

## **“You Did What You Wanted, and I Helped Because I Had To”: The Weak Currents of Found Family in Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus Trilogy***

Whereas many narratives for young adults, both within and outside the fantasy genre, emphasize rebellion against, temporary departure from, or compensation for the family, Jonathan Stroud's *Bartimaeus Trilogy* envisions young protagonists who do not find fulfillment in any kind of family structure, biological or chosen. Instead, these characters sacrifice their lives and/or potential connections to others to facilitate social change. While Stroud's characters undeniably feel some bonds with one another, these bonds are remarkably minimal and contingent: Nathaniel and Kitty, the series' young adult protagonists, stand on opposite sides of a sociopolitical conflict which they only set aside temporarily when confronted with immediate crisis. Any more permanent resolution is foreclosed by Nathaniel's death. Meanwhile, Nathaniel and Kitty's connections with the ancient djinni Bartimaeus, curtailed by the power imbalance involved in forcibly summoning him to Earth, are similarly incapable of providing the comfort often assumed to inhere in a family unit. Their camaraderie, even when fleetingly genuine, is always contingent, dissolved either by serious disagreement or departure.

Drawing from previous scholarship on the young adult's position relative to the family in fantasy for younger readers by writers such as Maria Nikolajeva, Catherine Butler, and Farah Mendlesohn and Michael Levy to contextualize my reading, I will argue that Stroud's trilogy eschews the young protagonist's personal growth into or out of a family unit to instead emphasize a sense of complicity in and responsibility for combatting flawed sociopolitical systems. Rather than uniting them in any lasting way on a personal level, Nathaniel and Kitty's truce becomes a necessary step in their efforts to overturn the larger traditions of exploitation by which their world of domineering magicians, commoners, and enslaved djinn operates. The narrative arc of the *Bartimaeus Trilogy*, in which friendship is represented as a current strong enough to positively influence the characters' actions, but too weak to prevent them from being washed permanently away from one another by their contributions to the formation of a better world at the story's conclusion, shifts that conclusion away from valuing familial unity and toward an emphasis on the young adult's sociopolitical responsibility.