the analysis of this postmodern property.

Following Ma (1340), postmodern works usually do not have a proper theme. She argues that the presence of a dominant theme would contradict the postmodern denial of a fixed centre or meaning and ignore the dominant postmodern disbelief in hierarchies within a literary work. Furthermore, Ma stresses that postmodern texts are not finished artefacts; they rather require readers to complete the text and to construct a coherent whole by filling gaps and incorporating their imagination while reading (1340). Even though the readers' active involvement is utterly essential for the reception of *Monster* and *After the First Death*, as will be outlined in the following section on co-authoring, I do not fully agree with Ma in claiming that the novels are devoid of a proper theme. In fact, as argued by other scholars, too, in *Monster* the theme of identity and race is clearly in the foreground,⁶ whereas in *After the First Death*, themes like political control, terrorism, patriotism and innocence are addressed (see DeLuca 140; MacLeod 77; Myszor 77-78). However, as the co-authoring processes are, indeed, a prerequisite for making sense of these themes, I would suggest that the novels' indeterminacy on the level of theme is simply not as dominant as in Ma's study of postmodern adult fiction. One reason might be that the novels under discussion are targeted at an adolescent readership, for which a milder version of indeterminacy is likely to be more accessible.

Ma's second category of indeterminacy concerns the characters of a work, which she considers as "vague figure[s]" (1340). In fact, this type of indeterminacy is remarkably more apparent in both novels under discussion. As extensively discussed in section 4.2.2.1, Steve's identity is characterised by a substantial degree of indeterminacy. Both the protagonist himself and other characters of the novel wonder whether Steve is an innocent person or a "monster". The indeterminacy of the protagonist's character is highlighted by means of his ontological maze as well as by his desperate search for his identity. Especially the open ending of the novel, which leaves it open to the readers to judge Steve's responsibility for his involvement in the holdup, leads to the climax of Steve's and the novel's indeterminacy in general (see Schneider 20; Yearwood 53). Similarly, also Ben has been established as a very indeterminate person, into whom the readers get very limited insights. His indeterminacy is continuously underlined by his frequent self-doubts and suicidal thoughts. Apart from that, his father's identity and profession are presented as vague and mysterious

⁶ See Engles & Kory, "The White Gaze" 49; Groenke & Youngquist 506; Schneider 21; Yearwood 52.

entities as well, about which even the family members hardly know anything concrete. As a result of the vague and partly contradictory character portrayals of the chosen novels, the readers are again highly engaged in making their own interpretation of the characters and, most importantly, in evaluating their personality and reliability (see Head 29; Yearwood 53).

A further aspect affected by postmodernist indeterminacy is the plot of postmodern novels (see Ma 1341). Its indeterminacy greatly results from the experimental and structures of the novels, which are characterised by discontinuity and fragmentation. Due to readers' active involvement in making sense of the disrupted narratives, the coherence of the plot is exclusively created by them, which might eventually lead to multiple versions of a story and, thus, to the indeterminacy of the plot. Although Ma considers language as a final aspect exhibiting the postmodern indeterminacy in postmodern fiction, the two novels under discussion do not exhibit distinctive features of linguistic indeterminacy or any type of language gamers. Still, Derrida's notion of the texts' multiplicity of meaning is inherent in both novels, considering the remarkable degree of choice the readers are given in interpreting the protagonist's moral stance in *Monster* as well as the radically different interpretations of *After the First Death*, as outlined above. (ibid., 1340)

Summing up, indeterminacy is a prevalent postmodern property that can also be identified in *Monster* and *After the First Death*, having an impact on the novels' characters, plots and also on the novels' themes. However, comparing the prevalence of indeterminacy in Cormier's and Myers' YA works with Ma's analysis of postmodern adult fiction, I can conclude that the YA works under discussion exploit indeterminacy to a considerably lesser and more accessible extent on most levels.

4.2.3 Co-authoring

Having identified the most prominent postmodern features in Cormier's and Myers' selected novels, their impact on the readers' involvement in the construction of meaning should be finally examined on more concrete examples within this section. In technical terms, readers' active engagement in meaning-making processes of postmodern texts is referred to as 'co-authoring' and is regarded as a further inherent

property of postmodern fiction (see Groenke & Youngquist 507; Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 67). Considering the variety of postmodern characteristics discussed on the basis of the selected primary texts, one can conclude that postmodern YA fiction confronts young readers with a substantial degree of structural complexity, chaos and uncertainty. In order to get the highly chaotic and complex narratives into order, it has been stressed, amongst others by Knickerbocker & Brueggeman (68), that readers are thereby forced to assume a more active role. The new requirements imposed on readers of postmodern YA narratives have been of considerably wide scholarly interest.⁷ Generally, there is a common belief among scholars that postmodern works yield remarkably more authority over the work to its readers than traditional texts do (see Gillis 56). In fact, when reading postmodern narratives, readers are required to pursue a variety of tasks in order to create a coherent meaning of the confusing text material. In Gillis' words, "readers become immersed in the action, they make inferences, decipher plot, and construct themes from what the voices show and tell" (56). As a consequence, the reception of such texts is no longer regarded as a purely receptive mode, but rather, as a significantly active and productive process (see Barthes 227). In fact, the concept of co-authoring entails far more than an active attention to complex features. Knickerbocker and Brueggeman stress readers' greater authority and scope of functions, enlisting tasks, "such as "mak[ing] connections or fill[ing] in the gaps an author has left" (67-68). Also, Groenke & Youngquist emphasise that "it's up to the readers to fill in gaps and pull together the discrete parts of narrative strands" (507). Taking into account these new tasks, Roland Barthes' influential conception of reading as a "writerly," rather than a "readerly" act" excellently demonstrates the changing nature of reading, which is required for the reception of postmodern texts (see Barthes 227; Nicol, *Postmodern Fiction* 221). Relating these insights to Myers' and Cormier's novels, I will show that co-authoring is, indeed, an indispensable element for constructing a coherent meaning of *Monster* and *After the First Death*. Above that, postmodern texts, such as the primary texts under discussion, indispensably require a greater tolerance for ambiguity and the respective competence for coping with indeterminacy.

Taking a closer look at *Monster*, one can observe that Myers has, indeed, inserted various gaps the readers are required to fill (see Groenke & Youngquist 507). These

⁷ See Gillis 56; Groenke & Youngquist 507; Head 31; Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 67-68; Koss 77; Koss & Teale 570; Myszor 88.

gaps primarily concern Steve's involvement in the robbery and, subsequently, also his own identity. As has already been pointed out, at the beginning of the novel, the epistemological question of whether Steve actually was a participant in the robbery clearly stays in the foreground (see Yearwood 52). However, very soon the focus shifts from the action to Steve's identity. This shift clearly alludes to McHale's notion of the dominant as introduced in 2.4, which undergoes a transformation from the modernist epistemological concern to the postmodern concern with ontological questions (see McHale 9-10; Yearwood 52). What really matters after this shift is the protagonist's search for his identity (see Yearwood 52). As far as the readers' role in co-authoring is concerned, it is their task to find answers to these questions by synthesising the information provided by various testimonies as well as by Steve's journal (see Gronke & Youngquist 507; Schneider 20). However, this task is considerably challenging due to the contradictory nature of the testimonies and their lack of certainty expressed throughout the court proceedings, which forces the readers to critically evaluate the trustworthiness of the individual voices (see Gronke & Youngquist 507; Yearwood 52). In fact, several witnesses admit that they are not entirely sure of what they saw or heard. For instance, Mrs Henry answers that she is "[n]ot that sure", adding, "It's only what I think I heard" (Myers 163). Similarly, Steve's statement at court reveals that he neither has precise memories of the day of the robbery, nor of previous conversations led with King (see Myers 225). As far as the robbery is concerned, he states the following in court: "I don't know exactly where I was when the robbery took place. [...]. When the detectives asked me where I was I couldn't even remember the day they were talking about" (Myers 231-232). Clearly, this considerable degree of uncertainty, combined with Steve's self-doubts, as discussed in 4.2.2.1, significantly challenge the reliability of the voices, in particular Steve Harmon's (see Yearwood 52). As a result, the readers are forced to evaluate the truthfulness of the various statements, which require them to act both as "critics" and creators" (Klinker qtd. in Koss & Teale 570). At the same time, the contradictory images of Steve Harmon projected by various characters of the novel point to the lack of the protagonist's "real" identity. As mentioned earlier, postmodernists do not believe in a coherent or fixed identity, but rather in the performativity of the self as a concept which is subjected to constant change by means of individual performances and discourses (see Abrudan 23).

The most important task that is left to the readers, however, results from the lack of a proper resolution. Although Steve's final diary entry reveals that he eventually gets pronounced innocent in court, it remains questionable whether his acquittal is, in fact, deserved. Given the absence of the actual verdict, the open ending of the novel leaves it open to the readers to evaluate Steve Harmon's guilt or innocence and, most importantly, his moral responsibility for his minor role in the robbery (see Groenke & Youngquist 511-512). Since whether fully reliable and consistent facts, nor trustworthy pieces of evidence about his involvement are sufficiently provided by the novel, there is not just one but various possible interpretations of the story. Thus, Steve might have assumed the role of a lookout during the robbery or he might also have just been wrongly accused due to several unknown reasons. When reading postmodern texts in an EFL context, it is, therefore, crucial to explicitly draw students' attention to the great ambiguity inherent in postmodern texts and to the resulting demand for accepting multiple meanings. In other words, their awareness should be raised that postmodern texts are not supposed to be attributed only one single meaning.

Considering the variety of postmodern features present in *After the First Death*, co-authoring processes are of great significance for the reception of Cormier's novel, too. Similarly to the reception of *Monster*, the readers of *After the First Death* are required to combine the various nonlinear pieces of information presented from the different perspectives of the two major genres. Apart from the variety of perspectives and voices, Myszor (88) stresses that in *After the First Death*, a further challenge results from the multiple time sequences involved in the plot, which mainly result from the two narrative strands and occasional jumps into the past, as discussed in 4.2.1.3.

The biggest gap in *After the First Death*, however, concerns Ben's role in the hijacking of the school bus. Already in his first diary entry, Ben alludes to this event and anticipates that it must have had an immense impact on his life, as he considers committing suicide: "I have deduced, reflecting on the Bus, that this would be the best way to shuffle off the mortal coil" (Cormier 6). However, until the second half of the novel (chapter 5 and, in particular, chapter 7), it remains a mystery what exactly happened to him and what made him even involved in the hijacking in the first place. In order to fill this gap, the readers are highly engaged in combining the two narrative

strands from the even and odd-numbered chapters as well as in constantly making inferences from the information provided through the lenses of various protagonists.

Likewise, also Ben's father and his profession constitute a mystery throughout the novel. Neither Ben, nor his mother knows the exact scope of functions his father has as a general of the secret institution Inner Delta. Only as the novel proceeds, the readers get piecemeal clues about his father, "the phantom" (Cormier 50), and the role of the organisation in the hijacking.

As has been shown, also in *After the First Death* readers are actively involved in co-authoring the meaning of the nonlinear, multiperspectival and highly ambiguous novel, which confronts young readers with two plot lines that are intertwined in a very sophisticated and engaging manner. Owing to the readers' considerable autonomy in the construction of the novel's meaning, Myszor (88) points out that it is, therefore, indispensable to allow a variety of readings.

Taking into account the remarkable degree of ambiguity and indeterminacy, which results from the lack of a distinct personality of the protagonists, the open ending and unresolved question as far as Steve's involvement in the robbery is concerned and the even more confusing question whether Ben Marchand actually exists or if Ben's diary entries purely represent his father's imagination, I have demonstrated that postmodern texts deliberately play with multiple meanings, allowing radically different interpretations of one single work. As a consequence, it needs to be emphasised once more that, apart from the co-authoring processes mentioned above, postmodern readers indispensably need to dispose of a considerable tolerance of ambiguity and multiple meanings and to develop various strategies for dealing with this indeterminacy. Without doubt, these skills constitute a crucial prerequisite for the postmodern literature classroom, which is especially challenging in the context of a foreign language learning setting.

Based on the analysis of Myers' *Monster* and Cormier's *After the First Death*, this chapter has demonstrated the diversity and prevalence of postmodern features in two selected YA fiction works from the 70s and 90s. Although a broad selection of distinctive characteristics has been identified, there are also several other noteworthy

postmodern features, such as intertextuality, irony and contradiction (see Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 67, 69), which I do not consider to be represented in the chosen primary texts to such a prevalent degree to devote a lengthy separate discussion to it.

Still, albeit being of minor relevance, I want to briefly comment on intertextuality, as one intertextual reference can be identified in *After the First Death*. In fact, careful readers will observe that the quote “After the first death there is no other” precedes the beginning of chapter one, which is very likely to have influenced the author’s choice of title. Interestingly, this quote represents the final line of a poem by Dylan Thomas, called “A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London.” As can be read on the homepage of *Poetry Foundation* in the section on Dylan Thomas, this final line is highly ambiguous. While it might express a pledge on the eternity of life, it could also mean that death always has the same meaning and that, as soon as someone dies, he or she is dead forever.

Having examined a variety of the most distinctive postmodern features inherent in *After the First Death* and *Monster*, I want to emphasise that the analysis of these works with the sole focus on inherent generic features of the postmodern should not mean that this is the only reasonable way of approaching these texts in the EFL classroom. In fact, the novels entail a great potential for exploring other aspects, too, which will be briefly outlined in the final chapter of this thesis.

5. Postmodern YA literature in the Austrian EFL classroom

5.1 Postmodern YA literature and the Austrian curriculum for EFL teaching

As the major objective of this thesis is to investigate the place of postmodern YA literature in the EFL classroom, it is indispensable to establish a connection to the Austrian national curriculum for second language teaching as well as to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)*, which constitute the two main documents determining the overall goals of second language teaching in Austria. Given the rather advanced level of reading competence required for the reception of postmodern texts, as outlined in the previous chapter, I chose to restrict my target group to upper-secondary levels. Apart from that, the harsh content and

challenging structure of the primary texts under discussion supported my decision to consider the predefined teaching goals solely with regard to upper-secondary levels.

According to the curriculum for language teaching, literary texts constitute a vital component of the EFL classroom (see BMBF, *Fremdsprache* 4). Yet, the curriculum does not further explicate any specific types of literature that are regarded as suitable for the respective context. The incorporation of postmodern texts into language teaching contexts, as my thesis promotes, can, therefore, not be explicitly based on the Austrian curriculum. However, several rather general educational objectives are addressed, for which postmodern YA literature proves to be a suitable medium for achieving these goals.

The most decisive connection that can be drawn between postmodern literature and the Austrian curriculum can be found in the domain "Mensch und Gesellschaft." Among other things, this rubric expresses the objective of familiarising learners with an open-minded, cosmopolitan attitude as well as of raising their understanding of social relations. More specifically, this educational goal is defined as follows:

Durch die Auswahl geeigneter fremdsprachlicher Themenstellungen ist die Weltoffenheit der Schülerinnen und Schüler sowie ihr Verständnis für gesellschaftliche Zusammenhänge zu fördern. (BMBF, *Fremdsprache* 1)

As already outlined in section 2.3 and 3.2.1, the recent trends in postmodern YA literature can be regarded as a response to current socio-economic and technological developments as well as to dominant postmodern assumptions, which largely shape contemporary life. By critically investigating some of the main postmodern features exhibited in postmodern YA works, learners can acquire a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of social, economic, philosophical and technological issues and developments occurring in today's society as well as their impact on contemporary life and artefacts, such as on literature. In how far the issues addressed by postmodern narratives are relevant for contemporary adolescent readers will be demonstrated in more depth in the discussion of their educational value in section 5.3. Apart from that, one of the leading principles defined in the first part of the general curriculum emphasises the importance of addressing the immense technological innovations of mass media within the EFL context (see BMBF, *Bildungsziel* 2). Since postmodern narratives often mirror the influence of hypermedia on contemporary texts, they can serve as a meaningful illustration of the influential

phenomenon of the technological innovations. In the second part of the general curriculum, it is further emphasised that through the establishment of a connection to current issues, learners should acquire insights, knowledge and essential skills, which are relevant for the achievement of several tasks required in the contemporary world (see BMBF, *Bildungsziel* 7). In more concrete terms, the implementation of postmodern narratives fulfils this objective by familiarising learners with complex reading skills, which are indispensable in today's media-saturated society, as I will further demonstrate in section 5.3.

Apart from that, it is stated in the curriculum for second language teaching that over the course of teaching, teachers should not just aim for a variety of language material, but also for a rising complexity: "Komplexität und Vielfalt der sprachlichen Mittel zur Bewältigung kommunikativer Aufgaben sind im Laufe der Oberstufe stetig zu intensivieren" (BMBF, *Fremdsprache* 3). The choice of postmodern literary texts clearly requires learners to deal with a considerably higher degree of complexity within literary texts and thereby fulfills this predefined goal.

After the identification of the suitability of postmodern YA literature for the achievement of several educational goals of the Austrian curriculum for upper-secondary language teaching, the *CEFR* should be briefly taken into account as well, since its precise definitions of objectives, content and methods form the basis of the curriculum.

Surprisingly, the reading competences at advanced upper-secondary levels defined by the *CEFR* (B1+, B2) reveal that the complex nature of postmodern narratives, indeed, tends to exceed even the language competences of second-language learners predefined for the Matura level (B2). Following the *CEFR* descriptors for the level B2, "[learners] can read short stories and novels written in a *straightforward* language and style, [...], if [they are] familiar with the story and/ or the author" [emphasis added] (6/12). At level B1+, even less reading proficiency with regard to literary texts is expected from the learners: "[Learners] can read *simplified versions* of a novel, plus stories *with a clear structure*, with little use of a dictionary" [emphasis added] (5/12). Interestingly, these descriptors contradict the national curriculum, which states that at level B2 learners can read contemporary literary prose (see

BMBF, *Fremdsprache* 5), which, however, is very likely to exploit innovative complex structures. Given the complex nature of postmodern YA narratives outlined in chapter 4.2, it can be concluded that postmodern texts neither exhibit a “straightforward style”, nor do they represent “simplified versions of a novel [or] stories with a clear structure”. Thus, as far as the *CEFR* descriptors for reading are concerned, postmodern YA literature, indeed, exceeds the reading proficiency predefined by the European Framework for second language teaching. Owing to the rather contradictory information provided by the *CEFR* and the national curriculum, the suitability of postmodern YA narratives for a foreign language learning adolescent readership seems to be questionable. Yet, in order to prove the contrary, I will consider various studies, which demonstrate that today’s adolescents are capable of dealing with postmodern texts, at least as far as their intellectual capacity is concerned.

5.2 Adolescents’ familiarity with postmodern texts

After the consideration of the Austrian curriculum for second language teaching as well as of the *CEFR*, the assumption that postmodern literature would be unsuitable for YA readers due its complexity might prevail. However, although the foreign language setting undoubtedly aggravates the reception of postmodern texts, I will argue within this section that postmodern literature constitutes a manageable challenge to adolescents, especially when sufficient support is provided. In order to specifically take into account the EFL setting, I will also outline a few teaching principles, which are supposed to facilitate the reception of postmodern YA fiction for foreign language learners. Interestingly, a number of scholars have investigated adolescents’ readiness for dealing with postmodern texts and widely agreed that today’s young adults share a considerable extent of familiarity with postmodern features.⁸ Before turning to the findings of these studies in more depth, I want to emphasise that these studies are from an L1 context. While they primarily focus on the intellectual capacity of adolescents, they do not acknowledge the additional linguistic challenges that arise when confronting second language learners with

⁸ See Bearne (2009); Dresang & McClelland (1999); Goldstone, “A New Subgenre” (2004); Goldstone, “Picture Book Codes” (2001); Groenke & Youngquist (2011); Parsons & Hundley (2012); McClay (2000); Wu (2014).

postmodern texts. For this purpose I will try to complement these studies by establishing the required link to language learning.

As already pointed out earlier, the growing familiarity with distinctive postmodern elements inherent in a variety of contemporary texts can be linked to the immense technological developments and their influence on contemporary life (see Dresang & McClelland 160). Given the pervasive digitalisation and the resulting “media hype,” the contemporary Western society is confronted with new texts in terms of structure and format and, consequently, also with new types of reading, which have eventually found their way into YA literature (see Dresang & McClelland 161-165; Parsons & Hundley 241). Parsons & Hundley (241) enlist several examples of some of these new text types, such as audiobooks, online videogames, You Tube videos and television movies. Owing to the changing landscape of texts, today’s “media-savvy” adolescents are widely considered as being highly experienced in reading and viewing such texts, which are, among other things, characterised by nonlinear structures, interactivity, multimodality, fragmentation and indeterminacy (ibid., 241-242) While these features clearly reflect the pervasive contemporary hypermedia culture, they equally represent typically postmodern features, as demonstrated in the previous chapter.

However, despite adolescents’ assumed familiarity with postmodern features, they are usually hardly accustomed to encountering these features in literary texts of their L2. Therefore, it would be recommendable to work on these typically postmodern features and the required reading strategies by letting students them compare with similar characteristics of a hypermedia text, with which they are likely to share a greater familiarity. This comparative task is supposed to enable students to identify the parallels between the two texts, which should eventually support them in transferring their screen-reading strategies to the reception of the postmodern literary text. Given the L2 context of the readers, at the final stage of introducing language learning students to postmodernism, the hypermedia text, which should serve as a means of comparison, could also be taken from the students’ L1 context. This would be particularly helpful, as it would allow them to initially concentrate on the postmodern characteristics instead of struggling with language issues, in addition. Considering the variety of challenges postmodern readers have to face, I am

convinced that that it is of utmost importance to, still, prepare readers for what they will encounter in the respective text language and structure-wise. As language learners usually have a more limited experience with complex texts written in their L2 compared to native readers, this is especially crucial when it comes to second language learners. Apart from that, in order to not overwhelm them, I would recommend focusing on only a few postmodern features individually and on required reading strategies for coping with them, as most activities of the teaching material in chapter six do, rather than confronting them with the diversity of postmodern elements at once.

A further finding outlined by several studies mentioned above concerns adolescents' considerably high degree of expertise in the reception of multimodal texts. Bearne believes that this is also a result of the increasing confrontation with multimodal texts in their everyday lives (219). Kress thoroughly investigates the multimodality apparent in our contemporary culture. He explains that, apart from language and writing, new forms of representation have become remarkably dominant in today's communication, such as images, sounds, gestures, speech, objects etc., which all carry meaning in a different way (35-36). These additional modes represent very essential types of texts, which deserve considerable attention as well, apart from the more traditional, purely written ones. Accordingly, introducing learners to multimodal texts implies that, when constructing the meaning of texts that include various means of representation, readers do not just have to pay attention to language, but also to images, gestures, facial expressions, posture, as well as to sounds (see Bearne 220). Particularly the implementation of visual elements has been identified as an overly popular device in current multimodal YA narratives. Examples thereof are the incorporation of photographs, graphics, as well as font and colour changes, which provide additional layers of meaning to the respective texts (see Parsons & Hundley 349). In fact, these additional representations of meaning provide valuable means for further negotiations of meaning and, thus, substantial opportunities for language production in the language classroom. For this reason, I would suggest mainly arranging group activities when working with postmodern texts. These activities should ensure students' reciprocal support in dealing with the complex nature of the texts and thereby provide ample room for language exchange. One type of activity

which is particularly suitable for jointly constructing the meaning of postmodern texts in an L2 settings are, for instance, info- and opinion-gap activities.

While referring to Dresang's work *Radical Changes: Books for Youth in a Digital Age* (1998), Glasgow (41) further investigates the influence of the digital world on young readers. Interestingly, she observes increasingly open-minded attitudes towards new text-types. Glasgow emphasises (41) that adolescents growing up in the digital age are not just more accustomed, but also more tolerant and willing to indulge in experimental narratives. Likewise, Meek (175) finds a greater tolerance for the unexpected among children, suggesting that they successfully manage to identify the voices within complex narratives and to distinguish between them (ibid., 172). Apart from adolescents' greater tolerance for the unexpected, the reception of postmodern texts requires a greater tolerance for ambiguity, as emphasised in the previous chapter. Developing a greater tolerance for ambiguity is a particularly crucial skill when it comes to foreign language learners, as they usually tend to look for a single meaning of words, expressions or texts for reasons of simplicity. Confronting young language learners with the ambiguity of postmodern texts and language can ideally illustrate that language and texts often cannot be restricted to one single meaning or one single truth. Even though this is often difficult to accept for language learners, the comparison of various ways of interpreting postmodern ambiguous texts in class can serve as a valuable example for better understanding this phenomenon. In addition, the multiplicity of meaning postmodern readers are supposed to explore offer a rich potential for discussion and, thus, for developing oral skills.

In spite of teenagers' undeniably greater familiarity with more complex and difficult texts from today's media landscape, the findings discussed so far need to be interpreted cautiously. To my mind, the sole exposure to such texts does not automatically promote the required competences for effectively making sense of them. Thus, I am convinced that in order to support students in reading complex narratives, they necessarily need to be acquainted with a variety of methods for developing those skills. As I will demonstrate on the basis of more concrete examples in the final chapter of my thesis, the implementation of postmodern YA texts in the EFL classroom should be indispensably complemented with specific scaffolding activities for exploring several techniques and for clarifying language and

comprehension issues. In fact, my personal critical attitudes towards the widely assumed correlation between adolescents' familiarity and a subsequent competence for the reception of complex text types can be supported by Youngquist's survey conducted with high school students of a 9th grade. Interestingly, this study proves that despite students' considerable experiences with nonlinear texts previously acquired through the exposure to contemporary media, it cannot be inferred that they would be able to automatically apply their screen-reading skills to the reception of postmodern works (see Groenke & Youngquist 506). Indeed, the reception of Walter Dean Myers' postmodern text *Monster* still caused considerable difficulties to the readers as well as a significant degree of confusion and frustration (ibid.). More specifically, it is reported that the students were particularly irritated by the novel's ambiguity and multiple flashbacks, which contribute to the nonlinearity of the narrative (ibid.). Relating these insights to an L2 context, it can be inferred that the level of frustration is even higher with second language learners, as they might have to cope with language issues, in addition. What Groenke & Youngquist (508) learnt from their study was that students should be introduced to prevalent postmodern features beforehand, as I have suggested earlier, and that they should be supported throughout the entire reading process. The same has also been suggested by Goldstone with regard to teaching postmodern picture books (see "New Subgenre" 203). Thus, as far as the reception of postmodern texts in an L2 context is concerned, I would recommend dividing the postmodern novel into small bits and pieces and continually work on the confusing aspects of these passages in class. Considering the highly complex nature of these texts, I would also allow more frequent language switches to the learners' L 1 within these discussions, if required. As one of the while-reading activities for *Monster* suggests (see chapter 6.2.3), an online forum in which students can exchange their reading experiences and difficulties throughout the reading process would provide ideal means for this purpose as well.

Apart from the examination of adolescents' experiences with postmodern texts, various scholars have examined the suitability of postmodern literature for the even younger readership of children.⁹ For this target group, the publication of postmodern

⁹ See Anstey (2002); Goldstone, "New Subgenre" (2004); Goldstone, "Picture Book Codes" (2001/2002); McClay (2000); Serafini (2005); Wu (2014).

picture books has revolutionised the literary market, as discussed in 3.2.3. Many of these studies demonstrate that there is a wide-spread underestimation of children's reading skills among adults (see McClay 101; Meek 172; Wu 808). However, similarly to today's adolescents, also children are already greatly exposed to postmodern features, albeit rather by watching essentially postmodern movies and television series, like *The Simpsons* and *Sesame Street* than by reading innovative text types (see Goldstone, "Picture Book Codes" 66; Mc Clay 91). Mc Clay's study, for instance, found that children and adolescents do not just derive more pleasure from constructing the meaning of a selected postmodern picture book, they also succeed better in jointly combining the visual and verbal information than their adult colleagues (see McClay 102-103; Wu 808). Coles & Hall argue that this might be due to their greater familiarity with the reception of texts on screen (114), an argument that should be considered with caution, as I have outlined above, as well as due to a possible inhibition of adults caused by their intention to attribute one single meaning to the ambiguous picture book. Although one needs to keep in mind that postmodern picture books are more easily accessible than postmodern novels due to their visual components, which accompany the verbal text, several reading strategies required for the reception of postmodern picture books are of great value, as they can be transferred to the reception of postmodern YA narratives. For instance, postmodern picture books require the synthesis of information from two means of representation as well as readers' high degree of involvement in making sense of the overly fragmented, non-linear, self-referential and multi-perspectival texts. Apart from that, postmodern picture books can prepare young readers for the dynamic interaction between readers and the respective postmodern text. Given the limited amount of written text and their rich repertoire of postmodern elements, I am convinced that postmodern picture books constitute an ideal starting point for familiarising young learners with postmodern texts. As language issues will not constitute a significant challenge when reading postmodern picture books, foreign language learners could brilliantly concentrate on the non-traditional structural patterns of the medium. Thereby they could more easily explore the postmodern phenomenon within a more accessible type of literature.

As has been shown, today's adolescents are embedded in a media-driven digitalised world, which confronts them with new and rather complex text types in their everyday

lives. Their growing familiarity and openness for experimental non-linear and multimodal texts from an early age onwards does, however, not automatically engender the necessary reading competence. Relating these findings to my hypothesis, I can conclude that today's young adults are surrounded by various typically postmodern textual features. Still, specific strategies need to be developed in school for successfully coping with these properties. Apart from readers' familiarity with postmodern textual features, I consider it as utterly important to also investigate the educational value of postmodern literature in order to be able to reasonably determine and justify the place of postmodern texts in the EFL context. Thus, the subsequent section will explore this aspect in more depth.

5.3 The educational potential of postmodern YA literature

In the following section I will demonstrate the immense value of postmodern YA literature for adolescent learners, considering its beneficial impact on their reading competences, on their knowledge of literature as well as on their understanding of the contemporary world in general.

One potential benefit postmodern YA fiction entails is of a rather general nature. More specifically, it refers to the familiarisation of young people with the dominant assumptions of postmodernism. In fact, postmodern YA literature is considered to prepare young adults to cope with upcoming demands of our contemporary world (see Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 75). It has been argued that studying postmodern literature and postmodernism in general enables young adults to better comprehend the world they are living in (see Haynes 50). Relating this insight to the contents of the national curriculum, I would like to emphasise at this point that this aspect has already been identified as an important educational goal, which is very relevant for my investigation (see 5.1). In fact, Haynes' assumption has been approved by a group of students attending an interdisciplinary university art course about postmodernism. After extensively indulging in postmodern theories and dominant ways of postmodern thinking, many of the students reported to feel better prepared for their existence in the postmodern world (*ibid.*, 48-49). Taking into account the students' high appreciation of the course, the teacher adds that addressing prevalent questions adolescents have to consider in a postmodern world does not just yield

important insights into postmodern poetics, it also positively influences the learners' behaviour, which, given the better understanding of the contextual circumstances, is likely to be more appropriate and "humane" (ibid., 47). Moreover, by encountering prevalent postmodern issues, such as ambiguity and uncertainty in literature, students are likely to develop a better understanding as well as more open-minded attitudes towards these characteristics (see Coles & Hall 114). Similarly, Metcaff (53) acknowledges the potential of postmodern literature in terms of preparing students for their participation in life. She draws attention to the rising demands on children and adolescents and identifies a growing necessity to adequately and critically interact in a more chaotic and democratic consumer society, which is characterised by an overload of information (ibid.). Metcaff emphasises that the confrontation of adolescents with more complex literary material represents useful possibilities for better preparing them for critical thinking and decision-making processes (ibid.). Metcaff eventually summarises the general benefit of postmodern narratives in terms of providing insights into the postmodern world, arguing that postmodern fiction carries "intellectual prestige" by enabling adolescents to "participate in the public debate" (55).

Having considered postmodern literature's role in preparing young readers for an informed and critical interaction in the postmodern world, I will turn to a more tangible benefit adolescents can derive from reading postmodern fiction, which is a considerable development of reading strategies and an enrichment of their repertoire of text types. This issue has been discussed in numerous articles, both with regard to child and adolescent readers.¹⁰ Given the altering landscape of text types and the growing number of texts entailing multimodal, fragmented and nonlinear features, there is a broad consensus that new reading techniques are required for decoding these texts.¹¹ What these new reading strategies entail has already been outlined both in the section on co-authoring and in the one on the late trends in YA literature (see 3.2 and 4.2.3). Among other things, as pointed out, the new modes of representation, which emerged with the remarkable developments of technologies of information and communication, have expanded the concept of 'literacy', requiring readers to decipher also the new representations of meaning that go beyond the

¹⁰ See Anstey 445, 447; Goldstone "New Subgenre" 199-201; Knickerbocker & Bruegeman 71; Koss 79; Koss & Teale 570-571; McClay 95-105; Serafini 59-62.

¹¹ See Anstey 446; Koss 73; Koss & Teale 570; McClay 103; Serafini 61.

traditional use of letters, words and writing practices (see Kress 22-23). Apart from that, as has been shown, today, texts are often presented from different sources and perspectives, which requires readers to synthesise the fragments of information in order to construct a coherent meaning (see Koss 79). As a result, Koss emphasises the necessity of reading the material critically while questioning the validity of the information provided by various sources. Interestingly, she identifies an inextricable connection between the literacy of postmodern times and critical thinking, arguing that the multiperspectival nature of postmodern books provides ideal ways for developing a critical understanding of reliability and of how to deal with “the bombardment of media and information sources” (ibid.). Considering the variety of new demands in the for today’s society in the domain of reading, I am convinced that the sooner young people learn to attend to these features and to develop specific reading strategies, the better they will orientate themselves in today’s information-driven society. Since postmodern fiction mirrors numerous of these textual features, it clearly represents useful possibilities for young readers to get accustomed to them as well as to develop new reading skills that are indispensable in today’s media-driven world. At this point, I want to emphasise once more that for this purpose, young readers need to be provided with various reading strategies, scaffolding activities and basic background knowledge of postmodern literary features. These are highly necessary for helping students with finding their way through the complex textual landscape and with developing a heightened awareness of these features as well as a critical and sophisticated way for approaching such texts.

A final argument supporting the introduction of postmodern YA fiction to adolescents derives from its potential to enlarge the learners’ expertise in literary-related subject matters. In fact, by examining the ways in which postmodern literature deviates from traditional narratives, students’ awareness of genre and genre-related characteristics can be increased (see Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 70). Moreover, the study of metafictional devices can be highly instructive, as it illustrates and emphasises the author’s role in constructing the literary text (ibid., 71). Yet, also for these purposes, students’ attention has to be explicitly drawn to such literary concepts in class and actively worked on by means of specifically devised reading activities and reading guidelines, as will be illustrated in chapter 6.2.

The examination of the immense and equally diversified educational potential of postmodern YA narratives for adolescents has shown that the reasons for implementing this type of literature clearly outnumber the daunting challenges it might pose to young readers. The next point that needs to be considered is how postmodern literature should best be introduced to a young adolescent readership, and more precisely, which approaches to literature are most suitable for this purpose. While several rather general ideas and strategies have been outlined so far, the theoretical consideration of teaching implications in chapter five will be exemplified on the basis of concrete activities in the final chapter of the thesis.

5.4 Teaching implications

Owing to the remarkably complex deviations of postmodern literature from more traditional narratives, it becomes obvious that, especially when confronting a young adolescent readership from a language learning background with these types of texts, specific approaches to literature are required. Having already pointed to various teaching implications in 5.2, I will now elaborate on some additional principles that should be applied when teaching postmodern fiction in an FL setting. Furthermore, I will introduce a highly established reading approach and two ways of reading, which have been suggested as particularly suitable for the reception of postmodern texts (see Rymarczyk 273-279; Surkamp 88-93; Weskamp 3-11).

According to Surkamp, one of the most distinctive methodological principles for teaching postmodern fiction is the new emphasis on “student-centred[ness]” and “process-orient[ation]” (88). Surkamp explains (88-89) that the resulting neglect of analytical approaches in favour of the more reader-oriented approach is rooted in poststructuralism and deconstructivism, which propose the supremacy of the reader over the text while particularly welcoming creative tasks, such as the construction of new text types in form of text transformations or creative and performative responses to the narratives. Yet, even though creative responses to texts should prevail in the postmodern literature classroom, Rymarczyk (280) stresses the importance of also paying attention to the analytical dimension by considering not just the content, but also the form and reading methods when analysing a postmodern text. As my analysis of *Monster* and *After the First Death* has shown, only by considering all three

dimensions, readers will be able to identify the full potential of the postmodern text and successfully create a coherent meaning of the complex texts.

Given the major focus on readers, their interests, responses, and needs are of utmost significance. Surkamp (89) outlines that the new emphasis on readers as well as the acknowledgment of their given set of experiences and needs underline the changing conception of reading as an active process, in which readers construct the meaning of a text based on their “individual set of preconditions.” At the same time, the focus on readers as well as their great autonomy implies that the reception of postmodern texts is well-suited for producing extensive output in the target language. In fact, since the meaning of these texts cannot be pinned down to one single truth due to remarkable gaps, postmodern texts are ideally suited for intensively discussing the meaning and reading processes of such texts. Depending on the type of activity, the reception of postmodern literature in the EFL classroom, therefore, provides a multitude of authentic situations for verbal and written language exchange. Thus, it is of utmost importance to establish a very interactive atmosphere in the postmodern literature classroom. In fact, students’ interactivity is considerably valuable not just for means of practising communication, but also for developing collaborative skills, which are indispensable due to the highly complex nature of the texts, whose full potential can hardly be exploited by individual readers. However, what is important to keep in mind is that the language output should not be limited to the sole discussion of the literary text. Since the primary aim of a language class is to develop students’ language skills, they should be allowed to also go beyond the text when accomplishing the respective activities. Above that, it is also important to leave enough room for the consideration of language issues in terms of vocabulary and syntax rather than just purely focusing on the literary features of the texts.

Having pointed to the active role attributed to readers in the anti-consumerist reading model, I will consider the so-called ‘reader-response theory’ within this section, which fully accounts for the proposed student-orientation and readers’ involvement. Moreover, since this approach shares numerous similarities with the co-authoring processes required for the reception of postmodern texts (see 4.2.3.), I chose it as an interesting and fruitful approach for the postmodern literature classroom.

5.4.1 Reader-response criticism

Reader-response criticism is a highly established branch of literary criticism, which constitutes an approach to reading that places great emphasis upon readers, their involvement in the production of meaning as well as on their responses to the respective text (see *Glossary of Literary Terms* 449; Tompkins ix, xv). Considering the readers' active participation in the reception of the chosen postmodern texts in form of co-authoring processes, the relevance of this theory becomes evident. However, I want to clarify that reader-response theory is neither an explicitly postmodern theory, nor exclusively suitable for the reception of postmodern narratives. Rather, I consider it as an essentially interesting approach to postmodern literature, given its belief in the polysemantic nature of texts as well as its focus on readers' active involvement in meaning-making processes, which I will outline within this section.

Reader-response criticism is not a unified theory, but a collection of diverse theoretical approaches, examining the status and relationship between the readers, the literary text, its meaning and the readers' responses (see Tompkins ix). They primarily differ in the determination of factors influencing the readers' responses, of the degree the textual structures predispose reading and meaning-making processes as well as in the placement of the dividing line between what a text objectively constitutes and what is complemented by the reader's subjective responses (see *Glossary of Literary Terms* 150). Having considered a variety of reader-response theories introduced by Tompkins (1980), I chose to introduce Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological theory in my thesis, as it represents a balanced view of the text's and the readers' joint role in the creation of meaning while promoting the text's multiplicity of meanings (see Selden 112).¹²

One major principle of Iser's phenomenological theory of reading is that the readers' responses to the text as well as the processes involved in reading deserve at least equal consideration as the text itself (see Iser 50; Selden 112). Following Iser, a text does not represent a fully established meaningful unit; it is only "concretised" through the interaction of the text and its readers (see Iser 50). Respectively, the readers

¹² See *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 149-150; Freund 141-148; Hirvela 128-133; Iser 50-69; Selden 112-114; Tompkins ix-xxvi.

assume the role of a 'co-authors', whose task is to supplement the text with information that is unwritten or only alluded to, and to fill gaps left by the author (see Tompkins xv). Thus, rather than being inherent in the text, Iser suggests that the meaning of a literary text only results from "a reader responding to an author's cues" (ibid., xviii). More precisely, he believes that the readers realise or give "Gestalt" to the text material by means of "picturing," "anticipation" and "retrospection" (see Iser 50, 58) as well as by "creative participation," "reconstruction" and "frustration" (see *Glossary of Literary Terms* 150). These processes, in which the readers are required to adopt various perspectives and incorporate new pieces of information into existing experiences and memories, occur automatically during reading. They do not just mirror individual experiences, but also shape the readers' respective impressions of the text (see Iser 56-57).

As far as the structure of literary texts is concerned, it is responsible for triggering this dynamic relationship and interactivity between the text and its readers (ibid., 55), which results from the substantial degree of incompleteness and indeterminacy, including multiple "gaps" and "blanks" the readers are required to fill (see Freund 142; Iser 55). Although, these gaps suggest a considerable freedom and autonomy of the readers in filling the blanks, allowing them to incorporate their experiences and dispositions, they are to some degree also restricted by the structures and perspectives offered in the text (see Freund 141). Tompkins emphasises that despite the considerable autonomy assigned to the readers in meaning making processes, "their activity is only a fulfillment of what is already implicit in the structure of the work" (xv). Thus, on the one hand, the meaning of a text is influenced by its patterns and, on the other hand, by its readers, their experiences, responses and respective dispositions (see Iser 50). What is closely linked to this conception of an incomplete textual pattern and also most relevant to this thesis is the tolerance of multiple meanings promoted by reader-response criticism. Indeed, due to the readers' great autonomy in filling gaps and clarifying indeterminacies, a variety of different realisations of the text is possible (ibid., 55). Based on this insight, it follows that a text must not be limited to one inherent meaning: it rather entails a multitude of different meanings depending on the readers' disposition and responses.

The discussion of the so-called reader-response criticism has demonstrated the importance of the readers for the production of a text's meaning. According to reader-response criticism, these co-authoring processes are vital for all sorts of texts. However, as outlined within the analysis of the selected primary texts, they are even more crucial when it comes to the reception of postmodern texts, as these texts exploit fragmentation and indeterminacy to a considerably larger extent (*ibid.*). Above that, the concept's underlying assumption of a text's polysemantic quality underlines the affinities of reader-response theory with the required reception of postmodern narratives, too.

5.4.2 Ways of reading

In her article on methodology for teaching postmodernism, Rymarczyk (266) argues for the combination of various approaches in postmodern literature teaching for exploiting the various meanings inherent in postmodern narratives. Thus, I finally want to introduce two ways of reading that have been considered as useful approaches to postmodern texts by Rymarczyk (2004) and Weskamp (1997).

5.4.2.1 Intertextual reading

One very interesting approach to postmodern literature, based on the assumption that texts lack one 'true' and distinctive meaning, is the investigation of the interdependence of multiple texts, in technical terms, their intertextuality (see Weskamp 8). Intertextual readings are particularly suitable for the reception of postmodern texts, since its activities follow the postmodernist urge to combine multiple texts (see Surkamp 91). As Weskamp (8) explains, in postmodernism, texts are considered to be embedded within a network of multiple texts and discourses, which all influence each other. Surkamp, who draws on Hallet's theory of intertextuality, further argues that our present society is characterised by an "interplay of a plurality of texts and media" (91). Following Hallet's conception of intertextuality, Surkamp (91) explicates that intertextuality is rooted in three dimensions. It may be the result of the incorporation of an already existing text into another one or established through the readers' association with a known text from his or her repertoire, elicited by a given text. Thirdly, intertextuality might evolve from similarities

and differences between seemingly unrelated texts, identified by the readers (see Hallet qtd. in Surkamp 91). Consequently, the major assumption of intertextuality is that texts only derive their meaning from their interrelatedness to other texts and cultural artefacts (see Surkamp 91). Owing to the belief that the meaning of texts can only be identified when being compared to other related texts and text types, it is indispensable to pay attention to a text's interplay with other texts during the literary analysis of postmodern texts (see Surkamp 91). What is important to mention at this point is that these intertextual relations can be of a diverse nature, constituting a combination of both high culture and popular culture, ranging from classics and historical accounts to songs, films, hypertexts, magazine articles and already established interpretations (see Surkamp 91-92; Weskamp 8). Apart from that, while communicating and sharing their individual readings, learners produce new texts in either written, oral or other sorts of creative forms about the ones under discussion and thereby maintain the interplay of texts within the classroom context (see Surkamp 92).

In fact, today's huge repertoire of texts, ranging from a wide selection of print to media and hypermedia texts, allows for a highly creative and diversified combination of texts (see Rymarczyk 273). As an example, Rymarczyk (273-275) proposes to combine the analysis of an experimental short story with two well-known paintings, which she cleverly uses for a pre-reading activity. In a foreign language setting it would also be interesting to combine texts from various cultures and language backgrounds. Applying the concept of intertextual reading to one of the selected primary texts, *After the First Death*, students' attention could be drawn to the quote by Dylan Thomas taken from his poem "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London". As this quote ("After the first death there is no other") bears a striking resemblance with the novel's title, students could be encouraged to reflect on its meaning in relation to the novel. Apart from that, they could also be provided with the entire poem and compare the ambiguous meaning of the quote within both contexts.

Finally, I want to point out that, although intertextual reading constitutes a rather demanding reading approach, requiring a profound knowledge of literary texts, interdisciplinary thinking skills as well as an awareness of what is considered as a

text, I fully share Weskamp's (8) belief in its great potential. I am convinced that intertextual reading constitutes a very sophisticated and elaborate approach to literature, which enhances learners' understanding of the inextricable interrelatedness of texts and disciplines while providing them with a larger picture of our culture. Considering the approach in relation to postmodernists' belief in the multiplicity of meaning as well as their new conception of texts including various cultural representations from high and low art (see Surkamp 81), its particular relevance for postmodernism becomes evident.

5.4.2.2 Aesthetic reading

As an alternative to intertextual reading, I chose to introduce the aesthetic reading approach, pioneered by Louise Rosenblatt (see Rosenblatt 1994), which I consider as a further interesting and meaningful way for reading postmodern narratives. As can be read in Weskamp's article (4), aesthetic reading pays particular attention to readers' aesthetic perception of texts. In other words, readers' personal perceptions, emotions and reactions triggered by the respective text are at the centre of literature teaching (ibid.). Based on the suggested orientation on readers' aesthetic perceptions and affective responses, a shift from an analytic and cognitive treatment of texts to a more playful interaction with literature is of great importance (ibid.). A commonly used and widely known term for this approach is the so-called personal-response theory, in which readers engage actively and emotionally with the text in a myriad of preferably creative ways or even performances, such as pantomime, drawings, role plays or written responses (ibid., 8). Rymarczyk (275) suggests a more traditional method of aesthetic reading by asking the readers of an experimental short story to keep a response journal, in which they are supposed to make comments and take notes about the text while reading. On the one hand, this helps them to become aware of what the text triggers in them and, on the other hand, to better realise which text passages evoke questions, confusion or further challenges. Thus, a reading response journal provides room for personal reflections concerning both, the content and the narratives structure of a text. At the same time, reading journals represent suitable means for practising writing, in which the focus is rather on developing fluency than accuracy. Rymarczyk emphasises that, although this might appear as a rather straightforward and easy approach to literature, its difficulty should not be underestimated, as readers are usually entirely left on their own in constructing the

meaning, lacking any clear guidelines or any kind of support by further texts (ibid.). Considering the main principles of aesthetic reading outlined above, I come to the conclusion that this way of reading is of great benefit for young readers in general, but in particular when it comes to the reception of postmodern texts. While aesthetic readings strongly focus on readers' emotional responses, which constitute an essential dimension in the literature education, it also illustrates that reading involves various stages that often follow a nonlinear order. In fact, readers are often required to go back to previous passages in order to clarify the meaning or to read it from a different perspective (ibid.). Keeping a response journal makes readers especially aware of these processes while encouraging them to consciously reflect on how challenging passages or complex structures affect their personal reading and meaning-making processes. Apart from that, by comparing their responses with colleagues, they will learn that there are multiple ways of reading and interpreting a story and that the meaning of a text can never be fully constructed within the first reading (ibid., 275-276). These nonlinear processes of reading are particularly apparent in postmodern narratives, which constantly require readers to revisit and reread complex passages. Also, the approach emphasises the inherent possibility of multiple readings (ibid., 275), which is especially prevalent in postmodern texts due to their high degree of indeterminacy, ambiguity, open-endedness and formal experimentation, which welcomes multiple different interpretations.

Having considered the importance and the potential of Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory and the two selected approaches to reading postmodern literary texts, I will finally demonstrate how they can be applied to the reception of the chosen primary texts by Cormier and Myers by introducing various specifically devised activities.

6. Teaching *Monster* and *After the First Death*: A selection of teaching material

The final chapter of my thesis is supposed to provide various suggestions for teaching the selected novels in the EFL classroom. I decided to introduce them as separate activities in order to yield a greater freedom of choice and flexibility to the teacher. The activities should be regarded as recommendations for approaching *Monster* and *After the First Death*, which apply the principles of postmodern literature

teaching discussed above. Before introducing the individual tasks, the choice of books should be more closely examined and justified.

6.1 Justification of choice of books

Given the variety of postmodern features inherent in Walter Dean Myers' *Monster*, the novel's potential for exploring postmodernism has already been established. Apart from that, the implementation of *Monster* into the EFL classroom can be supported by various additional arguments concerning the novel's content and themes.

One major concern of the narrative is Steve Harmon's status as a young black criminal, whose confrontation with severe prejudicial attitudes clearly aggravates his position in court (see Engles & Kory, "Incarceration" 54). In fact, throughout the novel, the protagonist is faced with numerous racialised comments, which emphasise his disfavoured position due to his ethnicity. Although the protagonist is fully aware of his low social status, even his own attorney explicitly reminds him of it by bluntly pointing out that "[h]alf of those jurors [...] believed you were guilty the moment they laid eyes on you. You're young, you're Black and you're on trial. What else do they need to know?" (Myers 78-79). Taking into account the prevalence of racial prejudices expressed in the novel, I would argue that the author addresses a highly relevant topic within his work. Even though the novel only targets prejudices against African Americans, it also alludes to the prejudicial attitudes towards other ethnicities and nationalities that are highly apparent in the European society. By demonstrating the extent and detrimental effect of such prejudices on the respective protagonist, the novel encourages students to reflect more critically on dominant stereotypes. Furthermore, it sheds light on the white privilege maintained by the US legal system, on which I will comment in the discussion of a related post-reading activity (see Engles & Kory, "Incarceration" 57). In fact, the strong presence of stereotypes and prejudices deserves careful consideration in the EFL classroom, as it is even explicitly mentioned in the national curriculum. Following the Austrian curriculum for second language teaching, an objective examination of cultural prejudices and clichés is of utmost importance for the students' development of their intercultural competences (see BMBF, Fremdsprache 1).

A further highly valuable educational aspect addressed in *Monster* concerns the moral side of human behaviour. Steve Harmon's prosecution underlines people's moral responsibility for their actions, which has to be taken from an early age onwards. More precisely, the protagonist experiences a moral conflict in the novel; which the readers are supposed to evaluate critically (see Myers, "Reader's Guide" 8; Schneider 20). Even though the protagonist's role in the holdup is of minor significance for the robbery, he has to stand up for his behaviour by facing the risk of being sentenced to life imprisonment. Hence, the novel powerfully emphasises the importance of being aware of one's moral responsibility. Without doubt, *Monster* clearly entails a strong didactic value in this respect (see Myers, "Reader's Guide" 9). As has been shown, the implementation of Walter Dean Myers' *Monster* into the EFL classroom can be supported by various arguments, which all underline the immense potential and relevance of the narrative for today's adolescents.

Likewise, the potential of Robert Cormier's *After the First Death* clearly exceeds its role as an exemplary piece of postmodern fiction. Being written in a very realistic manner, the novel revolves around a substantially thrilling, but equally discomforting and brutal event. It portrays the ruthlessness and cruelty of terrorism, an utterly relevant topic in our contemporary world. What makes this book especially thrilling and unique is that a terrorist acts as a focaliser, thereby providing highly interesting insights into the mindset of a strikingly cruel and ruthless person.

Moreover, de Luca points out that Cormier's novel confronts its readers with different forms of control, "the very personalized form of brutality and intimidation employed by the international terrorist", "mind control" as well as the "behind-the-scenes government manipulations" (140). Raising pupils' awareness of these issues will help them in understanding the wider context of terrorist attacks as well as the interrelatedness of several state institutions, like military, government, secret service and their cooperating role in protecting the state. Even though the disturbingly dark content of Cormier's novel might be criticised for being unsuitable for adolescents (see Schober 303), I would argue that it is important to confront young adults with the harsh reality of life. Reading *After the First Death* does not just represent a suitable means for this purpose; it also conveys important values, such as courage and

patience, while reminding its readers of the danger of excessive loyalty, patriotism (see Mac Leod 77) and submissiveness.

6.2 Suggestions for classroom activities

During the development of the activities I paid particular attention to ensure a high degree of reader-centeredness as well as a considerable amount of process-, production- and action-orientation while exploiting the students' creativity (see Surkamp 88-89). By applying these principles, I aimed at emphasising the readers' active involvement in interpreting processes and at demonstrating the influence of the readers' set of beliefs and experiences on the interpretation of the respective texts (ibid.). Moreover, taking into account the main assumptions of reader-response criticism, most activities reject the idea of a single inherent meaning by allowing multiple interpretations instead (see Iser 55). As will be shown, several activities also represent examples of the aesthetic and intertextual reading approach (see Rymarczyk 273-276). Although the individual activities will not take into account all principles at once, the chapter will present a wide selection thereof while paying attention to the content, to required reading strategies as well as to the form of the chosen texts, which Surkamp (88) considers as particularly crucial aspects of examination when dealing with postmodern narratives.

Based on Thaler's (110) concept of the three phases of reading a text, which is widely known as the "PWP approach", I chose to structure this chapter according to his model and divide my activities into pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading tasks, respectively. As each stage follows specific objectives, the activities are not interchangeable across the individual stages. Yet, the distinction between while-reading activities and post-reading activities is not a clear-cut case. (ibid.).

6.2.1 Pre-reading activity for *Monster*

The first stage of reading is supposed to activate the readers' prior-knowledge of the upcoming topic and to cognitively prepare them "in terms of both schematic and language knowledge" (see Hedge 210). As Thaler emphasises, reading should involve creative approaches, which are particularly suitable for this initial stage (110).

The pre-reading activity, devised for an engaging initial approach to *Monster*, requires students to predict the content of the book on the basis of the novel's cover page (ibid.). Even though the cover page does not give away too much information, it is concrete enough to guide students into a specific direction. In order to facilitate the students' guessing, one could complement the title page with a short extract from Steve's first journal entry (see Appendix, Handout A). Within this activity students are supposed to make use of their imagination, which should eventually encourage them to read the novel. The predicted story lines can either be explained orally within groups or pairs or formulated by writing a blurb. Taking into account the emphasis on process-orientation in the postmodern literature classroom, I would suggest a two-stage approach in which the students first collect ideas orally with colleagues and only later proceed to writing the blurb individually or in pairs.

6.2.2 Pre-reading activity for *After the First Death*

Similarly to the activity devised for *Monster*, the first reading stage of *After the First Death* should be exploited by means of creative predictions. As an incentive, I chose to provide the students with various quotes from the text (see Thaler 52), which have either been uttered by the victim Ben Marchand or presented in the focalisations of the third-person narratives (see Appendix, Handout B). These particularly striking quotes shed light on the protagonist's character traits and foreshadow the considerably captivating and horrific main event of the novel. Based on these quotes, the students should infer the plot of the novel within pair discussions. Without doubt, these quotes are very likely to trigger the readers' suspense and to encourage them to read Cormier's renowned work.

6.2.3 While-reading activities for *Monster*

According to Thaler (110) and Hedge (210), class readers should be complemented with several tasks that accompany the reading process, requiring the students to remain active while reading. While-reading tasks can serve various purposes, ranging from drawing students' attention to literary techniques and encouraging

readers' empathy to actively and creatively engage students with specific text passages (see Thaler 110).

As already pointed out in 6.1, one interesting theme addressed in the novel is Steve's identity, which is severely influenced by racial prejudices. Hence, one valuable while-reading activity would be to foster the students' understanding of the unstable and performative nature of the postmodern identity as well as of the related concept of 'relational identity formation' (see Engles & Kory, "Incarceration" 55). According to Engles & Kory several passages of the novel lend themselves for acquainting the students with these concepts (ibid.). More precisely, Engles & Kory ("Incarceration" 56) propose to develop an understanding of 'relational identity formation' in three stages. As can be seen on handout C (see Appendix), for this purpose, firstly, the term 'identity' should be written on the blackboard and discussed in plenary. Afterwards, the concept should be expanded by adding the second element, 'formation', thereby encouraging the students to work on the performative dimension of identity. As a last step, the third component, 'relational', should be added, eventually requiring the students to make sense of the entire concept by coming up with examples from everyday life. After these three stages, the students should be able to formulate their own definition of 'relational identity formation'. Although within the three stages, the concept should be explored by making references to their own identity, they should be able to finally relate the concept to Steve Harmon's practices of self-fashioning by analysing the passages indicated on handout C. This activity can either be done orally, in form of a plenary discussion, or individually by taking notes on the handout. On the one hand, this activity develops the students' understanding of the performative nature of the postmodern identity and, on the other hand, it emphasises the postmodern preoccupation with ontological questions (see Engles & Kory, "Incarceration" 55-56; McHale 10).

A further while-reading task for *Monster* devised by myself is primarily concerned with the novel's format and narrative situation (see Appendix, Handout E). In form of a close-reading exercise (see Rymarczyk 277), the students should, firstly, become aware of the strengths of both genres, the screenplay as well as the first-person narratives in the form of journal entries, and their effect on the readers and, secondly, they should identify traces of Steve Harmon's unreliability (see Schneider 21). Before

that, however, the concept of 'unreliable narrators' should be explored in plenary by brainstorming on numerous potential factors which might lead to an unreliable narration. This preparatory stage is indispensable for equipping the students with the literary expertise required for the close-reading exercise. What is important for this task, too, is that the students expand their theoretical literary knowledge by applying it to the analysis of the primary text. After an investigation of the narrator's unreliability and the mixture of genres, the close-reading exercise asks the students to identify further non-traditional elements of the novel, such as the implementation of visual elements, metafiction, fragmentation and writing devices, like flashbacks and flashforwards. At this stage, the students are not supposed to come up with the correct technical terms of these features; the primary goal of the activity rather consists in raising their awareness of the ways a postmodern text differs from more traditional narratives. While I would suggest answering these questions individually, it is important to provide some time for discussing these issues in class at regular intervals. As an alternative to simply answering the questions on the handout, one could also set up an online discussion forum, for instance, on Moodle (see Groenke & Youngquist 506). The chat tool would enable the students to discuss the questions online as well as to share personal questions and reactions to the text with their colleagues (*ibid.*). Since the contributions could be posted anonymously, the learners are more likely to express their reading experiences more honestly. Furthermore, this tool would enable the teachers to easily follow their students' responses to the text and to take up any difficulties in class (see Groenke & Youngquist 506). In order to cover all important formal aspects of the novel, I would suggest opening a separate discussion for each question from handout C as well as one additional discussion for further comments. It should be emphasised in advance that each student is required to participate at least once in each discussion. This close-reading activity contributes to the students' heightened awareness of the particularities of postmodern literature as well as to their development of analytical skills. Without doubt, this inductive approach to the novel's postmodern characteristics serves as a brilliant starting point for a discussion of postmodern literature and as a helpful demonstration of what the concept of co-authoring entails.

Given the dialogic structure of Steve Harmon's screenplay, Myers' novel also brilliantly lends itself for performative approaches. More specifically, Schneider (22)

as well as Knickerbocker and Brueggeman (73) suggest to perform a so-called 'Reader's Theatre' (see Appendix, Handout C). In this activity the students are asked to read aloud passages from a text "expressively" while producing a "dramatic response" (Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 73). Apart from an intelligible pronunciation, the participation in a 'Reader's Theatre' requires the students to experiment with paralinguistic elements, such as a powerful and engaging use of intonation, stress, pitch as well as an effective play with volume, facial expressions and gestures. For these purposes, the readers need to have already established a profound idea of the characters, the plot and the style of the respective text (ibid., 74). Therefore, I would propose to perform a 'Reader's Theatre' at an advanced stage of reading. Since *Monster* is already written in a dialogic structure, the performance of a 'Reader's Theatre' does not require any extra work in terms of textual transformations. Yet, the students could still expand the screenplay by writing additional dialogues and scenes, which they could read aloud, stage or even film afterwards. Suggestions for this task would be to ask students to write, for instance, a scene that exploits the attorney's perception of Steve Harmon, one about the actual holdup, or an additional scene that continues the narrative (see Appendix, Handout C). I am convinced that this activity is highly recommendable for numerous reasons. Apart from practising an effective use of paralinguistic features, the activity enables the readers to get personally involved in the narrative as well as to respond emotionally to it.

6.2.4 While-reading activities for *After the First Death*

Similarly to *Monster*, the highly sophisticated narrative structure of *After the First Death* deserves close consideration, too. As outlined in chapter 4.2, the frequent changes of perspectives as well as the alteration of two narrative strands within two different genres undoubtedly present considerable challenges to young readers. Thus, in order to draw the readers' attention to the complex structure of the novel, one suitable approach would be to let the students visualise the novel's narrative situation (see Thaler 52), as exemplified by Myszor (81). More specifically, I would suggest letting the students graphically represent the narrative structure of the novel in form a chart, in which they should indicate the plot line, the time of narration, writing devices such as flashbacks or flashforwards as well as the perspectives adopted in the individual chapters (see Appendix, Handout D). Apart from that, they

should come up with suitable section headings for each chapter, as these are only numbered in the novel. The visualisation of the novel's narrative structure should be completed alongside the reading process. The activity is not just aimed at enhancing the students' knowledge in the field of literary theory; it also aims at supporting the reading process. In fact, within this activity the students will acquire a more precise picture of how the plot lines intertwine and how the events of the hijacking are related, which should eventually help them in establishing order in the rather confusing text. Due to the remarkable complexity of the novel, it is advisable to provide various opportunities for questions in class at regular intervals and to revise some literary concepts of the narrative situation in class beforehand.

A further recommendable way of approaching the complex narrative structure of *After the First Death* would be a so-called 'Think Aloud' activity, which would also be well-suited as a preparatory step for the previous task (see Knickerbocker & Brueggeman 74). Knickerbocker & Brueggeman define the 'Think-Aloud' activity as a "modelling activity, in which the students follow along as the teacher demonstrates how an experienced reader uses metacognitive processes to solve problems" (75). Even though the teacher's modelling is undoubtedly helpful, it would also be a good practice for the students to do the 'thinking- aloud' on their own. In more concrete terms, one could ask individual students to read aloud a passage in class while having the teacher as a resource available. As the brief example on handout D shows (see Appendix), the readers are required to continuously interrupt their reading within the activity in order to explicitly comment on the cognitive processes as well as on the strategies and steps that have to be taken while reading the respective passage. In other words, the readers express and share their thoughts and reading strategies required for making sense of the complex narrative of the chosen extract. They are supposed to explain what is going on in their heads and why they decide for specific strategies. For instance, within the activity several readers are supposed to explain why they skim through the next passage before continuing reading or how they interpret the effect of the mixture of genres and perspectives (see Knickerbocker & Brueggeman Appendix). Undertaking this activity for the reception of *After the First Death*, I would suggest reading aloud passages from chapter six, as this section exhibits particularly complex and rapid alterations of viewpoints (see Myszor 83). Given the complexity of this chapter, the students will

highly appreciate some reading support for these passages. Without doubt, this activity constitutes a brilliant preparation for the students, familiarising them with various ways of coping with the complex structure of the novel. By actively engaging the readers with the complex narrative situation of *After the First Death*, both rather analytical activities prove to be highly suitable for drawing the students' attention to the prevalence of chaos and disorder of the postmodern period, which is brilliantly mirrored in the chosen postmodern piece of writing (see Ma 1340).

Since Cormier's novel confronts its readers with an utterly brutal content and an overly harsh and bleak description of the terrorists' hijacking of a school bus, it is very advisable to provide ample room for the students' personal and emotional responses to the text. For this purpose, a reading journal provides ideal opportunities (see Rymarczyk 276; Thaler 110). As already introduced in 5.4.2.2, reading journals are supposed to accompany the readers throughout the entire reading process, encouraging them to continuously reflect on the text in a very personal manner (see Appendix, Handout D). As pointed out earlier, this activity constitutes a widely acknowledged task of aesthetic reading (see Rymarczyk 274). Reading journals are valuable in various respects. Apart from emotional concerns, they also provide room for questions and comments on the content as well as on the structure of the novel and its literary techniques (see Rymarczyk 257). Due to the privacy provided by a journal, the readers are encouraged to reflect more honestly on their reading processes and on personal questions than in plenary discussions. Yet, I see the most valuable benefit of reading journals in the intensive cognitive and emotional engagement of the readers with the given texts, which clearly poses them at the centre of the activity. As can be seen on handout D (see Appendix), guiding questions will be provided for students' support.

6.2.5 Post – reading activities for *Monster*

The final stage of reading takes place after the respective text has been read. While this phase serves to assess readers' understanding of the text, it should also provide diverse possibilities for creative and performative responses (see Thaler 52). Given the preference of creative and performative approaches to postmodern narratives in the literature classroom, my selection of post-reading activities will primarily focus on

creative follow-up tasks rather than on the assessment of readers' text comprehension (ibid., 52,110).

One activity proposed by Thaler (110), which seems to be an especially suitable follow-up activity for *Monster*, is to ask the students to write an alternative ending. Since the ending in *Monster* is ambiguous and open, it is important to draw the students' attention to its ambiguity and its lack of a proper resolution. As stated earlier, the author deliberately decided for this unresolved ending in order to encourage the readers to evaluate Steve Harmon's responsibility for his involvement in the robbery (see Myers, "Reader's Guide" 8). Thus, one possibility would be to ask the students to assume the role of a judge and write a verdict, in which they outline their stance concerning Steve's innocence or guilt (see Appendix, Handout E). Interestingly, the activity does not just stress the ambiguous nature of the ending and the considerable freedom of interpretation that is thereby left to the readers. It also stresses their involvement as co-authors. In fact, in order to write the verdict, the students need to combine the information provided by both genres and to compare and evaluate the trustworthiness of the various testimonies. At the same time, the writing task encourages the students to reflect on Steve's moral responsibility by taking their own value system into account. The students may be allowed to exchange their ideas in pairs beforehand. Yet, the verdicts should be written individually. What the students also gain from this task is a better understanding of further postmodern characteristics. More precisely speaking, the great autonomy, which is left to the readers in deciding over Steve's guilt or innocence, underlines the postmodern rejection of one inherent truth (see Sim 3). Although writing the verdict requires them to decide for one interpretation, the novel's multiplicity of meaning can be emphasised by letting the students compare the diverse endings composed by their colleagues. Alternatively, they could also be asked to write two brief verdicts, in which they are required to consider the arguments for both sides. Apart from that, the novel's open ending also illustrates the ambiguity and uncertainty, which is characteristic of the postmodern age (see Coles & Hall 114). Considering these beneficial aspects, the activity constitutes a promising way of familiarising the learners with prominent postmodern principles.

Since Steve's ethnicity plays a decisive role throughout the trial, a research project could be conducted for exploring the impact of racism on the US criminal justice system. More specifically, this research project is aimed at drawing the students' attention to the incredibly high incarceration rates of black citizens in the US (see Schneider 21; Thaler 110). Following Engles & Kory ("Incarceration" 53), in the US, the likeliness of imprisonment for the same crime is six times higher for African Americans than for white citizens. Indeed, there are various instances in the novel which exactly mirror Steve's disadvantage in court based on the prejudicial attitudes of the testimonies, the prosecutor and even of his attorney. Therefore, as handout E shows (see Appendix), after reading *Monster*, the students could be asked to conduct a research on the racialised US criminal justice system, by taking into account incarceration rates, studies and reports about publicly known racist practices of the US police and jurisdiction (see Schneider 22). The activity is considered as a group project, for which the internet and the school library should be consulted. Depending on the desired depth of the study, at least one lesson should be devoted to research. For this purpose, teachers should make sure to book the PC-lab. After the research, the students are required to process and interpret the information from the research and create a poster based on their findings. The poster should entail a collection of various types of information, texts, statistics, extracts from newspaper articles, personal notes and visualisations, which they should finally present in class. As a starting point, the learners could be provided with statistics and a quote from the primary text (see Appendix, Handout E), which introduces them to the subject matter under investigation. Apart from the development of research skills, the activity is very interesting for the postmodern literature classroom, as the learners practise intertextual reading by identifying the interrelatedness of various texts (see Weskamp 8).

6.2.6 Post-reading activities for *After the First Death*

The first post-reading activity devised for *After the First Death* also constitutes an example of a reader-centred and process-oriented activity. For this task the students are asked to prepare and conduct a press-conference with the novel's protagonists. The idea is taken from Thaler (110) and requires each student to assume a role, for instance, of a protagonist from the novel, of journalists, of the presenter or of the

audience (see Appendix, Handout F). As soon as they know their role, they are supposed to come up with various questions or anticipate possible upcoming questions and prepare some answers, respectively. For this purpose, the students, on the one hand, need to have a profound knowledge of the novel's content and protagonists and, on the other hand, they need to be able to expand the events of the novel with additional background information. Although the press-conference should focus on the hijacking of the school bus, the students should be free to invent further details and characters. If desired, roles can be changed after ten minutes. What is particularly valuable about the activity is that it requires the students to intensively engage with the content of the novel in a highly playful manner. Above that, the performative character of the activity is not just a very active and fun way of exploiting the novel; it also offers valuable opportunities for developing oral skills.

Since metafiction constitutes a very prevalent device of postmodern fiction (see Head; 28; Nicol, *Postmodern Fiction* 35; Waugh 21-22), which is strongly apparent in *After the First Death*, the self-reflexive writing should be taken into consideration in class as well. While I arranged the respective task as a post-reading activity, it can also be undertaken during the reception of the novel. As can be seen on handout D (see Appendix), I chose to introduce the students to the concept of metafiction by means of a concise and very instructive videoclip taken from the homepage *Study.com*. This videoclip explains the concept of metafiction in a very straightforward way and illustrates it with various helpful examples. At the same time, the activity constitutes a good practice for developing listening skills, which are overly neglected in the literature classroom. Based on the video, which the students should watch until minute 2:04, I devised a listening comprehension task in order to foster the learners' understanding of metafiction. The mixture of multiple choice questions and open questions cover the most central aspects of the concept and also require the learners to analyse the metafictional devices of the selected primary text. Thus, the activity entails a theoretical and a practical dimension by also establishing a connection to Cormier's novel. As far as the interaction format is concerned, I would declare it as a single work activity. For accuracy's sake, it is necessary to compare the results within groups or plenary, afterwards. Considering the activity with regard to its contribution to the students' better understanding of the postmodern world, the task is of immense value, as it sheds light on a further inherent characteristic of postmodern literature,

which can be considered as a response to the postmodern disbelief in the representation of reality (see Lewis 178).

The final chapter of my thesis has provided a selection of diversified and highly engaging activities, which have been devised especially for the three reading phases of the selected novels. The set of material should serve as a source of inspiration for the implementation of *Monster* and *After the First Death* into the upper-secondary EFL classroom. The activities are specifically designed for enhancing the readers' understanding of the novel and for demonstrating the postmodern atmosphere created by the variety of postmodern features. They are targeted at teachers who are willing to explore a highly interesting and promising field of literature, which still lacks a satisfactory selection of teaching material. I hope to have demonstrated the immense potential of postmodern narratives for the EFL classroom in terms of conveying an idea of what constitutes the postmodern phenomenon as well as the variety of ways in which the content, the form and the required reading strategies of postmodern YA novels can be exploited.

7. Conclusion

The postmodern experimentation with literary features constitutes a popular trend in contemporary fiction, which has eventually found its way into YA literature. As my thesis has shown, today's adolescents are frequently confronted with the disorder and ambiguity of the postmodern world, which is represented in contemporary YA fiction, among other things, by a mixture of styles, genres and perspectives as well as by the use of temporal distortion. Given the fascinating development of YA literature into a clearly more complex direction, my thesis was concerned with the following questions: 'What constitutes postmodern fiction?' 'What is the value of implementing postmodern narratives into an EFL context?' and 'How should postmodern YA literature be introduced in the Austrian upper-secondary EFL classroom in order to make this complex type of literature accessible to young readers?'

For answering these questions several theoretical considerations had to be made. For a better understanding of postmodern literature, an interdisciplinary examination of the postmodern movement constituted the starting point of my thesis. This

investigation has offered a comprehensive picture of postmodernism as a multifaceted cultural phenomenon, which is characterised by a deep scepticism towards established norms and by a rejection of dominant beliefs of the Western world. Within my thesis I have demonstrated that these postmodern assumptions have been taken up in literature in a highly interesting way by radically breaking with literary conventions. The subsequent analysis of YA literature and its late literary trends has revealed that postmodernism has already been strongly established in contemporary YA literature through the exploitation of typically postmodern features. By means of a comprehensive analysis of the postmodern characteristics of two selected YA novels, *After the First Death* (1979) by Robert Cormier and *Monster* (1999) by Walter Dean Myers, the most distinctive features of postmodern literature were illustrated on the basis of concrete examples. The analysis has not just yielded interesting insights into what characterises postmodern literature, but also what challenges are thereby posed to the readers. For determining the place of postmodern YA narratives in the EFL context, it was further necessary to consult the Austrian curriculum for second langue teaching as well as the *CEFR*. It has been found that while the use of postmodern narratives is not explicitly mentioned in the national curriculum, this complex type of literature also does not correspond to the reading competences defined for upper-secondary classes by the *CEFR*. However, a closer examination of the national curriculum has demonstrated the suitability of postmodern YA fiction for achieving several educational goals. Yet, my thesis also acknowledged that the reception of postmodern texts in the EFL context also entails downsides. Given the learners' limited experience with literary texts written in their L2, the postmodern complexity is likely to cause severe difficulties to the readers in reading and meaning-making processes in addition to more common language-related challenges. Apart from the required development of highly advanced reading strategies, postmodern narratives force the language learners to deal with the texts' ambiguity and its multiplicity of meanings. In fact, the development of these competences is highly demanding, especially with regard to the foreign language learning setting. However, despite the remarkable challenges, which clearly exceed the predefined reading skills for upper-secondary levels, my thesis has shown that the immense and diverse educational potential of postmodern fiction clearly prevails. More specifically, I have outlined that the confrontation of adolescents with postmodern literature brilliantly prepares the students for their participation in the

contemporary world, equipping them with a better understanding of the postmodern world of which they are part as well as with new reading skills, which are indispensable in today's changing landscape of text types. Even though a greater familiarity of adolescents with postmodern features has been identified by numerous scholars, I strongly argued that the sole exposure to these textual features in everyday life does not generate the required reading competence. In order to be able to effectively make sense of the complex narratives of postmodern fiction and to exploit its immense potential, it is indispensable to employ specific strategies for mediating those skills. For this purpose, my thesis has introduced various principles and specific approaches to literature teaching, which should be applied in the postmodern literature classroom. Moreover, a selection of activities has been provided in order to support the learners in coping with the complexity of the highly fascinating nature of the selected postmodern primary texts.

Considering the diverse potential of postmodern literature for young readers and its relevance for their participation in the contemporary world, I strongly advocate the incorporation of postmodern YA fiction into the Austrian upper-secondary EFL classroom. Even though these narratives are likely to pose considerable challenges to young readers, they will undoubtedly be manageable, if sufficient support and scaffolding activities are provided. I would like to conclude my thesis with a quote expressed by Puhr, which celebrates the value of postmodern literature for adolescent readers in a powerful way:

Sharing postmodern works with students makes them aware that fiction continues to evolve and authors continue to experiment, testing the limits of the novel's form and of their readers' intellectual acumen. (Puhr 66)

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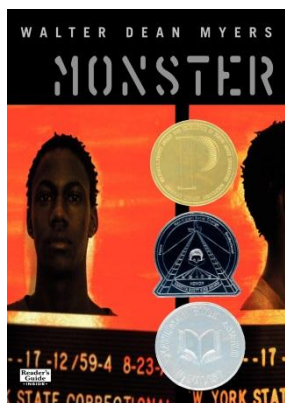
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Appendix

Handout A: Pre-reading- activity for *Monster*

Title-page & Extract

Look at the book cover and read the extract taken from the opening chapter of *Monster*.
Guess what the novel could be about and discuss the questions below.



The best time to cry is at night, when the lights are out and someone is being beaten up and screaming for help. That way even if you sniffle a little they won't hear you. If anybody knows you are crying, they'll be talking about it and soon it'll be your turn to get beat up when the lights go out. There is a mirror over the steel sink in my cell. It's six inches high and scratched with the names of some guys who were here before. When I look into the small rectangle, I see a face looking back at me, but I don't recognize it."
(Myers 1)

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster* (front cover). *Storysnoops*. Tiffany Boltz et al.

18 February 2016. <<http://www.storysnoops.com/blog/?p=3971>>

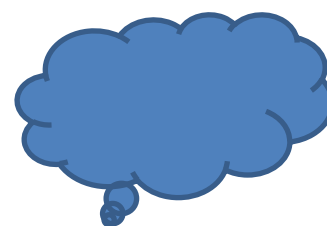
- What could the book be about?
- What is the genre of the book?
- What is the protagonist like?
- What happens to the protagonist?

- a.) Exchange your story line with your colleagues
- b.) Write a blurb(80-100 words)

Handout B: Pre-reading activity for *After the First Death*

Quotations

Look at the list of quotes from the text.¹³ Based on these quotes, try to infer the content of the novel while discussing the following questions with a partner.



- What do these quotes tell you about the protagonists Ben Marchand and Miro Shantas?
- What could the novel be about?
- What is Inner Delta and how is Ben's father involved in it?
- Who is Miro Shantas and what did he do?

- ❖ Ben: "I keep thinking that I have a tunnel in my chest. The path the bullet took, burrowing through the flesh and sinew and whatever muscle the bullet encountered (I am not the macho-muscled type, not at five eleven and one hundred eighteen pounds)." (Cormier 5)
- ❖ Ben: "There I've said it: Inner Delta. Like pulling a bandage off a festering sore. Or a diseased rabbit from a soiled magician's hat." (Cormier 10)
- ❖ "Miro's assignment was to kill the driver." (Cormier 16)
- ❖ "Without the mask, he was Miro Shantas, the boy without even a real name to identify him to the world. With the mask, he was Miro Shantas, freedom fighter. He often wondered which person he really was." (Cormier 38)
- ❖ Ben: "My father, the phantom." (Cormier 50)
- ❖ "This is why Miro did not like waiting. It gave him too much time to think, to ponder, to wonder about things he should leave to Artkin." (Cormier 54)
- ❖ "The effect of the operation is the reason for the operation. Simple escalation is the answer." Cormier 99)

¹³ See *BookRags*.

Handout C: While- reading activities for *Monster***A.) The Postmodern self**

- Have a look at the three concepts written in the boxes A-C. In a chronological order, reflect on each concept for 4 minutes and write down everything that comes to your mind in relation to it.

A.)

IDENTITY

B.)

IDENTITY FORMATION

C.)

RELATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION

- Share your ideas with a partner and come up with your own definition of 'relational identity formation'. Compare your definitions in class and check whether you have understood the concept correctly.

MY DEFINITION

Relational identity formation =

- In groups of 4 discuss the processes of 'relational identity formation' occurring in one of the passages below and explain it to the other groups.¹⁴
 - a.) p. 93
 - b.) p. 116
 - c.) p. 130
 - d.) p. 279-281

¹⁴ Selection of passages based on Engles & Kory ("Incarceration" 55).

B.) Close Reading

While reading the novel, try to answer the following questions.

- What genres are used in the novel? What are the strengths of these genres? Do you think the choice of genres is effective for the novel? Justify your answers! ¹⁵

- Steve Harmon's journal entries present his own version of the entire story. Do you think he is a trustworthy narrator? Can you find any contradictions in his accounts? Are there any instances in the script that make you question his reliability? Support your arguments with examples from the text.¹⁶

- Can you identify further elements in the novel that are rather unusual in literature? (Pay attention to narrative form, chronology, text types, layout etc.) Which effect do these elements have on your reading process?

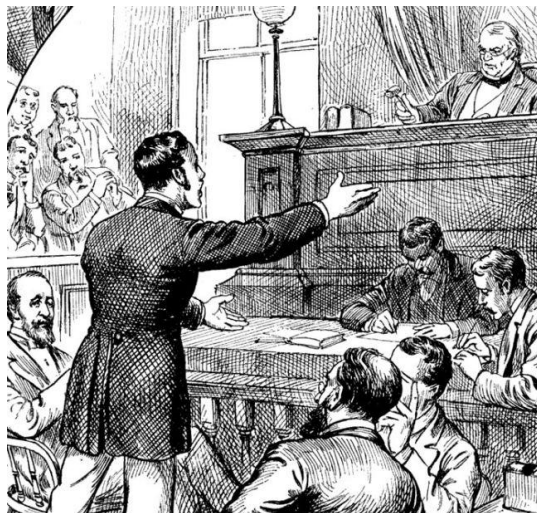
¹⁵See Myers, "Reader's guide" 3.

¹⁶See Schneider 21.

C.) Reader's Theatre

- Agree on a scene from Steve's screenplay you want to read aloud in class and choose a role from the list of protagonists participating in the trial. Imagine how your character would behave in a real trial and perform his /her role while reading the respective lines.
- In groups of four write an additional scene for the screenplay (minimum 3 pages) and read it out in a 'Reader's Theatre'. In your scene describe
 - the robbery of the drugstore (Who was really involved?)
 - a conference of lawyers discussing the case (What does Mrs O'Brien really think of Steve Harmon?)
 - OR
 - the first day after Steve's acquittal (How does everyone react and treat Steve Harmon?)
- While performing your role, try to use your voice effectively. Pay attention to intonation, volume, stress etc. You may also play with gestures and facial expressions.

Have fun!!



MyLearning. Arts Council England's Renaissance Major Partner initiative. 18 February 2016. <<http://www.mylearning.org/victorian-values--crime-and-punishment/images/1-1757/>>

Handout D While-reading activities for *After the First Death*

A.) Chart / Map of Narrative Structure

Visualise the complex narrative structure of the novel in form of a chart or a map while reading. For each chapter indicate

- the plot line
- point of view
- flashbacks or flashforwards
- point of time (present, past, future)
- any additional information that helps you understand the novel's experimental structure
- find a catchy title for each section

B.) Think-Aloud

Start reading chapter six aloud in class. While reading pay particular attention to the narrative situation of the passage and explicitly comment on it in class. Share any strategies that help you in making sense of the complex structure with your colleagues. After two paragraphs another colleague should take over.



Clarify the following aspects when reading your paragraphs:

- Whose perspective is adopted?
- How is the change of perspectives realised?
- Which of the two narrative strands is depicted?
- When does the narrated event take place in relation to the other events of the novel?
- Are there any jumps into the past or future?
- What helps you identify these features?

TES. 18 February 2016.

<<https://www.tes.com/lessons/FVQpkpoE0e6vLA/think-aloud>>

Example:

When I start reading chapter seven, I already anticipate a first-person narrative, since all odd-numbered chapters of the novel have presented journal entries written by Ben Marchand so far. Yet, I immediately realise that in this chapter the narrator is not Ben anymore. In fact, he is the one to which the journal notes are addressed. I read on a few lines in order to find out who the narrator is. Relating the content to the story line of the previous odd-numbered sections, I guess that chapter seven represents the response of Ben's father to his son's notes. In this chapter General Marchand returns to Ben's room, which he finds empty. The question arises what has happened to Ben in the meantime. I skim through the remaining odd-numbered chapters and find that the next one is also narrated by General Marchand. In order to fill the gap and clarify where Ben is, I go back to chapter five, Ben's last journal entry. When I skim through the last page, I realise that Ben has expressed a desire to escape and hide from his father at the end of the section. I think of various places to which Ben might have gone. Reflecting on his previous notes, I realise that Ben has explicitly uttered suicidal thoughts several times. The end of chapter five, therefore, might be an allusion to his actual suicide. In order to find out more, I return to chapter seven and continue reading...

C.) Reading Journal

Keep a reading journal while reading *After the First Death* and write down what comes to your mind while/after reading each chapter. The following guiding questions might be helpful for your reflections:

- ✓ What do you think happened on the bridge?
- ✓ In how far could Ben have been involved in the event on the bridge?
- ✓ How are the two plot lines interconnected?
- ✓ What are your personal reactions to the individual chapters (emotions, questions, etc.)?
- ✓ Are there any holes in the story? If yes, what is their effect?
- ✓ Which questions do you have regarding the content or form of the novel?
- ✓ Which difficulties do you have with the structure and narrative situation of the novel?
- ✓ How can you relate the events of the novel to our contemporary world?
- ✓ Further questions, comments ...

Handout E: Post-reading activities for *Monster*

A.) Writing a verdict

Medical Law Perspectives. Wordpress. 18 February 2016.

<<http://medicallawperspectives.com/wp/first-appellate-decision-on-merits-affirms-verdict-for-plaintiffs-transvaginal-mesh-case/>>



Although Steve gets acquitted from prison at the end of the novel, there is no clear resolution whether Steve is really innocent. What is your opinion of the protagonist? Was he involved as a lookout and should, therefore, be made responsible for his action or is he innocent? What are the arguments for both sides?

Imagine you are the judge of the trial. **Write a verdict** in which you

- determine and justify Steve's innocence or guilt
- support your arguments with information from the primary text
- critically evaluate the trustworthiness of all testimonies
- comment on the role of moral responsibility

Write between **350 and 400 words**. Make sure to use formal register.

B.) Group Project: US Racism & the US criminal justice system

Race plays an important role in the US criminal justice system, as can be seen in Myers' novel. Have a look at the following quote, the statistic and the image provided below, which underline the influence of race on the high US imprisonment rates of African Americans.

"I want to feel like I am a good person because I believe I am. But being in here with these guys makes it hard to think about yourself as being different. We look about the same, and even though I am younger than they are, it's hard not to notice that we are all pretty young." (Myers 62-63)



Prison Policy Initiative. Peter Wagner et al. 18 February 2016.

<<http://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/raceinc.html>>

- In groups of four, **conduct a research on the institutionalised racism of the US criminal justice system** and find information on the following aspects:
 - racial distribution in US prisons
 - US crime rate developments
 - gender-related differences in US African American imprisonment rates
 - reports of racist policing or racial judicial procedures (case studies)
- **Create a poster**, in which you present the findings of your group project. Include statistics, verbal and visual information and insert examples of racial practices and stereotypes from the primary text (*Monster*). Be prepared to **present your project** in class.

Handout F: Post-reading activities for *After the First Death*



A.) Press conference

Imagine you are at a press conference, which has been arranged after the hijacking of the school bus. At the press conference, most people involved in the tragic terrorist event are invited for providing explanations and facts from first-hand experience.

123RF. 18 February 2016.

<<http://previews.123rf.com/images/rangizzz/rangizzz1112/rangizzz111200029/11557744-Press-conference-microphones-isolated-on-white-Stock-Photo-news.jpg>>

- Choose a role from the list below
- Prepare questions, answers and further interesting background information about the hijacking (approximately 15 minutes preparation time)
- Act out the press conference and change roles, if desired
- You are welcome to invent new characters and facets to the story
- Make sure to actively involve the audience in the press conference and to allow plenty of time for their questions
- The press conference should be well-prepared and organised
- You may take some notes with you

ROLES

5 journalists	Ben Marchand (still alive)	Miro Shantas (imprisoned)
2 presenters	General Marchand	4 children from the school bus
US president	Mrs Marchand	audience
president of Inner Delta		

B.) Metafiction

- Watch the short video clip (until 2:04 min) and tick the correct answers. For each question, several answers might be correct.



WordPress. 18 February 2016.

<<https://exampleschildrensbooks.wordpress.com/category/metafiction-2/>>

- Videopclip: <<http://study.com/academy/lesson/metafiction-definition-examples.html>>

1. Metafiction occurs

- when the story examines elements of fiction itself
- when characters comment on what is going on in the story
- when references to historical events are made
- when pictures illustrate the pieces of written information of the text

2. Metafiction is often

- playful
- serious
- sarcastic
- dramatic

3. Metafiction

- helps the reader to identify with the characters
- forces the reader to reflect on the nature of storytelling
- forces the reader to reflect on the production processes of the stories
- increases the authenticity of the story

- Answer the following questions.

4. Which metafictional elements does the speaker identify in the well-known picture book *The Monster at the End of this Book*?

5. How would you define 'metafiction' in your own words?
6. Find at least three examples of metafiction in Ben's first-person narratives in *After the First Death*.
7. What effects do these metafictional references have on your reading?
8. Comment on the effect of these metafictional examples on the distinction between reality and fictionality.

Zusammenfassung

Die Zielsetzung dieser Diplomarbeit besteht darin den Platz und die Eignung postmoderner Jugendliteratur für den Fremdsprachenunterricht zu untersuchen, sowie Vorschläge für eine erfolgreiche Rezeption dieser komplexen Texte zu liefern. Für die Herstellung einer profunden theoretischen Grundlage wird vorerst eine Untersuchung der Postmoderne und der Gattung der Jugendliteratur separat vorgenommen. Anhand einer detaillierten Analyse postmoderner Elemente soll anschließend die Natur postmoderner Jugendromane veranschaulicht und zugleich demonstriert werden, mit welchen Leseherausforderungen die junge Leserschaft dabei konfrontiert wird. Als Primärliteratur dazu dienen die Romane *Monster* von Walter Dean Myers und *After the First Death* von Robert Cormier. Das Ziel der letzten beiden Kapitel ist es eine Verbindung postmoderner Jugendliteratur mit dem österreichischen Fremdsprachenunterricht herzustellen. Zu diesem Zweck wird untersucht, inwiefern die Implementierung postmoderner Jugendliteratur auf Basis des österreichischen Curriculums für Fremdsprachenunterricht gerechtfertigt werden kann bzw. in wie weit die geforderte Lesekompetenz dem standardisierten Kompetenzniveau des *CEFR* für B1+ und B2 entspricht. Obwohl gezeigt wird, dass die Komplexität postmoderner Werke die für das Level B2 definierte Lesekompetenz übersteigt, plädiert die Diplomarbeit stark für die Einsetzung postmoderner Jugendliteratur im Englischunterricht, da damit, unter anderem, nicht nur viele erzieherische Ziele des Curriculums erlangt werden können, sondern auch essentielle Lesestrategien entwickelt werden können, welche in der zeitgenössischen postmodernen Gesellschaft als unabdingbar erscheinen. Schlussendlich werden einige fachdidaktischen Überlegungen vorgenommen und zwei Lesearten sowie Wolfgang Iser's 'Reader-response theory' als geeignete Ansätze für die Rezeption postmoderner Jugendliteratur vorgestellt. Darüber hinaus dient eine Selektion ausgewählter und für die Rezeption von *Monster* und *After the First Death* selbst gestalteter Unterrichtsmaterialien als fundierte Grundlage für die Behandlung dieser postmodernen Werke im Fremdsprachenunterricht.

Abstract

The primary goal of this thesis is to determine the place and suitability of postmodern Young Adult Literature for the EFL classroom. Furthermore, it is aimed at providing suggestions for teaching these overly complex texts within a language learning environment as well as strategies for helping students to more easily cope with the texts' complexity. After a theoretical consideration of the postmodern movement and of the genre 'Young Adult' literature,' an in-depth analysis of the generic features of postmodernism inherent in the representative novels *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers and *After the First Death* by Robert Cormier is supposed to illustrate, on the one hand, the nature of postmodern YA novels and, on the other hand, the challenges that are thereby posed to the young readership. In order to establish a link between YA literature and the Austrian EFL context, the thesis will examine in how far the implementation of postmodern texts in the EFL classroom can be justified by the national curriculum for second language teaching. Moreover, it will be investigated whether the required reading skills correspond to the reading competences predefined by the *CEFR* for the levels B1+ and B2. Even though this examination will reveal that the complexity of postmodern texts even exceeds the prescribed reading competence, the thesis strongly advocates the use of postmodern YA literature in the EFL classroom. It will be shown that postmodern literature does not just bear immense potential for achieving various educational goals of the curriculum, but also for developing new reading skills, which are highly relevant in the postmodern media-driven world. Finally, Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory as well as intertextual and aesthetic reading will be introduced as suitable approaches to postmodern literature. Above that, a selection of teaching material especially devised for the reception of *Monster* and *After the First Death* will provide valuable activities for reading these texts in an EFL context.