

The Paradox of Historical Fiction: a Plaidoyer for Fictionality in Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*

Lea Košmrlj

Abstract

In light of the fact/fiction divide, this paper delves into the literary genre of historical fiction for young adults and re-examines the disputed boundaries between fact and fiction. Exploring Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*, a work of historical fiction for young adults about life in Nazi-occupied Denmark, this discussion addresses the paradoxical nature of historical fiction: it is the *fictional* elements of historical fiction that play the crucial part in bringing *historical* facts closer to the young adult reader.

Keywords: historical fiction, young adult literature, Lois Lowry, *Number the Stars*, fact and fiction

"It is only if fiction is identified with writing about imaginary beings and literature identified with fiction that the relation between history and literature must be seen as little more than an opposition between the real world (past and present) and fantasy, dreams, daydreams, and other similar phantasmatic activities [...]" (White 2014, xii)

INTRODUCTION

Fact and *fiction* are often viewed as two diametrically opposed terms. In the case of historical fiction, factual, hard data competes with non-factual, fictional parts of the work that are a product of a writer's imagination. In the relentless rivalry between the two, which one prevails? Is it fiction that governs the text, or is it history that is the basis of a successful work of historical fiction (Akman 86)? When it comes to historical fiction, it often seems that a book's main objective is to convey historical information, and its quality mostly dependent on how well it succeeds in doing so.

In young adult fiction, the fact/fiction dichotomy is particularly pressing. The *fact/fiction divide*, which is still a matter of dispute, seems to have led to a *history/literature divide*, and by strictly separating the latter two, there remains little room for the genre of historical fiction to affirm itself as a reliable source of knowledge and an accurate portrayal of the past (see White 2014). The article explores the fact/fiction and history/literature divides in the present conceptual frameworks of young adult historical fiction. By examining Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*, an acclaimed work of historical fiction for young adults set against the backdrop of World War II in Denmark, the article seeks to challenge the presumption that the historical elements in a work of historical fiction are subordinate to its fictional parts. On the contrary, the article argues that fictional elements play a crucial part in evoking a believable and engaging portrayal of the past. The demands that a work of historical fiction "smells right, [...] feels right," and that "the snap and tang of the past are communicated effectively" (De Groot 14) are fulfilled precisely by building an immersive fictional frame around historical facts. Therein lies the paradox of historical fiction: it is the fictional elements of the work that bring history closer to the young adult reader, and that are the key to bridging the gap between the past and the present.

THE FACT/FICTION DICHOTOMY IN HISTORICAL FICTION

The literary genre of historical fiction is often under attack for being a "secondary form" of history (Smiley), even "impure" and "vulgar" (O'Connell 506), and therefore an inadequate medium for conveying historical facts. Such accusations

mostly attack the narrative elements, a priori assumed to be fictional elements of literature which *dry history*, a presentation of historical facts in a strictly informative manner, purportedly does not contain and which, by consequence, make historical fiction more *fiction* than *history* (Hollien 5). Paradoxically, literary critics acknowledge historical fiction's educational function, but often to the detriment of its aesthetic value. It therefore seems to offend common sense to shelve a work of historical fiction either as pure fiction or a history book, and this is precisely what prevents the genre from receiving more serious attention in either discipline (Rehberger 59). Before examining the fact/fiction dichotomy in Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*, a brief historical overview of the debate is needed.

In today's historiography, non-narrative, analytical, and descriptive procedures prevail, whereas the narrative mode is scarcely used and mostly limited to providing specific, often personal examples and illustrations. The limited utility of narration in historical writing has, at least in part, to do with doubts about its ability to accurately represent the past (White 2010, 273). It is worth noting that this was not always the case. As Aristotle famously writes in *Poetics*, poetry "is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular" (IX). History as a discipline used to convey its lessons in the form of stories and exerted a strong moral component; historical narratives of ancient Greek scholars like Homer and Sophocles recounted both factual information and didactic, moral lessons (Rodwell 173). The *history versus fiction* debate is thus far from novel and has existed from at least ancient Greece onwards (Burke 169). It was as late as the beginning of the nineteenth century that history moved away from its origins in rhetoric and story-telling, and was transformed into a positivist, utilitarian science postulating objective facts about the past, while historical literature became its deficient, non-referential counterpart (White 2014, 10; 2014, 12–13). In classical narratology and literary theory, the *fictional* narrative was "hypostatized as narrative par excellence, or as the model for all narratives whatsoever" (Genette et al. 755), whereas the possibility of a *factual* narrative, a term introduced by Genette as recently as 1991, remained largely overlooked (Löschnigg 2021, 270). The narrative mode in general therefore came to be viewed in historical writing as more of a necessary evil than the norm, one which often triggers the association of a mythic, religious, pseudoscientific, or fictional text rather than a proper empirical reflection of history (White 2010, 273–74). Thus, the concept of *historical fiction* grew into an irresolvable opposition between *history* and *fiction*, with "one [being] a metonym for truth and the other for falsehoods" (Stocker 69).

It was only in the twentieth century that the fact/fiction divide began to shake at its foundations. It became increasingly clear that the problem impinges not

only on history and literary theory but on fundamentals of ontology, epistemology, cultural hermeneutics, and science (Tamura 151–52). Pitfalls of narration in historiography were raised by scholars such as Paul Ricœur, Paul Veyne, Georg Lukács, and Hayden White, and narratologists such as Käte Hamburger and Dorrit Cohn later turned to topics of factual narration, markers of fictionality and cultural hermeneutics (Löschnigg 1999, pa. 1; Korthals Altes 158). Gérard Genette postulated in his essay “Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative” that “historians do on occasion invent details or arrange ‘intrigues,’ and novelists do on occasion draw inspiration from topical events” (757), while Lukács was one of the first to examine the genre of historical fiction in *The Historical Novel* (1937). By arguing that historical writing cannot lay claim to objectivity because it is structurally identical to fictional representations of the past, Hayden White unequivocally took historiography off of the factual pedestal (Doran xxvi). White paved the way for the narrativist school of thought with his seminal work *Metahistory* (1973) (Korhonen 11), in which he argued that historical writing and literary writing display much the same structure at the level of representation—that of a narrative (Doran xxvi), and that a narratological order is imposed upon past events even in historical writing by way of *emplotment* (White 1973, 2014, 7). On these grounds, White repeatedly challenged the misconceived divide which surfaced in the nineteenth century and which equated history with fact and literature with fiction (White 2014, 17; Stocker 69). At the same time, he questioned historiography’s claim to complete objectivity and defended literature’s ability to deal with the past. His work marks a turn to narrative in the field (Korhonen 11), but has faced considerable criticism coming from both literary theorists and historiographers (Korhonen 13; see also Chorell; Lorenz). Postmodernist thought has thus shown that the domains of history and fiction, and by extension of fact and fiction, “are neither so far apart nor so homogeneous as they might appear” (Genette et al. 772).

HISTORICAL FICTION: HISTORY AND/OR FICTION?

For the present at least, the contestable history/fiction dichotomy continues to reign supreme in the domain of historical fiction (Addey 421). In everyday life, ontological realism is our best bet (Schaeffer 2.1). It is evident to us that certain events did take place, that certain people really did live, and that certain actions were carried out in the past—notwithstanding history’s interpretative nature and epistemological concerns (see also Brown). We intuitively establish a correlation between the reliability of a historical narrative and the amount of historical research behind it. Moreover, the commonsensical option of drawing a clear line between fact and fiction allows us to determine the work’s educational

value. Though his work has been repeatedly charged with historical relativism, White himself does not equate history (or historical fiction) with fiction either (Stocker 71), but rather with a kind of narration, and believes that reliable historical knowledge *can* be achieved (Korhonen 12). He acknowledges the ontological difference between factual and fictional components, and defines historical facts as “factual (singular existential) statements” (qtd. in Doran xxvi), which constitute the unprocessed historical record. However, the historical discourse which emerges from it does so by way of narration, and thus inevitably requires the author to make moral as well as aesthetic decisions (Roth xiii). White sees this as the point in which historical and literary writing coincide (Korhonen 12), and which demonstrates that the nineteenth-century separation of history and literature (but not fact and fiction) is artificial (Stocker 70).

Preserving the fact/fiction dichotomy is inevitable and necessary, especially when it comes to young adult literature, to avoid the traps of epistemology, relativism, and similar questions that are beyond the scope of this paper, and to be able to determine the work’s educational value. This certainly holds true for *Number the Stars*, as exemplified by Groce (2009) and discussed later. At the same time, the divide is detrimental to the genre of historical fiction, because it also maintains and perpetuates the literature/history divide and the *literature equals fiction, history equals fact* stance. Since the genre is inevitably a blend between fact and fiction (Akman 90), a work of historical fiction requires a delicate interplay of the two domains. In book reviews, however, the balance is often tipped heavily in favour of historical facts. Great demands are placed on historical accuracy (Peabody 33), while less attention is paid to the fictional aspects of the work (Addey 421–422). A work of historical fiction is often first met with suspicion towards possible fictional elements and scrutinised to determine just how many of them can be found in the work. If there are many, the entire work is condemned for being historically inaccurate at worst, or the fictional elements are ascribed no purpose and left unattended to at best (Addey 421). The answer to the question posed earlier about whether *fact* governs *fiction* in historical fiction is therefore a resounding yes: authors are expected to elaborate on which parts of the work are factual and which fictional in the fore- or afterword, and sometimes outright defend themselves for filling in slots where historically accurate information is available with fictional elements. Taking such poetic licence is often deemed a result of poor research or a factual faux pas (421). Authors contend with book reviews that “regularly emphasize the authenticity, the affective impact, of historical fiction” (De Groot 14), and suffer from what Maria Margaronis labels “anxiety of authenticity” (2008).

IN DEFENCE OF FICTIONALITY

Most authors of historical fiction, Lois Lowry included, are ‘mosaic makers’ (Addey 425) that construct a story on the basis of a limited, in many respects incomplete historical record. Missing parts are filled with “multiple small elements (such as words, events, situations, characters) to create a bigger picture” (428). But what exactly are the missing parts, and in what relation do these ‘small elements’ stand to the past?

Hayden White argues in his last book *The Practical Past* (2014) that contemporary historical writing can only ever paint a fragmentary picture of the past, because it is limited to empirical methods like investigating documentary evidence, and to dealing with topics that are suitable for such analysis (xiv). By drawing on British philosopher Michael Oakeshott’s (1983) distinction between *the historical past* and *the practical past*, White proposes that the totality of the historical past can best be captured precisely through literary writing. The historical past belongs to the domain of professional historiography and deals with past events, institutions, persons, politics, and religion; the practical past includes topics like love, work, and suffering, which cannot be accessed and reconstructed directly and objectively, and are thus left unaccounted for in historiography, but are topics that literary writing can explore (xiii–xv). In short, White argues that historical writing cannot reify the past in the way novels or witness literature, which have often been blatantly disregarded as merely fiction, can (28–29), and that “professional history is not an adequate way of relating to the past” (Ahlskog 375). He makes the distinction between the practical and the historical past not only for the purpose of discussing the truth value of historical or literary writing, but primarily to open up the practical and ethical dimension of history. As opposed to the historical past, the practical past is didactic. It possesses present-day relevance by offering us parallels to current situations and problems, and explores ethical and moral concerns—hence the term ‘practical’ (White 2014, 10), much in the Nietzschean spirit of understanding history as a guiding force for the present and future (see Nietzsche 1874).

The practical past tackles topics which “are accessible as objects of practical study only by way of imaginative hypothesization” (White 2014, xv), for example love, friendship and everyday matters, and pieces of the mosaic that authors of historical fiction include to create an immersive atmosphere of the past. This yet again calls for a reevaluation of the term fiction merely “as a kind of invention or construction based on hypothesis rather than a manner of writing or thinking focused on purely imaginary or fantastic entities” (xii), and sheds new light on literary representations of the past. Historical fiction’s fictional elements need not be entirely fabricated. In fact, they can complement, enhance, and add validity to the factual components to lend a historical narrative the dimension it lacks. As White writes:

The practical past, however, *is* amenable to a literary—which is to say, an artistic or poetic—treatment that is anything but “fictional” in the sense of being purely imaginary or fantastic in kind. A literary treatment of the past—as displayed in various instances of the modern(ist) novel [...]—has the real past as its ultimate referent [...], but focuses on those aspects of the real past which the historical past cannot deal with. (White 2014, xiv)

In *The Practical Past*, White offers firm grounds for the validity of representing history through literature, and once again makes room for historical and literary writing to enter into dialogue. For the purposes of this paper, the concepts of practical and historical past will be borrowed to examine the interplay of factual and fictional elements in historical fiction. On the condition that authorial responsibility and academic rigour serve as the basis for tying a historical narrative to a historical record, White’s distinction effectively lends itself to exploring the fact/fiction divide. The practical past begins where the historical record as historiography knows it ends, and where the historical record ends is when authors of historical fiction are required to bring in their ‘small elements’ to fill in the empty space in a historical narrative.

A similar divide to that of the practical and historical past is suggested by Michael Hollien (4), who distinguishes between *dry history* and *narrative history*. The former conveys to the reader “*what-it-was* and *why-it-was*” and consists of impersonal historical facts, and the latter centres upon a personal and particular experience, usually of “ordinary people living through an extraordinary event,” and tells the reader “*what-it-was-like* to experience” (Hollien 7). While Hollien rejects the educational value of narrative history (5), there are parallels that can be drawn with White’s divide. The ‘*what-it-was-like* to experience’, much like the practical past, is literary, imaginative and fictional, but it can nonetheless be historical; not in the sense that it masquerades as fact, but rather in the sense that it brings the reader closer to a better, more thorough understanding of the historical background.

The fact/fiction dichotomy therefore persists, but an entirely new kind of duality becomes apparent: the literary elements at issue are no longer unbound from the facts and the factual narrative or useless for imagining the past reality. They still do not purport to be historical facts, just like historical fiction does not purport to be an entirely factual narrative, but by means of “imaginative hypothesization” (White 2014, xv), as opposed to invention *ex nihilo*, they facilitate the factual part of the narrative and take on a crucial immersive role. Susan Peabody, a writer herself, sees the historical novel as “a metaphor for the past” (34). Drawing on Aristotle’s discussion of metaphor in *Rhetoric*, she concludes that one of historical fiction’s abilities (and ultimate aims) is to render a convincing, comprehensible picture of the past. Confined by methodology and practice, this is what historical writing cannot do (Peabody 33–34).

The immersiveness and immediacy of historical fiction are particularly significant when it comes to young adult literature. Right after utopian and dystopian fiction, books with realistic and historical elements rank highest on the reading lists of young adults (Vats 9). Weaving historical facts into an engrossing narrative makes them “of more immediate consequences to a young reader than when presented in lists and pseudo-prose collections, as in a text book” (qtd. in Rodwell 153). Bullet points with historical dates, information about war alliances, and descriptions of triumphs, failures, and atrocities are indeed what young adults will typically encounter in their history books, where the human perspective is left unaccounted for. In historical fiction, however, the young adult learner is no longer “the outsider, looking in” (Nawrot 343). This observation is not merely a claim a reader of historical fiction makes on the basis of their subjective feeling, but is also backed up empirically (see Nawrot 343). The critical variable that distinguishes historical fiction from ‘plain history’ is thus precisely the practical past, the “what-it-was-like,” the human point of view. The past cannot take shape in the minds of readers if it is not given the form of modern immediacy; it must, in its fictional aspects, transcend its historiographical framework. Understanding the importance of the practical past in young adult historical fiction, we can now turn our attention to Lois Lowry’s *Number the Stars*.

A CASE IN POINT: LOIS LOWRY’S *NUMBER THE STARS*

Number the Stars is a historical novel for young adults by Lois Lowry, a prolific and internationally acclaimed American author of young adult fiction. Published in 1989, the novel was immediately well-received and won the esteemed Newbery Medal. Against the backdrop of World War II, Lowry’s *Number the Stars* presents the life of a Danish girl named Annemarie Johansen and her family’s valiant efforts to aid her Jewish friend Ellen Rosen in escaping Nazi persecution. Ellen’s family is forced to separate and flee the country; as the parents go into hiding, the Johansens provide sanctuary to Ellen and pretend that she is Annemarie’s sister. Along with Annemarie’s uncle Henrik, who is a fisherman in the north of the country, the Johansens help the Rosens and four other members of the Jewish community flee to neutral Sweden.

In brief, the historical background of the novel, which clearly shows the book’s narrative depth and historical validity: on April 9, 1940, German forces marched into the hitherto neutral Denmark, in violation of The Danish-German Non-Aggression Pact, and occupied the country. Outnumbered and insufficiently equipped, the Danes surrendered immediately. Resistance groups formed shortly after, yet active resistance was minimal and made little headway at the beginning of occupation (Holmskov Schlüter; Bülow, “The Occupation of Denmark”).

Recognising the necessity of adapting to life under German control, both the Danish citizens and the government more or less peacefully tolerated the German presence. The Danish government remained in power, refusing to participate in the genocide, but did provide the occupying forces with food and other resources. The monarch, King Christian X, remained in Denmark. It was not until 1943 that resistance sabotage actions grew stronger and became more frequent (Bülow, "The Occupation of Denmark"). By August 1943, the Nazi persecution in Denmark grew more severe and Danish Jews faced imminent arrest, relocation, and ultimately death. The events that followed are one of the most touching untold stories of human compassion in World War II. An effective nation-wide Danish counter-operation ensued: the majority of the Jewish community went into hiding and managed to escape to Sweden by fishing boats. German soldiers raided homes and boats to find them, yet mostly with little success; the Danes hid the Jews in their houses, churches, attics, and small stowaways under the boat decks. Out of around 7,500 members of Denmark's Jewish community, 284 were found on the night of October 1, 1943. The rest found shelter in hospitals, churches, attics, in the homes of complete strangers, and then managed to reach neutral Sweden by ferries and fishing boats (Holmskov Schlüter; Bülow, "The Rescue of the Danish Jews").

Number the Stars offers the young adult reader an overall historically accurate, well-researched account of the Jewish persecution in Denmark and also draws on multiple non-fictional sources to render it authentic: the diaries of underground Resistance Movement members, various written accounts, and stories of both the rescued Jews and the Danish rescuers (Groce 8–9). The author herself states in the foreword that, while the protagonist and her family are mostly a product of her imagination, the rest is thoroughly researched and historically accurate non-fiction:

Annemarie Johansen is a child of my imagination, though she grew there from the stories told to me by my friend Annelise Platt, to whom this book is dedicated, who was herself a child in Copenhagen during the long years of the German occupation. [...] So I created little Annemarie and her family, set them down in a Copenhagen apartment on a street where I have walked myself, and imagined their life there against the real events of 1943. (Lowry 133)

Annemarie, the protagonist of the novel inspired by conversations with Annelise Platt, should be understood as a vehicle aiding the book's practicality and conveying *what-it-was-like* to experience World War II in Denmark, which makes the book inextricably bound to the real historical account. The protagonist is therefore not simply freely invented, but carefully constructed by means of hypothesising in order to fit the historical backdrop:

I had always been fascinated and moved by Annelise's descriptions not only of the personal deprivation that her family and their neighbors suffered during those years, and the sacrifices they made, but even more by the greater picture she drew for me of the courage and integrity of the Danish people [...]. (Lowry 133)

In the first few chapters, Lowry paints a detailed portrait of the Johansen family, particularly Annemarie to make her as relatable a character to young adult readers as possible. She constructs a multi-faceted child who is naive and wary, inquisitive and contemplative, resolute and hesitant, brave and fearful all at once; a girl who loves playing with her younger sister and rolls her eyes at her naivety, has a best friend, likes fairy tales and making up stories herself—much the same traits young adult readers themselves might have. Throughout the book, she attempts to make sense of the war and the world around her, and the reader who follows her on her fictional journey is perplexed with similar questions as she is, or as Annelise Platt might well have been in 1943:

Later, once more in her bed beside the warm cocoon of her sister, Annemarie remembered how her father had said, three years before, that he would die to protect the king. That her mother would, too. And Annemarie, seven years old, had announced proudly that she also would. Now she was ten, with long legs and no more silly dreams of pink-frosted cupcakes. And now she—and all the Danes—were to be bodyguard for Ellen, and Ellen's parents, and all of Denmark's Jews. Would she die to protect them? Truly? Annemarie was honest enough to admit, there in the darkness, to herself, that she wasn't sure. For a moment she felt frightened. But she pulled the blanket up higher around her neck and relaxed. (Lowry 25–26)

Construing the reality around her, Annemarie most often turns to her parents or her uncle for guidance, and asks questions young adults would quite possibly pose as well. While they are open to discuss such matters with her, they are reluctant to reveal to her the full extent of war crimes and atrocities and only gradually, upon her insisting, explain to her the persecution of Jews, the Resistance movement and the Nazi ideology:

But Annemarie heard Mama and Papa talk, sometimes at night, about the news they received that way: news of sabotage against the Nazis, bombs hidden and exploded in the factories that produced war materials, and industrial railroad lines damaged so that the goods couldn't be transported. And she knew what Resistance meant. Papa had explained, when she overheard the word and asked. The Resistance fighters were Danish people—no one knew who, because they were very secret—who were determined to bring harm to the Nazis however they could. They damaged the German trucks and cars, and bombed their factories. They were very brave. Sometimes they were caught and killed. (Lowry 8)

It is through Annemarie's questioning, overhearing and speculating that the young reader gets a grasp of the past events, both on a social and individual scale, and the complexities of living in times of adversity. In the paper "Authenticating 'Number the Stars' Using Nonfiction Resources," Robin D. Groce puts forward three historical domains that the work accurately reflects in more detail: geography, events, and people (6). Factual information about these topics is conveyed to the young adult reader mostly through Annemarie's conversations with her father. While the dialogues are, naturally, made up by the author, they contain valuable descriptions of Denmark's topography, King Christian X's historical persona, Danish government's non-cooperative stance towards Nazi Germany, and geographic features of Northern Europe (Groce 6). The character of a 10-year-old who seeks out and absorbs all this information is much closer to the young adult reader than impersonal expository writing on the topic.

The book's linear plot relies on Harold Flender's *Rescue in Denmark*, a factual account about rescue groups in Denmark based on the testimony of David Melchior, a member of the Danish Jewish community, whose father was the chief rabbi of Denmark (Groce 6). The real-life events of September 29, 1943 are elaborated to Annemarie by her father and set the story of the rescue of Danish Jews in motion:

This morning, at the synagogue, the rabbi told his congregation that the Nazis have taken the synagogue lists of all the Jews. [...] They plan to arrest all the Danish Jews. They plan to take them away. And we have been told that they may come tonight. [...] They call it 'relocation'. (Lowry 35–36)

The effective nation-wide Danish counter-operation that ensued is described through Annemarie's perspective and skilfully zoomed in on a single fictional Danish family, which manages to bring several Jewish refugees to neutral Sweden. Multiple non-fictional resources were used as the basis for descriptions of the Danish Resistance movement, Nazi officers, hiding places and fishing boats that brought members of the Jewish community to safety (Groce 7–8). However, it is the literary, artistic elements around them that give the novel the power of "making [history] much more effective, much more 'historical', more 'humane', and thus, paradoxically, truer to reality" (Akman 91). The *historical* dimension of the past is achieved by thorough research; the *practical*, human dimension is conveyed by means of the book's fictional parts like Annemarie's thoughts, dialogues, and everyday situations. Annemarie is, apart from war atrocities, faced with the loss of a family member, the suffering of a best friend, and the struggles of growing up. All of this cannot be reconstructed historically, but is part and parcel of the real past—of being human then and now. This is ultimately what helps the story surpass its historiographical framework and gives it power beyond merely

conveying factual information. By discussing topics like the value of cross-cultural friendships, the importance of inter-religious tolerance, and the dynamics in interpersonal relationships, the novel gains the dimension of the practical past, and thus an immersive present-day relevance:

It was an odd word: pride. Annemarie looked at the Rosens, sitting there, wearing the misshapen, ill-fitting clothing, holding ragged blankets folded in their arms, their faces drawn and tired. She remembered the earlier, happier times: Mrs. Rosen, her hair neatly combed and covered, lighting the Sabbath candles, saying the ancient prayer. [...] She remembered Ellen in the school play, moving confidently across the stage, her gestures sure, her voice clear. All of those things, those sources of pride—the candlesticks, the books, the daydreams of theater—had been left behind in Copenhagen. They had nothing with them now; there was only the clothing of unknown people for warmth, the food from Henrik's farm for survival, and the dark path ahead, through the woods, to freedom. (Lowry 93–94)

The story of *Number the Stars* operates at once at the external, referential level which abounds in factual information, and at the level of the (mostly) fictional protagonist's rich internal life, which is the key element that ultimately grants the reader access to a past world and helps them learn about the historical happenings. Annemarie and her family are simultaneously a *fictional* construct of the author, and what is ultimately *real* and comes alive in the mind of the young adult reader. This is what once again leads us to arrive at the paradox of historical fiction: it is through fictional characters, their thoughts, everyday situations, and conversations—their hypothesised reality—that young adults immerse themselves into the past, and are able to take from the book a history lesson about Danish Resistance in World War II.

CONCLUSION

Authors of historical fiction for young adult readers contend with the task of piecing together the mosaic of the past, and the quality of their work is contingent upon their finding a fine balance between both factual and fictional elements. This paper advocated for greater appreciation of the fictional elements, offered grounds for their immersive and authenticity-granting capacities by introducing the concept of the *practical past*, and suggested a shift in the definition of *fictionalising* towards what Hayden White terms *imaginative hypothesization*. In historical fiction, literary elements are thus at once a means for teaching history and reanimating the past, and an end in and of itself with literary and aesthetic value. A case in point in this respect is *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry, an award-winning

historical novel for young adults. The fictional protagonist Annemarie Johansen, her family, and Lowry's depictions of their practical past give young adult readers a window into a past world of Nazi-occupied Denmark, and thus contribute to the contemporary discussion of the Holocaust.

The observation that fiction plays as important a role as fact does not, naturally, diminish the importance of the moral and ethical questions that authors of historical fiction are confronted with: "How much—and what kinds of things—is it permissible to invent? [...] What are the moral implications of taking someone else's experience, especially the experience of suffering and pain, and giving it the gloss of form" (Margaronis 138)? To say that the ethical, epistemological and ideological pitfalls of historical fiction can in some measure be mitigated is to assume both an idealist and a relativist stance at once. However, it might be one worth taking if we believe that historical fiction for young adults can, in fact, serve as a conduit for historical understanding. With thorough historical research and intellectual responsibility as the prerequisite, authentication procedures, and parental and teacher guidance, boundaries between fact and fiction become clearer, and the two can, somewhat paradoxically, seamlessly blend with one another in a work of historical fiction to create an engaging narrative for young adult readers. The paper emphasised the value of the fictional elements in historical fiction, for it is the fictional frame that ultimately, albeit somewhat paradoxically, bridges the gap between the past and the present, and allows young adult readers to engage with the past and to gain historical knowledge from a work of historical fiction.

Lea Košmrlj

lk72012@student.uni-lj.si



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Paradoks zgodovinske fikcije: v zagovor fikcije v romanu *Number the Stars*

Članek se v luči dihotomije med dejanskostjo in fikcijo ukvarja z literarno zvrstjo zgodovinske fikcije za mlade bralce in preosmišlja meje med dejanskim in izmišljenim. Osredinja se na zgodovinski roman za mlade bralce *Number the Stars* avtorice Lois Lowry, ki opisuje življenje na Danskem pod nemško okupacijo. Članek raziskuje paradoksalno naravo zgodovinske fikcije: prav izmišljeni elementi so tisti ključni del zgodovinske fikcije, ki mladim bralcem in bralkam približa zgodovinska dejstva.

Ključne besede: zgodovinska fikcija, mladinska literatura, Lois Lowry, *Number the Stars*, dejstva in fikcija