

**School of Media, Culture & Creative Arts
Department of Communication and Cultural Studies**

**Reading Girls Reading Pleasure:
Reading, Adolescence and Femininity**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the reading girl and the potential pleasures and transgressions she experiences through popular fiction. Throughout modernity, the western bourgeois girl has been directed towards texts that both validate proper, and caution against improper, forms of femininity. This practice continues within the institutions of family and education as well as through the public library system and commercial booksellers. Although the contemporary girl is subjected to feminism, culture continues to insist on her domestic role. The notion of identification is central to societal fears about the material that finds its way into the hands of reading girls. Because the reading girl can align herself imaginatively with characters, commentators worry that she might absorb passivity from passive characters, wanton habits from wanton characters, or murderous habits from murderous characters. Reading theory tends to reinforce these fears through a particularly disparaging assessment of popular fictions. The girl's identifications with characters in popular fiction continue to worry her familial, educational, psychological and moral guardians.

Using a methodology based on the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, I consider the girl reader as a subject split between her unconscious and the identity she cobbles together through identifications with embodied and representational others. Because of this foundational split, she can never fully articulate reading pleasures and their effects can never be calculated with consequence. Reading participates in the girl's struggle to achieve the precarious feminine position, and provides her with pleasures along the way. To demonstrate some of the pleasures available to the girl, I undertake readings of texts associated with adolescence and femininity. I examine young adult fiction that is directed at the adolescent reader to expose the pleasures that lie beneath the injunction to adopt a heteronormative adult identity. From books addressing the girl, I move to melodramatic and sensational adult fictions located in the domestic. In these fictions, the girl is stifled and distorted because she is captive to her family and cannot escape to establish the direction of her desire and seek the recognition of the social Other. Finally, I look at texts marked by violence. Taking one fictional text from the horror genre, and one non-fictional true crime text, I explore the unspeakable pleasures of reading about blood and death.

In these readings, I investigate both conservative and transgressive pleasures. These pleasures co-exist in all of the fictions explored in this thesis. All reading tends towards the cautionary, and the book cannot corrupt the normally constituted reading girl. Through identifying with characters, she can build up a repertoire of feminine masks and develop an awareness of the precarious position of womanliness. In the end, I argue, the adolescent reading girl cannot be determined or totalised despite the best efforts of the book and its commentators.

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Chapter One

Assuming the Feminine Position

My eighty year old mother has read *American Psycho*. I enjoy making this announcement to my tutorial group or any other young available audience. They are always impressed and I achieve my goal. After all, it is a boast.

My mother is too embarrassed to tell anyone how many novels she reads a week. A shameful absorption in fiction is a female family fault. I am a slow completion because I am drawn away from this dissertation by an enthralling crime novel, or any crime novel, or any novel. My sister pleads with her young children to leave her alone for the duration of the final chapters. We are our mother's daughters. Thus, my interest in adolescent girls' reading practices is somewhat recuperative of a life lost in fiction. In my family, we read whatever took our fancy without discipline or censorship. We were comforted by domestic triumphs, excited by wild sex, enlightened by highbrow ruminations, terrified by unspeakable horrors, and thrilled by perilous adventures. Now, I try to recognise myself in reading theory, but I find that the subject of reading is never as promiscuous as the evidence of readers might suggest. Thus, in this dissertation I examine the opportunities for pleasure in reading for the adolescent girl reader, and the prospective effects of her reading on the formation of her gendered subjectivity.

Reading and readers fascinate me. I watch women on public transport. They do not dash for a seat just to ease their aching feet, but because it is so much easier to read sitting down. I am a reading voyeur. I crane my neck trying to see the titles of the books they read. Self help? Bodice ripper? Fantasy? True crime? Religious tract? Romance? Social realism? Classic? Pulp? Now and again, the reading public seems to be engulfed by a particular title: any Stephen King, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, Dan Brown's the *Da Vinci Code*, Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight*, and so on. Generally though, there appears to be no limit to the genres and titles. Certainly, I have yet to see anyone reading de Sade's *Justine* on public transport, but a woman on a plane shows me her favourite lesbian erotica when I

outline my argument. Despite the categorical divide that is maintained in most reading theory between popular and aesthetic texts, most readers appear to breach the divide with little concern about critical derision. In this thesis, the reader is a pleasure seeker.

The Australian artist, Tracey Moffatt, speaks of teenage years with nights spent babysitting her siblings, "I'd make them go to bed early, so I [could] stay up late at night and watch lots of great films. And read books. Look for dirty books, mainly" (qtd. in Smee). Amongst these dirty books was Germaine Greer's, *The Female Eunuch*, chosen because, "it looked a bit rude". Tracey Moffatt represents the adolescent girl reader who is the subject of this thesis, precisely. Motivated by curiosity and desire, she finds herself in unlikely and contradictory textual places. Similarly, the author Dorothy Allison, discusses the trashy and pornographic material she accessed and read indiscriminately during her girlhood concluding: "I am the wages of pulp" (94). The art works of both women explore that raced and classed figure of fascination: the desiring and desirable, cheap and potent heroine of pulp fiction. Despite, or perhaps because of, the urgency with which the adolescent girl is warned away from this figure, she is exhibited in fiction as villainess, caution and object of excessive desire. Girls like Moffatt, Allison, my plane companion and myself seek our pleasures amongst both the bad and the good women of fiction. Amongst the pleasures of reading, disruption and preservation of the normative co-exist. Whilst apparently socially compliant as they read quietly, my reading companions on the train might encounter aberrance and impropriety between the pages of the fictional and fantastic texts they read.

In reading theory, the reader becomes the product of the book, and the book becomes the weapon of particular social forces. Are my mother, my sister, myself and the reading girls and women on the train all submitting to the regulative discourses of gender and sexuality in the novels we read? Are we degrading our aesthetic and moral sensibilities by indulging the popular? Or do we follow our desires, pursue our dreams and seek our pleasures? Are we educated or entertained? Are we disciplined or delighted? Such questions recur throughout the diverse and multiple texts that have commented on reading girls and women over the past few hundred years. We female readers participate in a long history about

femininity and reading, a history marked by anxiety and desire, a repetitive history of regulation and disruption.

The adolescent girl featured in my research is a subject of this history. She is a western girl determined through the post enlightenment discourse of femininity dominant in British and colonial settler countries such as America and Australia. She is aged between twelve and eighteen years. Thus, she occupies a space considered as adolescent in contemporary western societies defined in terms of dependency, puberty and schooling. Her contours are drawn with modern apparatus promoting a particular middle class femininity and heteronormative sexuality. This girl features heavily in the history of reading, yet she is silent within its narrative. She cannot speak above the raised voices of the authorities who speak about her. These authorities include not only those with whom she comes into daily contact such as her family, her teachers, and her local librarians, but also more distant voices. Since the enlightenment, she has been subject to the opinions of academics, authors, journalists, politicians, doctors, and clerics who have encouraged and deterred her reading habits according to the texts she reads. Whilst public opinion may differ about preferred texts and the function of reading, one idea consistently informs the figure of the adolescent reading girl: she is sensitive to the identifications she finds within the text, and these identifications participate in the production of her gendered subjectivity.

Undoubtedly, adolescent girls are acutely interested in images and representations. A teenage girl's bedroom furnishes us with evidence of the supremacy of image and representation in her world. Her bedroom walls may project images of rock-stars, astrology signs, TV personalities, marijuana leaves, supermodels, dolphins, or family members and friends. Not infrequently, the latest rock band scowl down demonically from their position next to a herd of white horses tossing their manes. To the adult world, these images may appear contradictory and, on occasion, dangerous, but the teenage girl is likely to nominate her room as the environment in which she feels most comfortable (McRobbie and Garber). When she retires to her room, she might play music, paint her nails, talk on the phone, sneak a cigarette, try on clothes - and she might pick up a novel and read. All of these activities, although undertaken in solitude, are both intensely social and intensely narcissistic. They are about ways of being woman, being seen to be woman and

rebellious against the constraints of proper womanhood. Whether masquerading as an avatar on the Nintendo, looking at Gemma Ward on the catwalk, or reading about Cathy in *Flowers in the Attic*, the girl is looking for herself in the image of the other. The girl's job is to become an embodied and encoded woman. This process engages powerful identifications that are implicated in the mechanism of subjectivisation and the production and maintenance of feminine subjectivity.

Texts aimed at, and selected by, the adolescent girl reader invite her to engage in powerful identifications with fictional characters. These identifications offer the girl intense pleasure¹ and the illusion of freedom, even though such apparent freedoms and pleasures are tempered by the inescapable cultural imperatives of proper womanhood. The proper woman will be heterosexual and interested in beauty, romance and family (Christian Smith). Thus the girl is schooled into the daily practices of attending to her appearance, limiting her actions, concentrating on the feelings of others, and thinking about boys. She is directed towards endless self-examination as she engages in the powerful process of subjectivisation. Reading participates in this process. It is implicated in the production of normal female citizens, but it also offers spaces of ambivalence in which the shape of normative femininity can be distorted. The discourses that produce the reading girl assume that she is receptive to textual persuasion, but this straightforward view does not account for the fissures that run through the subject and its others. Through reading the girl is exposed to socially desirable and undesirable forms of femininity, and it is the unpredictability and instability of her identifications with these characters that underpins the cultural anxiety accompanying her reading. In seeking pleasure through reading, the girl can enjoy both the licit and illicit, the feminine and the masculine, the victim and the perpetrator, the normal and the aberrant. I argue that all of these pleasures contribute to her subjectivisation as a female subject, and I exemplify this argument through examining the identificatory pleasures available to the girl reader across a range of popular fictions and focusing on texts that represent scenes of sex and violence.

In referring to pleasure, I do not privilege forms of pleasure or offer a categorical range of pleasures. In this thesis, I use the word 'pleasure' to encompass all the meanings attached to enjoyment. I am not employing the opposition of pleasure and bliss as suggested by Roland Barthes, because I will be using the French term

jouissance according to its strictly psychoanalytic definition. Pleasure will be taken as including the state of *jouissance* as well as those forms of enjoyment that secure the normative. Since the purpose of this thesis is to track rather than to theorise pleasure, it is contrary to my purpose to be restrict understandings of pleasure by applying definitive constraints. I propose a subject who escapes any binary logic, and whose pleasures circulate around and through her in complex and contradictory eddies of enjoyment and desire. Unlike pleasure, desire can and will be defined through a specifically Lacanian framework, and pleasure will be understood as one of the aims of desire.

The opposition of pleasure and bliss is aligned in the work of Barthes and others to the opposition of highbrow and lowbrow fiction producing one of the fault lines that run throughout the debate about the reading girl. Reception theorists often claim that the aesthetic value of certain texts invites a more worthwhile reading, so reading Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is preferred to reading a Mills & Boon novel despite their shared features as romance narratives. Thus, canonical texts can be employed to ensure that the girl reads rationally and becomes a suitable subject. For example, the narrative structure of *Pride and Prejudice* demonstrates that a young woman needs to secure her position in the social world, and someone with the attributes of an Elizabeth Bennet best accomplishes this. Livelier than her sister Jane who is too passive to acquire Bingley without the intercession of her sister, Elizabeth is sufficiently disciplined to avoid the ruin courted by the too lively Lydia, yet not so disciplined that she becomes as boring as the proper Mary. Yet this familiar reading assumes that the girl will identify with Elizabeth throughout her reading of the novel. Whereas for the adolescent girl might there not be a thrill associated with identifying with Lydia and her illicit love? Might she not find erotic potential imagining the time Lydia spends with Wickham before Darcy's authority imposes the correct legal status on their union? Even if she identifies solely with Elizabeth, she is reading a template for upward mobility through proper femininity and marriage – scarcely a feminist trajectory. Indeed, the aesthetically valorised novels by Jane Austen offer the same narrative structure that orders all modern romances: position is secured when a man is secured. The irony here is that many feminists remain reluctant to admit the pleasures of the popular, but the often conservative, even regressive, pleasures of canonical women's literature continue to be allowed, even encouraged.

Despite various interests urging the girl to read critically and aesthetically, she has plenty of opportunity to indulge a more promiscuous taste. The privileging of canonical and avant garde texts over the popular is rarely maintained outside the academy and the school. As a girl reader, I moved easily between Jane Austen and Georgette Heyer as well as enjoying adventure, fantasy, science fiction and nineteenth century novels from England, France and Russia. Above all, I loved to read, but my reading was directed in class towards the so-called classics. The girl reader of the high aesthetic text tends to be positioned as an apprentice in the classroom who must be taught both to appreciate and critique. Generally, the girl is assumed to read texts that are popular for her own purposes and pleasures outside of the classroom. It is these pleasures that I am not suggesting that there are no young women readers of the literary as opposed to the popular text, but the maturational framework of literacy and literary training relegate this girl to a failed or trainee role. Consequently, she is excluded from the role of the penetrating, writerly reader despite being exhorted to become such a reader.

The adolescent reading girl is a thoroughly modern subject. The enlightenment project recognised the individual subject as sovereign, hence the modern reading girl is a meaning making subject able to think and act independently of external control: the non-slave. Paradoxically, it is this assertion of reason as the prime regulator of human behaviour that necessitates the complex of normative imperatives that penetrate the lives of individuals. In the interests of statehood and civility, individuals must willingly conform to shared codes of behaviour. From a Lacanian perspective such as I apply in this thesis, the individual must subject herself to the laws of culture, but this necessary acquiescence can be understood as subjectivisation rather than subjection. Although subjection is always implicated within subjectivisation, the latter term recognises the positivity and reflexivity inherent in becoming a subject. From both a post structural and a psychoanalytic perspective, to be social is to be subject. If subjection implies the domination of the subject by language and the laws of culture, then subjectivisation refers to subject's relation to herself within language and the law. In other words, subjectivisation incorporates the processes by which a subject is paradoxically produced as both discrete from, and analogous with, others. This subject is indeterminate because there is no complete system in which she can be fully encapsulated, particularly if she is a feminine subject.

The application of the term subjectivisation in my work is pertinent to an investigation of identification as the key process in gendered adolescent reading practices. Identification is the mechanism through which the adolescent girl can align herself with proper and improper, similar and dissimilar, moral and immoral textual others. As such, the identifications a young female reader makes are both fostered and feared, yet the mechanism itself, identification, is asserted but not explored. The process is imbued with the power to produce good and bad subjects and, consequently, it is rigorously policed by the various institutions engaged in the reproduction of modern citizens: family, school, church, media and the book writing, publishing and distributing industry. In popular and academic discourse, adolescent girls are vulnerable to dangerous practices as a direct outcome of their tendency to identify with textual, media constructed characters. An overview of theoretical models of reading and identification is presented in Chapter Three to demonstrate their association of the feminine, identification, popular fiction and irrationality. Ultimately, identifying with textual others comprises a process that cannot be policed or denied since it is not visible to the outside observer. It is a process that is feared because it can facilitate the consumption of taboo material in a private space. Although the adolescent girl may be forbidden to read certain material, she may still access, read and identify with banned books. She may also read fictions directed to her differently than her guardians intended—she might identify with the wrong object. Because the category of adolescence is unstable in its frictional status between the oppositional categories of adult and child, the possibility that the reading girl might lose her textual innocence disturbs social conventions.

My own perspective on the effects of reading on the subject is broadly Lacanian. As such, I accept that identifications are the stuff of subjectivity. Of course, the notion that the subject is constituted through identifying herself in available discourses is not the sole territory of Lacan. Indeed, it is one of the premises that sustain most structural and post structural theory including Althusserian interpellation and Foucauldian discursive production of the subject. For Lacan though, the mechanics of identification extend beyond the proposition of the subject as a discursive effect. The Lacanian subject is indisputably always already within ideology, but she has something more or less about her that she cannot represent to herself or anyone else. She is the subject irretrievably split from her unconscious knowledge. Indeed, she does not know that there is more and less to her identity, but it is this

something that is implicated in her reading pleasures and her subjectivisation as a woman, the two being inextricably linked. The truth of the Lacanian subject lies on the other side of the rift that marks the subject as alienated from her own unconscious knowledge of loss and lack. Haunted by a retroactive memory of completion and fusion with all and any objects, the Lacanian subject follows blindly along the path of her desire. Interpellation and discursive formation are not excluded from the Lacanian model. Rather, the model opens up the subject to examine the mechanisms through which she is constituted by external processes, particularly language and the other, and the internal processes they produce in support of the subject (Alcorn). In simple terms, Lacanian theory can explain the different effects of objects such as texts on different subjects without opposing the post structural subject of discourse to a humanist subject of free will. It is a theory that accounts both for diversity and determination. Looking at the reading girl and her books through a Lacanian lens disturbs any symmetrical and certain coalition between the look, the book and the girl.

Furthermore, the sexed body of the girl signifies a femininity that is as fictional as the text she reads. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the image of the sexed body is one of the corner stones in the process of subjectivisation. Sexual identities are assumed in response to the meanings inscribed on the image of the body rather than any biological difference. Lacan illustrates the inevitability of sexed identities through the story of two children:

A train arrives at a station. A little boy and a little girl, brother and sister, are seated in a compartment face to face next to the window through which the buildings along the station platform can be seen passing as the train pulls to a stop. 'Look', says the brother, 'we're at Ladies!'; 'Idiot!' replies his sister, 'Can't you see we're at Gentlemen'. . . For these children, Ladies and Gentlemen will be henceforth be two countries towards which each of their souls will strive on divergent wings, and between which a truce will be more impossible since they are actually the same country and neither can compromise on its own superiority without detracting from the glory of the other (*Ecrits* 152).

It is notable that each child recognises the category from which they are excluded thus indicating that sexed identity is an effect of the signifier of difference in the other, and this difference is itself an effect of the signifiers 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen'.

Subjects may deny their biological sex and masquerade as the other, but they will still have to go through one of the doors: it is not possible to enter both doors simultaneously. Thus, all subjects are categorised and colonised by the fundamental signifier of sexual difference: the phallus. Of prime importance in Lacan's model of subjectivity, the phallus is an empty signifier—it is not the penis and does not correspond to the penis (*Ecrits* 285). Rather, the phallus is the imaginary object that would complete the subject of lack presumed to be the property of the father and the object of the mother's desire. In order to cover his or her lack, the subject assumes either the masculine position of seeming to have the phallus or the feminine position of seeming to be the phallus. The necessary performances of femininity and masculinity emanate from this dichotomy. Thus, sexed identities call into being the dominant, homogenising, naturalised discourses of femininity and masculinity. These two exclusive categories cannot, and do not, fully contain or describe the multiplicity of variance and contradiction between and within subjects, but this is not to suggest that subjects can escape categorisation. The reading girl is designated female within a network of associations established through the key terms: feminine and Woman. Her reading participates in the process of subjectivisation through which she takes her place in relation to society and to herself as a female subject regardless of the extent to which she seems to adopt or resist the feminine position.

The reading girl invites an approach that is necessarily speculative and provisional because the Lacanian subject is inherently unstable in that she is constituted through lack, split from her unconscious truths and marked by the unspeakable Real. Both the subject's sense of herself and her desire are formed through identification with embodied and representational others. She is constituted through profound lack and alienation as a social and speaking entity. As such, she mediates her relation between self and other through three interdependent psychic registers: the Symbolic register of language, law and culture; the Imaginary register of identification, illusion, and fantasy; and the Real register of the unknowable, unspeakable and inaccessible¹. These three registers are co-existing structures formed from birth into a world of relations between subjects and objects. Importantly, the interconnectedness of these registers in what Lacan figures as a Borromean knot² is crucial to subjectivity (*Seminar XX* 124). Despite their instigation with the birth of the child and her infantile apprehension of the world, these

registers are not stages through which we develop and progress to achieve full subjectivity. Instituted as a subject through alienation consequent on the separation of the infant from her dyadic absorption in the maternal other, the registers coexist and continue to sustain subjectivity. All three must necessarily be implicated in the reading act as they are in all human activity.

My method involves identifying opportunities within texts for the reading girl to engage in the pleasures of making meaning in the Symbolic, identifying with others in the Imaginary, and thrilling to suggestions of the inexpressible Real³. Given the ineffable character of the Real, the subject cannot communicate her encounters with the residual traces that remain since the Real evaporates once an object enters the system of signification. Thus, some of the effects of reading are not directly apprehensible through interview or survey. Despite valuing ethnographic studies of girls and reading, the pleasures I am interested in exploring are often considered socially taboo. Girls may not be willing to discuss the pleasures of reading erotic or violent texts. Furthermore, some of the pleasures associated with reading sex and horror seem to me to be inexplicable. My body and imagination respond to the text, but I cannot always account for my response, nor can I find articulate accounts of these pleasures in ethnographic, autobiographic or critical literature. Descriptions seem to fall into the realms of common repetitions or critical obfuscation, and the intense pleasure remains elusive. A Lacanian perspective accounts for these unutterable pleasures because the Lacanian subject is internally riven between conscious and unconscious knowledge with the latter speaking indirectly through slips, dreams and fantasies. Unconscious knowledge is not available to the subject and cannot be elicited through a survey or interview. Consequently, there are many aspects of her reading pleasures that the reading girl cannot communicate directly. Through the examination of texts, I propose an amalgam of pleasures associated with each of the foundational realms of subjectivity that might account for their popularity with adolescent girl readers.

Of course, this approach is limited by my position as an adult. In this sense, I am aligned with all the other commentators on the girl's reading and her identifications. Although there are not many Lacanian analyses of texts addressed to young readers, Roberta Seelinger Tristes and Karen Coats both employ Lacan and Kristeva to identify the powers, persuasions and pleasures of children's and young adult

fiction. However, I would distinguish my approach in that I am more interested in the unsettled subject of Lacanian psychoanalysis than Trites and Coats, and less in the normative good citizen. My position on the act of reading corresponds with this observation of Shoshana Felman's,

reading, as I see it, is a constant struggle to become aware. Reading is an access route to discovery. But the significance of the discovery appears only in retrospect, because insight is never purely cognitive: it is to some extent always performative (incorporated in an act, a doing) and to that extent precisely it is not transparent to itself (15).

Reading as struggle, discovery and performance underpins my argument and my method. The readings I perform on selected texts struggle to discover the sites of pleasure available to the adolescent girl reader informed by the retrospective insights of the adult woman. In a sense, the girl reader is my former self, but my method is not autoethnographic. As the subject of this thesis, the girl reader is not unique. Rather, she is representative of the struggle to resolve the woman problem shared by other young female subjects. Through reading fictions, I seek to identify the pleasures available to the girl reader and their contribution to her struggle to achieve the recognition of the social Other³ despite her marginal status as an adolescent girl. Within this broad approach, I concentrate particularly on the implications of these reading pleasures for the assumption of femininity by the reading subject.

If this subject is female, then she is consigned to a more ambivalent process of assuming her position than that of the male subject. As Lacan famously pronounced, "*woman* does not exist, woman is *not whole*" (*Seminar XX* 57). In other words, the girl is directed toward a social category that is neither complete nor generic. Woman⁴ does not constitute a set into which the girl can insert herself. Any representation of the universal Woman is necessarily a phallic myth in which she is either the object of desire or of fear; an angel or a devil; a muse or a witch; a wife or a whore. Furthermore the feminine operates not only as a reminder that women are not whole, but also that nothing is whole: everything is incomplete and men also lack. Additionally, the feminine structure indicates the possibility of access to another *jouissance*⁵ or ecstatic affect beyond phallic *jouissance*, but this Other *jouissance* is unspeakable and unknowable. *Jouissance* is a wisp or trace of the undifferentiated Real left over from the division of the subject by language and

culture from all the sensations and objects that enveloped and besieged her in her infancy. This left over haunts the subject who seeks but cannot attain full *jouissance* settling instead for the limited phallic *jouissance* attainable through following the pathways of desire. There is no sexual difference in the submission of the subject to the injunction against union with the maternal body. Subjectivity requires alienation in the Symbolic realm of language and law regardless of sex. Nonetheless, the subject emerges in the Symbolic as inescapably sexed and sexuated, and the ambivalent and ambiguous status of femininity with its supplemental *jouissance* submits the girl to an uncertain process.

It must be noted that sexuation, the position the sexuated subject occupies in relation to *jouissance*, is not equivalent to the biologically sexed body. Masculine and feminine are structural positions predicated in, but not reducible to, sexual difference. Indeed, sexual difference is itself a nonsense since the infant is without difference and accepts its assignation as girl or boy only through social interaction. Nonetheless, the girl occupies a body that signifies the feminine and Woman thus she encounters femininity as represented as excessive, mysterious, ambivalent and abject wherever she looks. It is this radical decentring of the female subject that allows for a feminist Lacanian framework.

Feminist and psychoanalytic theory have enjoyed a long courtship replete with acceptances and rebuffals in which Lacan has played a particular role. Over the last few decades, feminist theorists have rejected him as an advocate of phallic authority, accepted him as an astute observer of the formation of patriarchy, and appropriated him as a champion of female difference (Moi). Some feminists have understood Lacan's insistence on the crucial function of the phallus in the production and maintenance of subjectivity and the marking of woman as lack as a justification of masculine supremacy, but this misapprehension is based on the assumption that Lacan was in the business of maintaining and promoting male dominance. In contrast, feminists such as Elizabeth Grosz recognise the Imaginary status of the phallus and the value of Lacan's work in exposing the mechanisms that support male dominance. Grosz recognises the radical alterity of the Lacanian subject and accepts his model as a productive extension of feminist theory. Furthermore, the work of French feminists incorporates psychoanalytic theory in a sustained manner rarely encountered in the English speaking world. Julia Kristeva,

Helene Cixous, Catherine Clements and Luce Irigaray attended Lacan's seminars and their work combines application, extension and critique of his theories. Despite their various arguments with Lacan, these women accept that sexual difference is psychically produced and maintained. French psychoanalytic feminism offers a number of opportunities for exploring identificatory reading as a mechanism of producing and maintaining sexed subjectivity, but I prefer to adopt a Lacanian stance as the scope of his work allows for a consideration of the interaction of number of key terms such as identification, pleasure, femininity, conformity, perversity and excess.

Many literary and cultural studies theorists refer to Lacanian concepts in their work, but few sustain a wholly Lacanian analysis of texts and/or readers. Those who do suggest a Lacanian subject as reader will be examined more closely in Chapter Three. For the moment, I want to indicate the lack of a sustained body of work applying psychoanalytic theory to adolescent readers and their texts (Kidd). Most theory in this field is committed to developmental psychology positioning childhood and adolescence as necessary stages in the production of normative adults. In general, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory has been applied more consistently in film theory than any other discipline excepting, of course, psychoanalysis. Initially, film theory focussed on the deployment of Imaginary identifications as camouflage for the film's ideological purpose of determining the subject without regard for the disruptive potential of the Real or the lack in the Other (McGowan & Kunkle). Film theory also extended its interrogation of the role of the gaze and the look in audience reception through the application of Lacanian concepts. Feminist film theorists such as Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman and Joan Copjec who were interested in female representations and viewers undertook much of the work in this field. Although these theorists apply Lacanian theory, they do not merely reproduce Lacanian theory in the field of film, but they interrogate and extend this productive model to account for the implications of film on the sexed subjectivity of the viewer. Indeed, early work such as Mulvey's has been critiqued as misrepresenting the Lacanian gaze although Mulvey never intended the concept of the male gaze to be read as identical to the Lacanian gaze (Scott). Nonetheless, feminist film theorists interested in the effects of film on the production and maintenance of sexed subjectivities have continually refined and renewed their application of the Lacanian model of subjectivity. Following Copjec's corrective

intervention in repositioning the Lacanian gaze as the *objet (a)* (the object and cause of desire) rather than a Symbolic apparatus of surveillance and mastery, recent psychoanalytic examinations of film texts are less prescriptive and allow for ruptures in the Symbolic filmic narrative that cause pleasurable disturbances for the viewer even when they are experienced as fear or horror (Thornham). Because of his insistence on the importance of the visual field or scopic drive in founding and sustaining subjectivity, the Lacanian model continues to attract theorists of both art house and mainstream film. In contrast, Lacanian examinations of the pleasures of written texts tend to preserve the binary between high and low culture. Rather than uphold this divide, my position is closer to that of contemporary film theorists who attend to the disruptive potential of popular and mainstream texts.

Despite finding Lacanian psychoanalysis to be the most productive methodology for my topic, I remain ambivalent about Lacan's body of work, or rather, about Lacan. I find the erudite and obtuse performances that constitute his work masterful and irritating, but the position in which he leaves the female subject appeals because it is neither reified nor debased. This may not always appear to be the case since Lacan's model of subjectivity is anchored in the triad of masculine, feminine and infant. Maternal and paternal relationships with the infant are cited as supplying the key constituent elements of subjectivity precisely because of sexual difference, yet the model is not biological. Any others to the infant regardless of their sex can enact the roles of mother and father. Similarly, subjects are exhorted by society, but not biologically condemned, to identify with the gender associated with their sexually differentiated bodies. In this sense the Lacanian family is a drama: subjects put on costumes, assume roles and comply with scripts. Ultimately, Lacan's theory of sexuation allows for girls and women to be psychically structured as masculine, to be disconnected from the bifurcated myth of Woman, and to be recognised for both the impossibility and potential inherent in the feminine. When applied to the reading girl, this theory upsets any certainties about the effects of her pursuit of reading pleasures. Whilst avoiding any utopian urge to establish a free subject liberated from the constraints of law and language, the Lacanian reading girl is nonetheless an unknowable subject aimed at an impossible feminine position. She is neither autonomous nor predictable.

In *Seminar XX, Encore*, Lacan's explication of the function of phallic differentiation on sexuated subjectivity culminates in a graph that illustrates and distinguishes masculine and feminine positions in relation to *jouissance*⁷ (*Seminar XX* 78). Through the use of propositional mathemes, Lacan delivers a model that concentrates on the complex functions of sexual differentiation in masculine and feminine subjectivity. He proposes an approach to *jouissance* that is "not all in the Other" on the feminine side of the graph (*Seminar XX* 57). In other words, not all *jouissance* is entirely subject to the phallic law of the Symbolic, and this Other *jouissance* marks the feminine position as a logical possibility (Shepherdson 136). The feminine exceeds the normative. The masculine side of the graph describes a subject more firmly established and identified with the Symbolic Other of society, law and language. The second proposition on the masculine side of the graph states that "All subjects are submitted to the phallic signifier", which is preceded by a proposition stating "There is one subject who is not submitted to the phallic signifier" (*Seminar XX* 78). These two propositions are logical when understood as describing a set of castrated men which achieves its limits by what it excludes: the uncastrated exceptional subject. This one subject is the dead father of *jouissance*, the mythical chief of the tribe who has access to all women, imposes all laws, and transgresses all laws. In terms of the metaphor of the family drama, the boy relinquishes his claim to the mother's body to the father who has rights to all enjoyment. Paradoxically, the boy must submit to the father's prohibition in order to identify himself with the father's masculine position after renouncing his previously undifferentiated identification with the mother's body. This means that to be masculine requires obedience to the law because of a notional One and All who must be obeyed. Thus, there is a necessary requirement for submission to language, law and society at the cost of absolute *jouissance* leaving the remainder: phallic *jouissance*. Although he may rail and transgress against the One and All, the masculine subject remains obedient in that he depends on the impossible subject who lacks for nothing in order to sustain his Symbolic masculinity, and he will reject one master only to institute another. He is constituted as the barred subject of desire who pursues a residual trace of *jouissance*, the *objet a*, in the other. Dissatisfied by the other's lack of the object that would complete him, his desire moves him on to seek the object elsewhere propelled by a foundational confidence in attainment and accomplishment.

On the feminine side of the graph, the first proposition states that "There is no subject that is not subjected to the symbolic law", and second that "Not all is subject to the phallic signifier" (*Seminar XX 78*). Neither proposition asserts a universal positive claim for the feminine. Instead, the feminine is not entirely inscribed within the Symbolic and does not entirely comply with the law, yet she cannot escape the lack and loss that supply the ground of subjectivity. Again paradoxically, the feminine subject is not fully contained by, despite being totally reliant on, language and the law. Because there is no ultimate Woman founding a set of women, woman moves in two directions: towards the law of Symbolic castration and towards the barred Other of her unconscious. In the unconscious there is no signifier for The Woman, since it is the father's 'no' signifying his (illusory) phallic power that introduces sexual difference and supplies the first originating signifier of the Symbolic and the first requirement of repression: the imaginary phallus. In more familiar feminist terms, this assertion is based on the recognition that male is defined against female, so the feminine is recognised negatively as not-masculine rather than as a positive entity. Hence, discourse and language sustain masculine power over the feminine. Mythic representations of Woman are positioned as the symptom of masculinity rather than a necessary limit and, as such, they have no relation to any essential femininity. Femininity is as much a product of the subject's relation to the phallus as is masculinity since the phallus is the signifier of difference with no available signifier of feminine difference. The feminine subject is constituted by loss and lack through the same imperative to differentiate as the masculine subject, but she is not totally invested in the Other of deceptive compensations.

The feminine subject is somewhat caught up as a lure in this compensatory system as the *objet (a)* cause of desire is inscribed on the feminine side of the graph. The *objet (a)* is the object that the subject believes will complete him or her (*Ecrits* 292-324). Thus, a nexus is indicated between the feminine and the residual traces of elemental oneness that sustain the illusion of completion through sexual union. The feminine subject is marked by the *objet (a)* because she personifies the imaginary object the masculine subject desires. If the girl child aims to be the phallus or object of desire for the masculine subject who is presumed to have the phallus then she occupies the feminine position associated with passivity and receptivity (Sorel). Similarly, if the girl child assumes she has the phallus, she will occupy the masculine

position associated with displays of activity and virility and pursue her desires. For the moment though, I will follow the trajectory of the feminine.

In order to be the phallus, the feminine subject must disguise her lack by masquerading as a Woman. That is, she must don the garb of femininity available from images and symbols of womanliness appropriated from the social sphere and internalised in the psychic sphere, yet her own desire is not specified. On the feminine side of the graph of sexualisation, desire is split between in two directions (*Seminar XX 73*). Desire is directed towards the phallus through the illusion of sexual rapport with a masculine subject who has the phallus, and towards the lack in the Other. Given that the Other refers to all radical alterity including language, law, the Other sex and the unconscious, the feminine position is associated with the recognition that there is a void at the heart of all systems of signifiers underpinning human communication, social organization and psychic identity. Because the feminine is not all incorporated in language and law, the feminine is positioned as closer to the void, the infinite, the Real of full *jouissance*. Consequently, the feminine subject has access to a supplementary *jouissance* that goes beyond phallic *jouissance*. In his work, Lacan offers the ecstatic figure of the mystic as the exemplar of feminine *jouissance*. It must be noted that whilst the mystic may exhibit signs of ecstasy, she is rarely comfortable. Lacan also insists that the subject does not know that she has access to this supplementary *jouissance* precisely because feminine *jouissance* lies beyond systems of meaning making. Perhaps this *jouissance* of the Other can be understood as a momentary dissolution, an undoing, of the bogus consistency of identity and society.

This siding of femininity with the failure of language and coherence has led some feminists to accuse Lacan of correlating the feminine with madness and irrationality (Ragland). In contrast, Lacan privileges the feminine position as that which recognises the lack of completeness that characterises all subjects and all systems. The fragile sex should more properly refer to masculine subjects who are invested in maintaining the illusion that linguistic and social systems are or can be complete unto themselves. In other words, masculine subjects are sustained by denying their lack in being. They are required to believe that it is possible to have the phallus and as such, they must fake the having of it through displays of masculine virility. On the other hand, the feminine masquerade makes no pretence about the lack of any

essential Woman beneath the mask. Rather, one mask merely replaces another in an endless sequence substituting one signifier of femininity for another.

Lacan's theory of sexuation is difficult, and explorations of its implications for social understanding and social change are limited especially in terms of anglo-american feminisms. However, it is this very complexity that I find productive in considering the identity formation and reading practices of adolescent girls. It has become apparent that the rights attained for women through second wave feminism have not translated into a suspension of masculine power or a radical change in sexual behaviours on behalf of men or women. It seems to me that we require a theoretical understanding of the psychic constitution of sexed identities in order to appreciate such social phenomena as the post feminist market in enhanced breasts and penile extensions. Productively, Lacan's theory clarifies the struggle undertaken by girls to become women, and the intransigence of the social system to undoing the inequities of sexual difference. Although her biologically sexed body does not condemn her to the feminine position, the girl has to negotiate the feminine masquerade, the mythic Woman who does not exist and her not all status in the Symbolic. Whether she assumes the masculine or feminine position, her image represents all of the feminine conditions of marginality, masquerade and Womanliness.

Unlike other theories of reading and subjectivity, Lacan's work allows for a reading girl who is subject to normative femininity without entirely relinquishing her particular enjoyment. Furthermore, her pleasures are inherently bound to her sexuated position. It is impossible to account for the social manifestations of sexual division without accounting for pleasure. When the reader identifies with a character, she does so pleasurably regardless of the sex of the character. The Lacanian theory of sexuation places all subjects under phallic rule, and phallic *jouissance* is available to all. Thus, the girl may be reading as a boy. As a lacking subject, she is just as capable of getting her rocks off when the *objet (a)* cause of her desire offers a momentary fulfilment. The history of identificatory reading tends to deny the girl her boyish pleasures. Moreover, a male protagonist can be sexuated as feminine performing a masquerade or accessing supplemental *jouissance* through encounters with the lack in the Other. For the girl to identify with a male

protagonist does not herald the collapse of sexual difference, but it does attest to her indeterminacy.

Reading as a girl, she may be sexuated feminine and identify with the masquerade of female characters. The reading girl's identifications may be intense and motivate such behaviours as seeking other fictions from the same series or the same author, repeatedly reading a particular novel and extending the narrative in her imagination. Nonetheless, in most cases these identifications are brief affairs and the girl's desire for another text moves her along to a fresh set of identifications. In the meantime, she is unlikely to have committed a crime, become a drug addict or entered an abusive sexual relationship merely because she has momentarily identified herself with a bad object in a novel. My reader has more in common with the Lacanian philosopher Slavoj Žižek's subject of fantasy:

fantasy creates a multitude of 'subject-positions' among which the (observing, fantasizing) subject can freely float. The subject is free to shift his or her identification from one to another (Plague 40n).

Whilst carefully ensuring that the subject of lack is not understood as completed by her fantasies and her associated identifications, Žižek insists on the mobility of identification in fantasies. Furthermore, he demonstrates the importance of distance in engaging in fantasy because the subject will fade away if she enacts her fundamental fantasy. Free floating indulgence in popular fictions might maintain the girl reader's fantasy of true love, perfect freedom, punishment and reward, but it is unlikely to lead her to assume the position of a character in order to be absorbed into the fantasy.

Instead, the mobility of identification presents her with multiple opportunities to furnish herself with the infinite masks of femininity. She may identify with the both the good girl and the bad girl, the blonde and the brunette, the heroine and villainess, the virgin and the whore, the murderer and the murdered, the penetrated and the penetrator. The girl can adopt traits and characteristics of these fictional objects temporarily as she expands her repertoire of feminine behaviours because if the feminine is enacted as a masquerade then it stands to reason that the feminine is performed and exhibited. Furthermore, because of the not all status of the feminine and the non existence of the ultimate Woman, the feminine subject cannot be totalised and nor can her identifications. The girl reader bears more resemblance

to a tourist passing through many feminine landscapes than to a conqueror who stakes her claim on single feature. Indeed, this mobility informs the pleasure of seeking out new texts.

As well as the pleasures associated with stereotypic feminine and masculine positions, the girl reader might occasionally access a supplemental *jouissance*. This is the *jouissance* associated with the feminine relation to the lack in the Other, a *jouissance* whose effect Lacan describes as “now and then, there is something that, for a brief moment, shakes women up or rescues them” (*Ecrits* 74). The use of the word rescue is odd in this context unless we think of these shaky moments as vacillating on the edge of the Real and, thus, rescuing the feminine from being entirely consumed in the masculine myth of Woman. In my readings, I argue that such erratic moments might hover in the vicinity of certain fictional tropes of sex and violence. As the narrative body fragments and dissolves, so the girl reader may have her own moment of dissolution. These moments constitute the unspeakable pleasures.

My selection of texts for examination is based on a number of criteria. I have selected particular genres and texts within these genres to demonstrate particular aspects of my argument and respond to anxious claims made about the girl and her identifications. The broad categories of texts I consider are young adult fiction, melodramatic and sensational fiction and fiction marked by sex and violence. Within each category, I examine texts that provide examples of particular reading pleasures. These particular texts have been selected on the basis of their illustrative value and their representations of sex and violence. Since I have not undertaken a broad survey or ethnographic case study, I have established popularity through bestseller lists and internet discussions, book reviews and lists of favourites. Clearly, internet data is unreliable in that claims of age and gender cannot be established, but information found on the internet was used to guide my choices rather than to support my claims. Of course, accident and advantage have also played a part in my choice of texts. Accident bought some texts to my attention, and all have been chosen because I can use them to my advantage. Certainly, none of the novels I examine constitute a definitive list, and I would suggest that the method I use could be applied to any text. These novels provide me with the opportunity to consider

the pleasures they offer the adolescent girl as she struggles to achieve an impossible position: Womanhood.

Before discussing any text, I provide an overview of the discursive history of the reading girl to situate her as a cultural artefact and to demonstrate the extent of public comment she has attracted. In Chapter Two, I examine the discourses through which the girl takes shape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This chapter presents a picture of the reading girl as the Symbolic Other of language and the law would have her—clearly, she must grow up to embody and enact the feminine, but the very instability of the feminine position results in discursive contradictions and over determination. The association of the feminine with feeling, intimacy and sympathy results in a widely held belief that girls are insufficiently guarded against the objects with which they identify. A brief history demonstrates how this belief is reiterated across the fields of religion, feminism, education, medicine and psychology determined to turn the girl into either the complementary wife or the autonomous woman. Of course, the girl can occupy the masculine position and assume the autonomy that must always fail since the subject cannot survive without his objects. As I have argued, man's autonomy is as flawed as his reason. We are alienated in an Other that constitutes us from the outside through social imperatives and fantasies, and from the inside through the truths of the unconscious which we do not recognise. Nonetheless, the girl is constantly figured as susceptible to her identifications. Good texts are presumed to produce the good wife, the good feminist and the good critic whilst bad texts produce the wanton woman, the victim of sexism and the trashy reader.

This process of productive reading is highly dependent on the idea of identification, but this term has its own slippery history in reading theory. Chapter Three, "Penetrating Fictions", provides an overview of this history. Often, identification with characters is suggested or implied by reading theorists who do not interrogate the term. The reader is assumed to identify herself with characters—in particular, the protagonist. Often, identification functions reflectively and the features of the character are unproblematically incorporated by the reader in many versions of reading theory including critical literacy and early second wave feminist interventions. Inevitably, reading identifications are seen as productive of a conservative passivity as opposed to critical action. Popular fictions are positioned in

opposition to canonical texts as the bearers of false gifts and regressive identifications. The girl reader is beguiled into recognising herself in the form of the compliant, the docile, the victimised, the sufferer, the prey. Female activity is the territory of the wayward woman who competes for the hero's attentions. It is generally assumed that the girl reader will identify with the heroine rather than the villainess. In this way, the patriarchy is reproduced. A Lacanian framework proposes a subject who identifies less reflectively. Crucially, she is constituted through identification regardless of age or gender. Certainly this subject will identify herself with objects of cultural value as she seeks to be the desire of the Other of language and law. However, she can also be mobile in her identifications. She can move between the heroine, the villainess and the hero in her imagination. Within these moves, she may encounter transgressions and thrills that evoke the Real beyond signification. Such moments are fleeting and their meaning cannot be apprehended, but they intimate the illusory nature of both the individual and culture.

Young adult fiction constitutes a category of texts aimed at the adolescent reader. In Chapter 4, "Reading to the Rescue", I present readings of *Letters from the Inside* by John Marsden, *Junk* by Melvyn Bragg and *Strange Objects* by Gary Crew. Despite considerable debate about the elements that define the category, young adult fiction continues to direct shoppers and library users to a particular type of text. Some of these texts are contentious because of a perceived nihilism and focus on troubled adolescents indulging in troubling behaviours. Violence, drugs, suicide and sex feature as contested themes for adolescent readers with the familiar assertion that the immature and unpredictable adolescent might directly model their behaviour on the representations she absorbs. The counter view argues for social realism in texts for adolescents and this requirement calls for representations of violence, sex, drugs and suicide as admonitory. Whichever position the adult adopts, young adult fiction is obliged to function as a surrogate parent. Although there are novels within the category like *Strange Objects* that evade such a regulatory role, the general expectation is that young adult fictions will assist in the maturational process by warning the girl against the pursuit of excessive *jouissance*. These fictions refuse access to undifferentiated bliss by resoundingly supporting the "No" of the Father demanding the girl prepare herself to take up her Symbolic role as proper mother and wife. Nonetheless, the girl can release more transgressive

pleasures in her reading through (mis)recognising herself in the transgressive fictional other.

Intense feelings and aberrant behaviours mark the families who populate the novels I examine in Chapter 5: "Excessive Reading". *The Pact* by Jodi Picoult is a sensational family and courtroom drama about the suicide of a teenage girl, and the consequences for her boyfriend and both of their families. The gothic horror classic *Flowers in the Attic*, by Virginia Andrews, locks up an adolescent girl and her four siblings in the attic of their maternal grandparent's home. Similarly, *Sleeping Dogs* by Sonya Hartnett, is a gothic fiction marketed to young adults in which a family with five children are isolated on a drought stricken Australian farm. All of these novels place the reading girl in the heart of the family, but these families distort and damage their offspring. Sister and brother incest provides the secret animating the narratives of two of the novels, and the third offers a quasi incestuous relationship between intimate childhood friends. However, incest is not the only crime. Beatings, torture and child sexual abuse are amongst the litany of trials faced by the children in these families. Monstrous mothers and *jouissant* fathers disturb the domestic, and the desire of the adolescent daughters deviates from its proper course returning her to the family where she is trapped. Even in *The Pact*, which is not a gothic or horror text, the desire of the girl is inhibited by her domestic arrangements. For the reading girl, these fictions construct a narrative out of the social and psychic problems of femininity, the domestic and desire.

Finally in Chapter 6: "Death by Reading", I consider *Carrie* by Stephen King from the horror genre, and the true crime book, *An Evil Love: the Life of Frederick West* by Geoffrey Wansell. These two texts feature young female murderers, and in the second text, young female murder victims. Public anxiety becomes particularly heightened when the reading girl is in the company of fictional perverted characters. These fears are based on her putative vulnerability to criminal association through identification producing her as either sadistic and masculine killer or masochistic and feminine victim. Again, this perspective overlooks the pleasures of reading the taboo, and the activation of unconscious thrills when the limits of the law are transgressed. Furthermore, horror is replete with images of the Woman in her monstrous manifestations. Consequently, the reading girl enjoys her

horrible pleasures. Through reading horror, she might be able to adopt the position of the last girl: the girl who survives adolescence psychically, socially and physically.

In Chapter 7: "Reading Secrets", I conclude that the pleasures of the girl cannot be anticipated. Each of the texts I examine offers both conservative and transgressive pleasures. Whilst the text always returns the girl to the limits of the laws of culture, she may have enjoyed aberrant and excessive pleasures during her occupation of the narrative. It is this deviation from the prescribed route to womanhood that arouses public anxiety, but it also offers the girl an opportunity to explore her status as the Other sex. The struggle undertaken by female sexed subjects to achieve feminine subjectivity is inscribed in all of these fictions since the texts are as enthralled with the non-existent Woman as is our patriarchal culture. The problematics of femininity perturb the culture, its laws and its texts. Even when the characters are predominantly male, they confront the issue of separation from the Mother, accepting the 'No' of the Father and following their desire. Above all, the reading girl can address the problematics of the feminine subject who is not-all captured within the Symbolic realm of law, language and culture. She can take secret pleasure in the erotic and sadomasochistic subtext of all subjects; she can imaginatively adopt the various disguises of the feminine subject as she enters the masquerade of womanliness; and she can fantasise about abandoning the domestic to enter into exotic passions.

Chapter Two

The Fearful Appetite of the Girl Reader

Describing my subject as the 'adolescent girl reader' belies the instability of this category and its associated subject position. The terms 'adolescent girl' and 'reader' seem to self-evidently point towards a stable, knowable entity, yet under interrogation both are constituted around core indeterminacies. Each of these terms has a history of examination that is too lengthy to review fully, but a brief consideration of the character of the subject, 'adolescent girl reader', shows that the project of definition is precarious. The adolescent girl reader is produced as an identity category in modernity through a confluence of biological, psychological, moral and pedagogical discourses. These discourses participate in the network of signifiers that constitute the Symbolic Other of language and law. In this chapter, I consider the position of the girl reader as a post enlightenment subject within the Symbolic domains of the domestic, literature, education and feminism. Interestingly, this examination of the adolescent reading girl reveals a subject who is represented as defying and exceeding any easy characterisation. This presumed tendency towards defiance and excess informs an ongoing public anxiety about her unpredictability and instability. The social sphere is disturbed by her feminine tolerance for ambiguity and dissolution achieved through her not-all status, and it responds by exerting extreme measures of control. As with other of her practices and pleasures, her reading is surveilled because of her alleged sensitivity and receptivity to representational models of femininity, and the potential failure of the system to bring her into line. In terms of her reading, this surveillance is justified by her apparent vulnerability to a single feature of the reading act: identification.

The reading girl's alleged susceptibility to engaging in powerful identifications with textual objects is based partly on our understanding of adolescence as a developmental life stage marked by certain attributes. As with all so-called life stages, adolescence is a category that is always mediated by time and place. The shifting indicators of puberty, schooling, work, marriage and economic

independence delineate the adolescent, yet all of these conditions are social. The biological Real of puberty is overwritten with prescriptions and proscriptions that insert the adolescent into the social system of exchange through marriage and labour. As such, the adolescent body is valued and makes meaning according to its potential as a productive and reproductive unit. The indivisible ideas of puberty and adolescence participate in a vast Symbolic network of language and law that operates to ensure the girl's assumption of her proper position as woman and mother. Her world is permeated with images, narratives and practices wrought within the Other of culture that provide opportunities for identification and self-reflection. These myriad representations function as personal ideals for the adolescent girl. Thus, they are surveilled by determined institutions and individuals to guarantee their suitability as prototypes of femininity.

The adolescent girl is a particularly modern subject because post enlightenment conditions shift the forms and times allotted to schooling, legal status, work and marriage resulting in a longer period of transition from childhood to adulthood (Griffin, *Representations of Youth*). This transitional period is organised through a developmental model of subjectivity concentrated on transforming the dependent child into the autonomous adult. Maturation, the focus and product of this model of social organisation, supplies the pathway to adult subjectivity (Driscoll). This pathway is always, and necessarily, differentiated according to gender. Indeed, Catherine Driscoll argues persuasively in her genealogy of girlhood, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory*, that the possibility of maturing to full subjectivity is not, in fact, available to the girl, "feminine adolescence marks the materialization of women and does not exist" (57). Thus, Driscoll echoes Lacan's infamous claim that "in fact *woman* does not exist, woman is *not whole*" (*Seminar XX7*). The girl should accede to Womanhood, but the Woman is not available as an autonomous position thus she cannot mature into an unproblematic full subjectivity. Nonetheless, her adolescence ends with her accession to female adulthood—itself a dependent and immature state. Although I would argue that Driscoll's understanding of full subjectivity risks duplicating the masculine striving for an impossible completion, I agree that the girl struggles to achieve the social recognition for which all subjects strive. She is as motivated as any boy or any adult to seek social approval, to be the desire of the Other, but the compromises she

must make in order to achieve recognition are complicated by her proximity to the myth of the Woman, to the *objet (a)* cause of male desire and to the void in the Other. Even on her best behaviour, the girl is a worry.

The adolescent girl emerges through an extension and cohesion of medical, psychological, social and cultural factors which converge to map, mark and mediate the body of a subject who is understood to be neither child nor adult (Griffin, *Representations of Youth*). Even the apparently biologically fixed matter of puberty is not stable, as the signs of puberty do not comply with a fixed timetable. Puberty for girls is often understood as the onset of the menarche, but this event represents only a single moment and this moment varies between individuals, times and places. Furthermore, the hormonal changes assumed to cause the adolescent stage are invoked to explain not only bodily changes, but also psychological, emotional and cognitive developments. The supposedly 'raging hormones' of the adolescent are called upon to prescribe and describe the period of "*sturm et danger*" generally translated as storm and stress. Storm and stress as the defining feature of adolescence was promoted in the 1904 treatise by G. Stanley Hall *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (Griffin, *Representations of Youth*). As its title suggests, this influential work merged various biological, cultural and social theories to produce an outline of modern adolescence (Lesko). Emotional volatility informs the idea of the adolescent as more dangerous and endangered than the constant adult. Thus the adolescent is relegated from both childhood and adulthood: too sexual for childhood and too immature for adulthood.

Our understanding of any aspect of history alters according to the narrative structure we impose on evidence. The adolescent girl emerges from historical shadows as a product of the Enlightenment, and the story which is told about her is a version of the dominant narrative of the subject of modern democratic societies. Thus, she is incorporated into the heroic story of the triumphal march of humanity from bestial origins to present enlightenment as a subject of self consciousness and human rights. Adolescent girlhood is formed through both rational and romantic versions of this master narrative. Reasoned accounts celebrate the elevation of the girl to an (almost) equal status with her companion, the boy, while romantic tales

mourn her gradual alienation from a prior natural femininity which positioned her as the boy's complementary equal in a bucolic past. Both narrative forms produce a coherent unified version of events, a version in which our knowledge of the modern girl is projected backwards, so that her past represents her either as the oppressed shadow of herself striving for a future perfect self-actualisation, or as the original (lost) perfect companion. In short, the girl in history is a projection of contemporary desire for the free individual and/or the original feminine. Either way, she is defined in relation to masculinity as the same or the complement. Just as there is no Woman to establish a limit to womanliness, so there is no Girl to establish the limits to girliness.

As she enters the modern era, this girl is accompanied by a set of assumptions that must be redeployed if they are to retain their currency under new conditions. When reason replaces God, then Woman's inferiority must be justified as reasonable. When the democratic urge replaces hierarchical oppressions, then woman's difference must be justified as equitable. When alienation replaces connection, then femininity must be justified as natural. These paradoxical discourses of femininity serve to maintain a bifurcated subjectivity and society where the infant must be declared one thing or the other in order to be declared a citizen of the countries of Ladies or Gentlemen. The statements made about the adolescent girl locate her as a volatile site for the mobilisation of modern anxieties about the maintenance of clear distinctions between the sexes. It is imperative that she enter the domestic feminine or country of Ladies, and to ensure this outcome both reasonable narrative and romantic anti-narrative are mobilised. For the adolescent girl to assume her uneasy position as a transitional marker separating the innocent girl child from the sexualised adult woman, she has to be discursively produced as neither fully child nor fully woman, neither thoroughly innocent nor thoroughly aware. From the discursive position of the social Other, adolescence is understood as an apparatus of subjection. The modern woman requires training, and adolescent girlhood constitutes the necessary discipline for her to assume the feminine position. Subjectivisation requires the girl to make sense of her sexed position, and submission to the dominant discourses of femininity through compliance or resistance is inevitable.

Similarly to 'adolescent girl', the 'adolescent reader' presents itself as a self-evident descriptor. In recognising the specifically modern features of the adolescent girl and the remarkable scrutiny bearing on her reading practices, it becomes apparent that the modern girl and the modern book emerge in the same historical period, and a remarkable convergence occurs between subject and technology. She is the first subject of the book, and the book is both her blessing and bane. Debate concerning the ideal conditions in which to produce the consummate feminine subject has proliferated throughout modernity. Accordingly, the adolescent girl emerges from relative obscurity in the Middle Ages to become the focus of intensive scrutiny. She becomes the central character of novels, conduct books and moral, pedagogical and scientific treatises. For writers as disparate as Samuel Richardson, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen and the Marquis de Sade, as representative of many others, the adolescent girl delineates the ground on which womanhood is built. Their heroines (respectively Pamela, Eloise, Maria, Elizabeth and Justine) herald an era in which legions of young women grace the pages of texts parading desirable traits and aberrant faults. Catherine Driscoll recognises this proliferation of images of girls as "represent[ing] a range of ambivalent positions in relation to knowledge, identity, and agency in late modernity" (27) and, I would add, throughout modernity.

As well as her status as subject of the text, the girl is concurrently urged to read through family, church and education. Still, this insistence on literacy is marked by inconsistency as the girl's reading practices raise fears in the community that she may exceed her textual limits. Both exhortation and anxieties are located in the notion of identification. In the long history of discussion about reading, women and girls are the loci of extreme anxiety. Their putative impressionability and sensitivity, combined with a lack of public responsibility and an excess of time, was, and is, seen to render girls particularly vulnerable to the effects of text. In Lacanian terms, society fears that the girl will become trapped within the Imaginary world of semblances and absorptions. Such fears were explicitly articulated in the nineteenth century. Kate Flint illustrates this anxiety in *The Woman Reader: 1837 to 1914*, a detailed consideration of commentary on women and reading in both Victorian domestic and pre-feminist contexts. Amongst the comprehensive array of evidence from primary sources garnered by Flint, is this quote from an article, 'Moral and

Political Tendency of the Modern Novel' that appeared in the 1842 edition of the *Church of England Quarterly Review*:

The great bulk of novel readers are females; and to them such impressions (as are conveyed through fiction) are particularly mischievous: for, first, they are naturally more sensitive, more impressionable, than the other sex; and secondly their engagements are of a less engrossing character - they have more time as well as inclination to indulge reveries of fiction (12).

This statement succinctly summarises the main features of nineteenth-century medical and religious discourses concerning the reading woman and girl. Such discourses converge on the disciplining of the girl's body, behaviour and intellect into that of a proper wife and mother, a position that can be reinforced or disrupted through reading. The disciplinary process might fail if the girl indulges her narcissistic fantasies through fiction rather than accept her Symbolic role.

The primary signifier of female adolescence is the onset of menstruation. The dangerous and unreliable nature of the female menstruating body was more overtly acknowledged in pre-feminist nineteenth century when the discourses of medicine and psychology cohere to produce the modern (hysterical) female subject. Not only does menarche provide an effective rupture between the non-sexual child and the sexualised young woman, Deborah Gorham claims it was read symptomatically as an indicator of normality or abnormality:

from the descriptions associated with abnormal female puberty, it is evident that the behaviour that medical men perceived as normal closely reflected the Victorian ideal of feminine girlhood. A well-adapted young Angel of the House would not be 'listless', nor would she be 'irritable', nor would she desire to 'escape from home', nor, above all, would she be unchaste or sensual (90)

Such behaviours were diagnosed as symptoms indicating the possibility of chlorosis and/or hysteria. Chlorosis, literally greensickness, referred to a gamut of behavioural and physical symptoms including anorexia, anaemia and hysteria. The cure for these ills involved moral and behavioural directives aimed at disciplining the body and mind of the girl into proper feminine conduct. To be avoided were "rich food, too little excellence in the fresh air, too much stimulation from dances,

entertainments and novel reading” (Gorham 89). In other words, the young woman should not be too frivolous, too sexual or too intellectual—her appetites must be regulated and her body disciplined. Rendered docile by constrictive clothing, behavioural taboos and social constraints, the body of the novice woman is subjected to rigid controls. This view was supported by medical and psychological discourses that founded an argument on the biology of the female body presenting the apparent proof of women’s greater impressionability and receptivity, and novel reading became associated with a pathologically excessive appetite.

Just as christian religion positioned the female body as a purveyor of sin, so medicine extends this moral imposition and figures the female body as inherently porous and unstable. Instability and permeability become psychological attributes of femininity written on the symptomatic pubescent body. This perception of the adolescent girl’s capricious body informs anxieties about her activities including reading. Flint encapsulates this corporeal model, “characterized as a physical appetite, reading became a form of ingestion to be carefully controlled, in order to avoid temporary indigestion or more long term damage to the system” (50). The conflation between the female reader, particularly the young female reader, and the text is firmly established—the reading girl is unproblematically reflected and infected by the texts she reads. The prevalence of these convictions about the susceptibility of the female reader to the dangers of the text is such that they become themselves the stuff of fiction.

Exemplifying this literary interest are the reading girls who populate the novels of Jane Austen. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland succumbs to a comic and deluded view of her social surroundings after reading Ann Radcliffe’s *Udolpho* at the behest of the morally reprehensible Isabella Andrews. The consequences of Catherine’s misreading are instructive and temporary. Catherine’s moral sense prevails whilst Isabella shows herself to be “a vain coquette” (206) leaving little room for doubt that the reading of silly novels may result in silly thoughts, but moral danger does not derive from this suggestibility. Rather, Isabella Adams represents a failure in both principles and decorum. Although Jane Austen’s heroines read the popular, they read differently. Catherine Morland may misjudge people and events because she imposes criteria adopted from popular gothic

novels, but the serious sister in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mary Bennett, is the more ridiculous character. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the Bennett sisters can be read as paradigms of femininity. Whereas Jane is too constrained by modesty, Kitty and Lydia are dangerously unconstrained, Elizabeth is neither too modest nor too abandoned, and Mary is comically too good. Mary is “a young lady of deep reflection [who] read[s] great books, and makes extracts” (7). Her serious pursuit of knowledge renders her unimaginative, unattractive and ridiculous. Still, the seriously engaged reading girl is not always a comic figure. To counter the suggestion that Austen’s work perpetuates the dual myth of the girl reader as the forerunner to both the silly woman and the desexed woman, *Mansfield Park* offers Fanny Price. As a girl, she benefits from the intellectual companionship of her cousin Edmund whose position and gender gain him an education at Eton and Oxford:

he recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, he encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgement; he made reading useful by talking to her of what she read, and heightened its attraction with judicious praise (57).

Although she requires male guidance to develop her literary skills given that she has no access to school or university, Fanny surpasses her tutor in the judgement of social propriety. Her reading may be associated with leisure and charm, but it cultivates rather than diminishes her moral worth. When the various scenes of reading in Austen’s novels are examined, they show young women reading different texts with different effects. Maybe the enduring popularity of Jane Austen’s novels amongst female readers is due to the diversity of female characters all of whom struggle to assume a becoming feminine position.

Prefigured by the reading girls of Austen and other nineteenth novelists, the consummate figure of the modern reading woman is Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*. In contrast to Austen’s inscription of girls who read variously with differing effects, Emma Bovary personifies the indiscriminate, affected young female reader. As Rita Felski notes, Emma Bovary is described in the same alimentary terms that Kate Flint observed in other Victorian accounts of women and reading. Madame Bovary consumes and is consumed by fiction. The acts of eating, reading and buying become conflated and, according to Felski, “consumption denotes not simply an economic transaction between seller and buyer, but an extended set of assumptions

about uncritical and passive reception of texts by mass audiences" (80). Thus, the masses are represented by a young Emma Bovary whose desires are mobilised through the excesses of her identifications. An association of the feminine, the masses and the emotive increasingly participates in the logic of distinction between the rational and mature masculine critic and the affected and immature feminine consumer. He establishes himself as a separate and autonomous individual while she yearns to be immersed in another. He reads rationally and critically; she reads affectively and thoughtlessly.

The need for a corrective to the girl's tendency towards such immersion provides one strand of the arguments supporting formal education for girls. Pedagogical and feminist discourses employed both romantic and rational narratives of femininity suggesting that girls require training in rationality to counter their natural feminine inclination to irrationality, yet their curriculum should be different from their male counterparts in order to preserve their essential feminine receptivity (Dyhouse). Notions of freedom and equality, when applied to women, constitute a radical disturbance to the social order. If the fraternity of the French revolution were to be extended to incorporate an equal society, man would no longer be free to improve his condition since there would be no established order of inheritance through which to progress his interests. Such interests demanded the certainty of male tenure. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft claims that the apparent weaknesses and flaws of femininity are the effects of the dominance of male fantasies in the formation of the female subject. Despite this maverick outburst against the "tyranny of man" (318), Wollstonecraft argued only for woman's equality as an intelligent rational being whose curriculum in girlhood should not differ from her brother's. This proposition relied on the recognition that an educated, intelligent woman would make a superior mother. Her freedom was represented by independence of thought, not independence of income or political representation.

Wollstonecraft's independent woman was constituted in opposition to her dependent sister whose passivity and incapacity inflamed those same appetites which threatened the social fabric—appetites which indicated an incontinence in all passions. The inability to control an appetite was indicative of an overall inclination,

and this inclination was always sexual. The intemperate woman could bring down dynasties through her infidelity. As a means of exchange, woman's currency was volatile. Wollstonecraft's argument can be aligned with many of the conduct book writers she condemns in that it is the indolent, pampered lady of the aristocracy who represents the greatest threat to society. Self indulgence and lack of productive activity could foster inappropriate proclivities. Consequently, Wollstonecraft argued, girls had to be educated to use their capacity for reason in order to fulfil their future roles as "chaste wives and sensible mothers" (188). In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* she promotes reading: "A relish for reading, or any of the fine arts, should be cultivated early in life" (48), but warns against:

Those productions which give a wrong account of the human passions, and the various accidents of life, ought not to be read before judgement is formed, or at least exercised. Such accounts are one great cause of the affection of young women. Sensibility is praised, and the effects of it represented in a way so different from nature, that those who imitate it must make themselves ridiculous (50).

This cautionary note relies on an ongoing feature of first and second wave feminism: identification with the wrong form of textual object distorts the feminine subject and produces her as stereotype.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, most British and colonial bourgeois girls had been taught either at home by governesses and mothers or in small village schools. As a result, they were literate and accomplished in the preferred feminine knowledges of needlework, painting and dancing, but they had no direct access to the classics, science or mathematics. The number of young women attending schools and the scope of the curricula offered in these schools expanded throughout the second half of the nineteenth century (Dyhouse). Enlightened argument prevailed that girls trained in rational thought would be better equipped to sustain the home as a moral sanctuary from the inevitable taint of the marketplace. The deployment of such rationalist discourse by women educators may have resulted in more educational options for girls, but these moves also met with considerable opposition. Warnings proliferated about the dangers to the reproductive body of too much intellectual activity. It was argued that intellectual activity could result in infertility and psychological disturbance since the accord between the girl's receptive

body and sympathetic mind would be disturbed (Flint).

This same feminine proclivity for the imaginative, intuitive and sympathetic was deployed as a rationale supporting the inclusion of English Literature as a key feature of curricula aimed at girls. Appropriately directed reading underpinned the cultural humanism of Matthew Arnold, aimed at the formation of British citizens to service the empire and sustain the home. As the democratic urge pushed towards universal schooling and literacy, texts were assessed as appropriate according to their putative capacity to inculcate middle class values and aspirations in working class youths and children. Ian Hunter's genealogical analysis of the conditions of emergence of the subject English in *Culture and Government* (1988) argues that English pedagogy comes into being "when traditional techniques of individual pastoral surveillance were redeployed in a new machinery of government aimed at the 'moral and physical' well-being of whole populations" (ix). Until the second half of the nineteenth century the study (as opposed to the consumption) of literature was based on grammar, rhetoric and the classics, and was available only to an educated male elite. This curriculum was not considered appropriate to the task of forming women and the working classes as self regulating individual subjects, but the newly conceived English offered "a unique vehicle for personal expression and individual growth" (Hunter 17) replacing the focus on rhetoric with one of personal psychological development. Allotting this purpose to reading implicitly depends upon the assumption that the reader will form an intimate relationship with the text rather than the distant critical stance associated with a classical education. Hence, the discipline is feminised.

Those who are associated with the establishing of English as a discipline such as Matthew Arnold and the Leavises would probably have been as appalled as any contemporary exponent of critical literacy if they had realised the degree to which their enthusiasm for the teaching of English literature could be reduced in the classroom to response based curricula which obscure critical literacies. F.R. and Q.D. Leavis were influential establishing the discipline of English as a formative subject in university and school curricula after the First World War. In his thoughtful reconsideration of F.R. Leavis's critical stance and practice, Michael Bell refers to 'participatory' reading as Leavis's preferred mode of teaching and reading.

Participation indicates a joining of the responsive reader and appealing text to produce a critical and ethical understanding. Although F.R. Leavis and his wife, Q.D. Leavis, advocated for English as a cultural curative, they were equally fervent about the democratisation of reading, intellect and aesthetics. Such a reading requires the application of sensibility *and* intellect. Despite this radical assault on the gendered binary opposition of feeling and thought, the Leavises maintained a clear distinction between aesthetic and popular fiction. As evidenced in Q.D. Leavis's ethnography *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1979), over-identification with characters in sensational popular texts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was considered to diminish the reader:

In the best seller as we have known it since the author has poured his own day-dreams, hot and hot, in top dramatic form, without bringing them to any such touchstone as the 'good sense, but not common-sense' of a cultivated society: the author is himself – or more usually herself – identified with the leading character, and the reader is invited to share the debauch (188).

In this directly gendered account of reading, author, character and reader are indiscriminantly jumbled in a morass of debased language and feeling. Although the reader is urged to respond to the text with intuition and feeling by the Leavises, the text in question must be sufficiently elevated in tone and craft and must maintain an appropriate distance from the reader. Without sufficient distance, the reader might lose the autonomy necessary to a self-regulating citizen.

The Leavisite tradition continues to influence many commentators on appropriate texts for children and young people. As Peter Hunt notes (43), in the latter part of the twentieth century Fred Inglis mimics the first sentence of his idol F. R. Leavis's *The Great Tradition* when considering *The Promise of Happiness: Value and Meaning in Children's Fiction*:

The great children's novelists are Lewis Carroll, Rudyard Kipling, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Arthur Ransome, William Mayne and Phillippa Pearce – to stop for a moment at that comparatively safe point on an uncertain list (3).

Even though Inglis eschews identificatory reading in terms of a simple one-to-one correspondence between reader and character, he relies on identification as the mechanism through which children's literature pursues its civilising and moralising

goal:

it is surely a fact in morality that the imaginative capacity to put oneself 'in the place of another and of many others' is a necessary condition for the understanding of other people's actions, and that such understanding is in turn a necessary condition of the quality of attention to others we know as compassion and forgiveness (4).

Despite the theoretical shifts that have occurred over the last fifty years within cultural and literary studies, such Leavisite perceptions of the function of English persist within the teaching profession (Sarland). Often this approach is conflated with reader response and personal growth theory resulting in an emphasis on the affective responses and associated psychological growth of the reader.

It is in the classroom that the resulting pedagogical practices reduce complex models of reading to a formula for the regulation of pupil subjects. Louise Rosenblatt's theory of transactional reading shares many features with both cultural studies and critical literacy models of reading in its recognition of the particularity of each reading. This particularity is based on the premise that the reader brings her social, emotional and experiential knowledge to the text and she arrives at an interpretation that is informed by this knowledge. However, the pedagogical drive in Rosenblatt's work is to produce a "self-aware, self-critical and self-enhancing" reader (Church 35). Once again, reading is coopted into the manufacture of proper citizens. A practice derived from Rosenblatt's theory requires pupils to write personal responses to fictional texts—responses that sometimes resemble confessions. For instance, Theoni Soublis writes with and about his student, Erik Winkler, who performs a reading response exploring his own feelings as a young gay boy in front of his class. The class react emotionally and encouragingly thereby instigating the following claim about reader response theory from the teacher, "literature discussions open a door for students to discuss their personal lives and experiences in such a way that any threat of ridicule is erased" (13). Here, identification with a character becomes a mechanism for self examination and correction not only for the reader, but also for the community. In Soublis' and Winkler's account, a tough sporty classmate expresses his admiration for Erik Winkler's emotional courage. Thus, masculinity is moderated through interaction with the reading femininised boy. By implication, the incomplete child or adolescent

must 'grow' into adulthood, and good books are as necessary as good diet in shaping this growth.

Despite the apparent absence of gender as a feature of contemporary pedagogical theory about adolescent reading, the classification of texts according to the sex of the reader continues in practice. Through a set of contradictory assertions, Fred Inglis defends his account of gendered reading by maintaining that his strategy is to interrogate late eighteenth and early nineteenth century children's books in terms of their capacity to critique the partition of public and private gendered domains and "speak out against them and for a more manly man, and womanly woman both capable of living these differences in both worlds" (146). This somewhat confusing statement is followed by a survey of heroism and courage in adventure stories in which Kipling and Stevenson are assessed as morally superior to Anthony Hope and Ian Fleming. Inglis turns from boys' adventures to comment on the entwining of helplessness and desire in the fictions of Daphne du Maurier and Georgette Heyer. This observation is followed by assurances that he,

does not endorse a narrow polemic on behalf of the left wing of Women's Liberation. Taking part in its more strident and sectarian version deprives women of what the culture at large most lacks in its public places: tenderness, peacefulness, care and love, sweetness, long-suffering. If women do not look after these things, no men will (165).

According to Inglis, such feminine qualities are sustained in Laura Ingalls Wilder's *The Long Winter*, one of the popular *Little House on the Prairie* series. He praises this book for its "strength in showing daughters how to become women" (166).

Far more productive in terms of identifying gendered pleasures and preferences in reading is Charles Sarland's *Young People Reading: Culture and Response*. Sarland invited English high school students from high, middle and low achievement forms to nominate and read texts before being interviewed about their responses. The groups were organised according to gender, age and ability. Reading preferences differed between boys and girls for all age and ability levels, but the participants were also requested to read texts from the other groups. In his conclusions, Sarland suggests that the participants approached texts according to a gendered

framework, and, furthermore, that they produced different readings of the same text based on gender. He recognises the importance placed by all the readers on the relevance to their lives that they perceive in preferred texts, and the desire of the readers to recognise their lives within the text. Sarland draws attention to "the distinction between the boys finding themselves in the text, and the girls finding the text in themselves". Unusually, Sarland recognises that this distinction is based on "two sides of the same coin" (85). Nonetheless, the reading girl continues to be represented as a porous receptacle invaded by the textual Other.

Needless to say, my own project participates in a similar gendering with its single focus on the adolescent reading girl irrevocably distinguishing her from adolescent reading boys. One of the difficulties of focussing on gender is that an examination of gendered practices and effects participates in the binary opposition of male and female that maintains the fundamental division. Arguably, feminism struggles both to expose the inequities and constraints experienced by women by differentiating between men and women, and to deconstruct the site on which these inequities and constraints are founded thus negating this differentiation. Not unsurprisingly, feminism has provided a much needed critique of the representation of the reading girl as irresistably captured by her identifications. Initially, though, feminist critique continued the Wollstonecraft trajectory and remained primarily concerned with establishing girls as equally rational beings to their brothers. To accomplish this task, the girl had to be taught to mistrust the texts aimed at seducing her into non-critical, overly emotional femininity. Whether a rational rights-based argument or a romantic claim of mutuality through difference prevails, modernity provides the framework through which women can contest injustice based on gender. Reading has provided feminists with a site where representation, production and consumption of the feminine can be critiqued and corrected. Thus the reading girl is significant in many key feminist works which again suggest that the girl is subject to the representations she consumes.

It is because identification and reading are implicated in the reproduction of gender that feminist scholars are interested in the effects of reading on identity formation. Although much contemporary feminism has tackled and dismantled essentialist nineteenth century discourses, there remains a lingering anxiety about adolescent

girls reading. In its contemporary feminist version, it takes the form of presenting girls as being particularly prone to making powerful identifications and, consequently, vulnerable to being irretrievably interpellated by discursive formations of femininity. For instance, second wave feminist examinations of the textual representations of women, such as those undertaken by Germaine Greer and Kate Millett, positioned the female reader as a helpless victim of the patriarchal text. The necessary emphasis on recognising the enormity of the powers of patriarchy and ideology in both these and other Marxist and radical feminist accounts from the nineteen seventies, tends to reproduce the 'passive female reader' syndrome as an inadvertent effect. In *Sexual Politics* (1971), Millet provides a detailed overview of modern sexual politics and literary representations of gendered subjectivity accompanied by revolutionary analyses of the operations of the discourse of sexuality in the work of D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Genet. Her political argument was considered radical in its insistence that marriage sustains and promotes patriarchy, and she maintains that the authors provide literary reflections of this condition. However, in accepting the reflective model of reading, she obscures the figure of the reader. As a hapless by-product of the book, the reader is irrevocably interpellated into heteronormativity.

Similarly, Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1971) presents a broad critique of the multiple strategies employed by patriarchy to subjugate women, in which she offers textual references both as evidence and instruments of patriarchal oppression. Amongst her wide ranging observations, she recognises the artificial condition of female puberty, "we do accept that puberty is a kind of natural disease of inorganic origin, which is a supposition . . . What we ought to see in the agonies of puberty is the result of the conditioning that maims the female personality in creating the feminine" (89). According to Greer, puberty is agonising for the girl because she cannot develop full subjectivity in terms of desire and the law. The feminine form into which she must force herself is that of the non-existent Woman, thus she must become a (failed) contortionist. Greer recognises that the problem for the girl is to "strike an equilibrium between her desires and her conditioning" (84), an equilibrium between desire and the law which is never achievable. Although Greer recognises the force of the girl's desire, she relinquishes ultimate power to the law in the guise of conditioning. In her consideration of the romance genre,

Greer disarms the girl, leaving her deluded about the fictional status of the hero of romance: "Such creatures do not exist, but very young women in the astigmatism of sexual fantasy are apt to recognize them where they do not exist" (180). Although Greer identifies the illusion at the core of romantic love, this statement implies a utopian reality where the girl is freed from all such illusion. Whilst the utopian urge of second wave feminism shifted the conditions of femininity somewhat, feminist fiction has not, and cannot, free the girl from the illusion of love. The nexus between representations, desire and the law is more complex than Greer's utopian view permits.

Partly in recognition of the failure of feminism to address and reform the pleasures of romance, feminist scholars began to explore the dynamic between text and reader as less reflective and reductive and more complex and dynamic. Eventually, a body of work emerged in which feminists questioned the tendency of critical and mass media theory to render the consumer captive to the product. Recognising the lack of regard for popular fictions associated with the feminine in contrast to the critical elevation of masculine genres such as detective, Tanya Modleski examined series romance, popular gothic and soap opera texts on the premise that "they speak to very real problems and tensions in women's lives" (14). Using a broadly psychoanalytic framework, Modleski considers the capacity of the texts to express women's fears and fantasies. She demonstrates how these genres describe the passive and anxious conditions of female lives whilst promoting the imagined triumph of love over aggression, of the personal over the political, of nurturance over seduction, of the domestic over the public and of the community over the individual. Although Modleski retains her scepticism about the effects of such overwhelmingly conservative texts, nonetheless she transforms the position of the reader from a passive but grateful object of male desire reforming her as an active desiring subject. She argues that the imaginary defeat of the masculine values embodied in the hero through the heroine's all-conquering love provides the female reader with the joys of retribution as the master is reduced to a slave for love.

In her landmark ethnographic study, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*, Janice Radway rejects the inherent inconsistencies in such theory and extricates the reader from the rule of the text:

Because readers are presented in this theory as passive, purely receptive individuals who can only consume the meanings embodied within cultural texts, they are understood to be powerless in the face of ideology. The text's irreducible givenness prevents them from appropriating its meanings for their own use just as it thwarts any desire on their part to resist the message. Furthermore, it is precisely because readers misunderstand their reasons for liking particular stories that they can easily be persuaded to purchase tales that contribute to their continuing oppression by perpetuating a false view of their social situations (6).

Radway returns interpretation to our understanding of the relationship between the reader, the critic and the text thus producing a more dynamic and nuanced understanding of the act of reading. Through interviews and questionnaires, Radway was able to identify the use value of romance for readers. Radway's readers of romance understood their enjoyment in terms of a liberatory activity valuing feminine domestic values and affording an imagined escape from the daily conditions of normative femininity. Radway cautions against attributing any greater authority to readers' perceptions than to critical analysis of the text, recognising the impossibility of producing a definitive and final account of the interaction between reader, text and culture. Although she refers to Nancy Chodorow's theory of feminine difference to support her argument that romance reading sustains feminine valorisation of relationships, Radway does not use a psychoanalytic framework to explore the interaction between reader and text. However, she does propose a reading subject who cannot know the cause of her desire, yet continues to seek her pleasures.

Second wave feminist criticism also turned to the adolescent girl reader. Angela McRobbie was one of the first theorists to recognise that youth studies was focussed on young men and the strategies they employed to negotiate a classed world. Girls were marginalised and positioned as invisible and passive in opposition to their male subcultural counterparts in the work of such theorists as Paul Willis and Dick Hebdige (McRobbie 1976 & 1980 in 2000). In her early work "*Jackie Magazine: Romantic Individualism and the Teenage Girl*" (1977 in 2000), McRobbie replicates the tendency of contemporaneous feminist politics to read the girl as hopelessly enthralled by the text. In this semiotic analysis, readers of *Jackie* are

subjected to the codes of romance, the personal, beauty and clothes as well as pop music. These codes incarcerate the girl within the confines of femininity,

The same themes appear and reappear with monotonous regularity so that the narrowness of the *Jackie* world and its focus on the *individual* girl and *her own* problems come to signify the narrowness of the woman's role in general and to prefigure her later isolation in the home (101).

In later reconsiderations, McRobbie redresses the balance and incorporates pleasures and excesses into the configuration of the girl, but her early work is marked by her self confessed tendency along with other feminists and cultural studies theorists to situate all popular culture within a conservative paradigm aimed at promoting false consciousness.

Generally this position is reiterated by most feminist critics interested in the reading practices of adolescent girls. Linda Christian-Smith's *Becoming A Woman Through Romance* (1990) performs a semiotic analysis of sixteen teen romances, takes account of the historical context, surveys seventy-five girl readers and interviews twenty-nine of these girls alongside five of their teachers. Christian-Smith contends that the emergence of the New Right in late 20th century US coincided with the expansion of series teen romances promoting a conservative femininity based on reproducing traditional heterosexual marriage patterns and associated male dominance. As in McRobbie's work on *Jackie*, teen romance novels are semiotically analysed to identify the codes of romance, sexuality and beautification embedded in all the selected texts thus reinforcing McRobbie's conclusions. In this case, though, Christian-Smith also undertakes an ethnographic exploration of readers of teen romances. She selects the seventy-five young women who respond to a questionnaire by identifying them as romance readers through their school book club orders. Twenty-nine of this group are then observed and interviewed within the school setting. All the girls involved are found to be categorised as "reluctant readers". Interestingly,

These girls were characterized by counsellors and teachers as girls who would have difficulty completing the remainder of their schooling, who were more interested in boys than in academics, and who would, in all probability, marry early and be young mothers (101).

It seems that these young women are always already condemned and their preferred reading matter is offered as a further substantiation of their irretrievable fall into the feminine condition.

In contrast to the overall argument presented by Christian-Smith about these young women, other factors are apparent in the girls' accounts of their relationship to their preferred reading matter. For instance, they acknowledge the importance of factors of access and economy in their choices. Moreover, one of the girls reports writing to an editor to complain about a book she "hated", and she comments "nobody ever asks us our opinion about nothing" (104). Another five girls resist a teacher's attempts to direct them to other genres basing their defence of romance on their own and their mothers' reading pleasures. Christian-Smith acknowledges the pleasures, sociability and resistance involved in these actions and statements with particular emphasis on the pleasures of identification, "The girls derived pleasure from imagining themselves as the heroine of romance novels" (106). Despite a number of girls commenting on the differences between the fictional heroes and the boys of their acquaintance and preferring "a strong assertive heroine", Christian-Smith insists on a conservative resolution to all these contradictions. The reading of romance is seen as conspiring to fulfill the prophesy that these girls will leave school, marry and have children whilst still young. Implied in this view is the assumption that the girls will be economically disadvantaged and married to men who disdain the value of love. The recommended antidote involves submitting romance texts to a critical literacy approach in the classroom. Again, I consider critical literacy to be a productive teaching practice, but surely the aim of critical literacy is not merely to diminish the pleasures of the romance reader or to maintain a singular view of the ideological work of romance.

As feminism recognises its own inherent differences and tensions, so analyses of girls' reading move in the same way as those of women's reading from a dialogic criticism pitting the puny woman reader against the mighty hegemonic patriarchy to the recognition of a more complex circuitry between and within text, context and consumer. This move informs the work of Meredith Cherland in *Private Practices: Girls Reading Fiction and Constructing Identity* (1994). The emphasis on the construction of identity points to Cherland's assertion of a subjectivity that does not

allow for a stable, central, knowable identity. The girl reader proposed here is composed through an assemblage of different and sometimes contradictory discourses and is riven by her unknowable desires and fantasies. Like Christian-Smith, Cherland undertakes ethnographic research involving observations and interviews with students, teachers and parents. Through the mechanism of dialogic reading journals and interviews, she focusses particularly on seven 11-13 year old girls attending a school in "an affluent middle-class Canadian community" (23). The data she collects is rich and detailed demonstrating the both the gendered and the social characteristics of reading and the importance of peer and maternal recommendations in the choice of texts. Nonetheless, Cherland's conclusions reinstate a binary dialogue between compliance and defiance, passivity and activity,

Although the Oak Town girls were subject to a cultural emphasis on female *passivity*, they did, at the same time, resist this ideology of female passivity in some areas of their lives, while still receiving messages that amounted to the culture's attempt to *counter* their resistance: messages about the threat of violence against women (164).

It seems that the reading girl is damned whether she does or doesn't resist Symbolic messages about preferred modes of femininity. To read violence is to read coercion. Again though, the proto feminist in the girl can be recuperated through critical literacy exposing the patriarchal threat inherent in texts of violence.

The Australian reading theorists, Pam Gilbert and Sandra Taylor, maintain a similar belief in the capacity of fiction to provoke the girl to action or condemn her to passivity. They examine the feminist potential of the viewing, reading and writing girl through soap opera, teen romance series and diary writing. In terms of reading romance, three girls aged eleven to thirteen were requested by the authors to read as many of the romance series as they wanted, and Gilbert and Taylor interviewed them afterwards. Interestingly, the eleven year old read more books in the series than the thirteen year olds before rejecting them as "embarrassing" due to their generic status as romance (98). Gilbert and Taylor are unusual in their recognition that middle class girls are aware of the cultural devaluation of the romance genre, and that they respond to the genre accordingly. Indeed, these reading girls produced an accomplished critical analysis of the series. Nonetheless, Gilbert and Taylor conclude:

Romance ideology is not a discourse intended for 'her'. It is a discourse which locks women into passive and submissive response rather than active and independent action; a discourse which cannot construct a future from women without men; a discourse which necessitates the humiliating and crippling romantic inscription of the body (103).

To counter the ideological impetus of romance, they recommend a critical literacy approach in the classroom where young women can learn to identify the mechanisms of texts and genres implicated in the construction of gendered identity. Whilst I completely agree with this recommendation, I am left wondering about the intense engagement of the eleven year old who read thirteen romances in two weeks before rejecting the series. I suggest that the interaction between the girl, her book and her pleasures is not quite as clearly delineated, and her reading practices beyond the classroom cannot and should not be subjected to surveillance.

My argument is not with the promotion of critical literacy as a mechanism to provide training in textual analysis emphasising the importance of cultural context and power relations. Rather, I am concerned about the tendency of feminist accounts of adolescent girls' reading practices to be complicit in furthering the view that we must feed girls wholesome texts if they are to resist the patriarchy. Such a view ignores the multiplicity marking all readers, texts and contexts. In particular, the impossibility of becoming Woman complicates all the girl's identifications with textual characters. As a correlative to this position, a number of feminist theorists emerging towards the end of the last century propose a post modern girlhood characterised by agency and action. In this third wave version of feminism, young women recognise themselves in the lives of popular TV series heroines, Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Xena, Warrior Princess. Young women use the internet and garage music to rehabilitate the term 'girl' and rewrite a multiplicity of girls: riot grrrls, geek grrrls, raunchy girls (Harris). Although many of the participants in these movements are older than those generally designated girls, 'girl' becomes a desirable designator when deployed as a signifier of freedom, action and power. Indeed, the triumphal 'you go, girl' has been adopted as an expression of encouragement and admiration applicable to women of all ages (Baumgarden & Richards). At first glance, this reclamation of girlhood as a potent force seems to offer the reading girl release from her captivity in the Other.

The academic field of girl studies arose concurrently with this apparent proliferation of representations of powerful desiring and desirable young women. Feminist academics associated with cultural studies, education, psychology and sociology concentrated their combined gaze onto the girl. Shared concerns about the difference and specificity that distinguish the category of girl unify a field that is as riven by contradictions and ambivalence as the site of investigation. Nonetheless, this body of work shares an enthusiasm for shifting the boundaries of girlhood to increase her social agency whether through enabling her capability for Carol Gilligan's relational femininity, recognising the ambiguous project of navigating adolescence or respecting her competence to act as a strong and sassy individual (Harris). This thesis participates in the interdisciplinary field of girl studies in both its focus on her reading practices and pleasures, and its exploration of her uncertain relation to desire and the law. As such it runs the same risk of producing a girl who is helpless in the face of the Other, celebrating a girl who is self determined, or contributing to the network of scrutiny and regulation that contain the girl. In effect, it is inevitable that I will reproduce all of these tendencies of girl studies since it is these dimensions that characterise the discourse of girlhood. Consequently, it is important to explore the strands that form this discourse in its contemporary shape to discover the way identification circulates as both productive and inhibitive.

The so-called Girl Power movement of the 1990s began as a feminist intervention in the punk, grunge and garage music scenes culminating in the riot grrrl bands whose reclamation of the grrrl was grounded in feminism and anti-consumerism. Often recognised as the point of articulation for third wave feminism, these grrrls juxtaposed frilly skirts with workman's boots and pointy bras with shaved heads. The lyrics, tone and performance of their music confronted the audience and challenged the social and cultural conditions that maintain the oppression and abuse of young women and their ensuing pain. The underground movement shunned mainstream communication channels relying instead on a technologically savvy fanbase who used the internet as means of disseminating the riot grrrl message. Nonetheless, the riot grrrl message was rapidly appropriated and repackaged as exemplified by the pop group, The Spice Girls. The Spice Girls phenomena may present a case of commodification in which assertiveness and freedom are disengaged from riot grrrl feminism and associated with the caricatures of femininity

represented by each Spice, but Catherine Driscoll argues for a more nuanced analysis. She questions the extent to which public debate focussed on the effects on young fans of identifying too closely with inauthentic objects: the Spice Girls. By promoting this opposition between authentic and inauthentic expressions of feminist resistance, commentators also reproduce the pejorative view that adolescent girls are vulnerable to false consciousness based on excessive investment in identifications with bad objects.

Interestingly, Marnina Gonick compares the formations of girlhood found in *Girl Power* with another popular text concentrating on the same topic but different in both tone and emphasis, Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. This best selling account of the psychological perils of contemporary girlhood is written by a psychotherapist, and the girl it produces is not equal to the challenges of modern life without externally imposed boundaries. Feminist in its reproaches, the text identifies sexism as the culprit in the girl's undoing. Still, whether the devil or the patriarchy are held responsible, like the modern girls who precede her this contemporary girl is subject to frailty and disorder. Despite the apparent contradictions between the messages of individual choice and empowerment offered by the girl power movement and those of fragility and powerlessness presented by Pipher, Gonick equates both as participating in a neo-liberal representation of girls for whom,

the future is thought to be securable only through creating and enhancing powerful identities acquirable by consuming the right products, having the right look, and resolving difficulties and problems by following guidelines for self-improvement found in self-help books (18-19).

Although late capitalism has accelerated consumption and marketed self improvement, Gonick recognises the same figure of the modern girl who frightened commentators with her fearful appetite for indiscriminate objects.

The girl as an Ophelia type figures strongly in young adult fiction. She also appears in many popular media texts in the guise of various pathologies – anorexic, self harming, sexually abused, mentally ill, drug addicted and victim of violence. Social conditions in terms of late capitalism with its accompanying hyper-consumerism and

individualism are generally considered responsible for shallowness, deviance and suffering. In one of the few Lacanian examinations of the psychic constitution of youth, Jan Jagodzinski subscribes to this “youth at risk” perspective. He equates the post modern with the post Oedipal, arguing that the phallic or Oedipal father has been replaced with the Father of *Jouissance* – the uncastrated One who can have it all. Through identification with the absolute hedonism of the *Jouissant* Father, the drives of young people are not adequately sublimated and desire is not properly established. Granted, Jagodzinski extends this condition to the parental generation for whom youthfulness operates as an *objet (a)* or cause of desire, but this intergenerational confusion secures his argument that late capitalism is marked by the failure of modern grand narratives and mechanisms of social control. Furthermore, “With the failure of the Law and loss of faith in its structures the perverse subject is slowly becoming the norm” (114). Youthful identifications are conspicuous for their passive engagement with mass media objects whereby the Other can invade and occupy the psychic territory of the young subject, or alternatively through hyper fandom when the young subject is submerged in the emulation of another. Moreover, young people are positioned as hyper-narcissistic, and consequently they are trapped in the Imaginary warding off invasion by bad objects and seeking to absorb good objects. Although a final chapter alludes to youthful interventions including cyberfeminism as strategies to replace the abandoned master narratives of modernity, on the whole Jagodzinski reproduces a young person who is at risk and who consumes excessively. Such a position is distinct from the work of many feminist theorists who invest contemporary girlhood with the propensity to manoeuvre their desires within the constraints of the Symbolic Other despite the struggle that this may entail.

The appropriation of newly emerging positions for women and girls through riot grrrl and cyberspace may put them back in their place, but poststructural and third wave feminist theory continues to contemplate female desire—its objects, its contradictions and its waywardness. Over four decades, Angela McRobbie has considered and re-considered the configuring of the category girl with an unusual willingness to recognise and rectify omissions in earlier work in view of later evidence and argument. Her work manifests an ongoing interest in the pleasures enjoyed by young women through engagement in activities such as reading,

magazines and dancing. Like Gonick, she appreciates that "relations of power are indeed made and re-made within texts of enjoyment and rituals of relaxation and abandonment" (262). Nonetheless, the young women who feature in McRobbie's work are subjects of desire even though their desires render them complicit with the social Other. These are girls who provide instances of subjectivisation. In this respect, they are subjected to unequal power relations as an inevitable component of being human rather than as a consequence of their consumptive natures, and they wield the materials available to them to contrive productive identities and recognition from and in the Other.

Another dedicated explorer of the territory of girlhood, Valerie Walkerdine proposes a similar move away from the frivolous and frail victim of her identifications, "I shall not argue that young girls passively adopt a female role model, but rather that their adoption of femininity is at best shaky and partial" (Some Day 163). For Walkerdine, sexed identity is "struggled over" rather than simply assumed, and desire is deeply implicated in this struggle. In her work, Walkerdine presents a number of scenarios detailing the connection of young working class girls to popular texts including films, comics and pop songs. Using a psychoanalytic framework, she examines the position of the working class as the Other who are theorised through the projected wishes and fears of the middle class resulting in a lack of specificity for the working class subject. The case studies embedded in her work return a specificity to working class girl children showing them in their historical context, and carefully examining their manipulation of the Symbolic objects available to them. In each case, she explores the desires, fantasies and pleasures projected onto and transformed by the girl child into the coordinates of her own desire thereby assembling a girl whose identification with the textual Other is productive and particular.

The approach adopted by Walkerdine recognises that the child as she appears in representations is a fantasy of the adult. Similarly, Jacqueline Rose argues that all children's fiction is constituted through impossibility because it is a product of adult desire. Taking *Peter Pan* as her case, she dismantles the claims that are made for, and on the child through the fiction addressed to the child, to reveal adult fantasies of the knowable child. This child is the example and guarantor of the adult's original innocence: a pre-lapsarian figure. Just as adult desire produces children's fiction to

confirm and control the discourse of childhood, young adult fiction performs the same function for the discourse of adolescence. The adolescent reader like the child reader is more a fantasy of the adult than an embodied individual. Both child and adolescent reader are produced through shared assumptions about the knowable reader, but the adolescent reader is differentiated from the child reader through the category of young adult fiction. In the case of adolescence, the reader must identify with the resolution of the innocent child into the sexualised but contained and unified adult. Not only is this imagined reader sustained by a category of texts, she is also at risk if she exceeds her limits and strays into adult fiction. In effect, the claims of many educators and young adult fiction writers about their ultimate aim to assist adolescent readers in the transition to adult fiction also police this transition.

Judgments about the suitability of texts for adolescents are the domain of authors, educators, parents, critics and publishers. The domain is limited by the publishing category: young adult fiction. Young adult fiction was established as a category to retroactively nominate texts considered suitable for educating and entertaining adolescents. Adults, whose assumptions about suitable texts culminate in the young adult fiction category, control the curriculum and content of this educative and entertaining venture. Furthermore, young adult fiction is imbricated in the economics of a publishing industry that conforms to the social regulations which produce the category. Many of the texts that constitute the young adult fiction category share a narrative urge to expose the adolescent characters (and by implication readers) to a corrupt and corrupting adult world which must be controlled, contained and resolved by the newly fledged adult (Trites). It is a fictional form that generally works to sustain the notion that inchoate desires can be directed to a suitable object and be resolved. In other words, it is a narrative of maturation that leads the innocent child through the storm and stress of adolescence to emerge as a mature adult subject. Of course, this narrative predates the category. It is a familiar narrative that has been reiterated since the emergence of the novel form.

Recalling Jacqueline Rose's and Valerie Walkerdine's detection of prohibited adult desires in discourse about the child, Catherine Lumby investigates the moral outrage provoked by teen models and identifies them as "symbols of the latent

sexual component of the caretaking role" (Watching 55). Focussing on the frictional status of the adolescent girl as a pivotal figure isolating the innocent girl from the sexualised woman, Lumby argues that the pervasive adult surveillance of the adolescent girl, ostensibly to protect her, allows the adult to maintain a voyeuristic watch over her body and behaviour condemning any and all sexual expression whilst enjoying her eroticism. Although the *Bad Girls* of Lumby's earlier work tend to be women rather than girls, her work has consistently promoted female sexual agency as opposed to the victimhood associated with anti-pornography feminism. Alluding to her reading of an advertisement "describing an erotic encounter", Lumby insists, "I've altered the image in line with my desire" (1997 xxv). Although Lumby is a sophisticated theorist, I would argue that the adolescent girl reader also manipulates the fictions she encounters so that they are in line with her desires.

Negotiation and contestation of the moral discourses that underpin discussion about adolescent readers continues forcefully in the contemporary arena. Debate centres on the texts, genres and media adolescents should consume, those they do consume and the effects they produce, with little attention to the pleasures they offer or the readings they generate. Critics and commentators focus on the dominant meanings available to the reader, and the effectiveness of these meanings in producing suitable subjects. Proper feminine subjects may now be prototype neoliberal feminists and concerns about gender may be inflected by a more overt examination of diverse sexualities, but anxieties still proliferate in pedagogical, media and feminist arenas about the propensity of bad texts to produce bad subjects. Rarely is the girl reader considered as a complex and indeterminate subject marked by her intrepid attempts to actively inscribe herself in a society that secures identity through the phallic signifier. Paradoxically, she manifests both the Symbolic need for the feminine to complement the masculine, and the Symbolic fear of the feminine in its radical Otherness to masculinity. To be the phallus, she must appear receptive and porous to balance the active and detached masculine subject who has the phallus in order to maintain the illusion that there is a sexual relation where two combine to become one. Ironically, this desirable quality renders the girl reader susceptible to capture in the Imaginary. Alternatively, she is feared for her excess of feeling and her potential for promiscuity as a subject not fully inscribed in the Symbolic. Psychology, literary

theory, feminism, medicine, education and religion all work to subject the girl to their particular ideologies, but they all overlook the impossibility of containing the girl. Both the girl and her Symbolic supports are lacking, and neither the girl nor her books can be totalised. Nonetheless, the modern reading girl is still viewed as a sort of slot machine: you put in good books and get a sweetie or a smarty.

Chapter Three

Penetrating Fictions

The operations, functions, reception, consumption and effects of reading have been theorised through a plethora of disciplinary, methodological and ideological frameworks. Such is the immensity of the field that it is impossible to incorporate the disparate, and often contradictory, accounts of the interaction between reader and text. My focus is on the function of identificatory reading as a mechanism of subjectivisation through the mobilisation of pleasure, desire and fantasy. In reading, the young woman is provided with a captivating and pleasurable opportunity to assume an adult gendered subjectivity through identification. However, the term identification has its own complex history in theories of reading, and this history requires examination and interrogation. Identificatory reading practices have secured notions of reading as productive both of the active citizen and the passive victim. In other versions of reading theory, identification is absented from the analysis and the act of reading, but these versions too oscillate between promoting the active or passive status of the reader. In spite of the prevalence of these two powerful histories, identificatory reading need not be coopted to support an either/or contest opposing agency and subjection as absolutes. Instead, I propose that identification can be re-positioned as a feature of reading that inevitably participates in subjectivisation allowing for discipline and desire to mobilise the girl towards womanhood. Although identification cannot lead the reading girl to a transcendence of the law, the movement of desire means that identificatory reading is marked by plasticity, instability and indeterminacy.

It is easy to lose sight of the adolescent girl reader when she is obscured by theoretical debate. Briefly, she is not present in any kind of formalism that places all affect and meaning on the side of the text. If the text is the dictator of all feeling responses and meaning making then the identifications of the girl are merely those invited by the text and the subjective effects are dependent on the text. In versions of the reading story that take this viewpoint, popular fictions are inescapably domineering. Since Adorno and Horkheimer's influential work *The Dialectic of*

Enlightenment was first published in 1944, Marxist inflected critical theory has reiterated the argument that popular texts are products of a monolithic culture industry aimed solely at consumption and, as such, they are formulaic, repetitious, univocal and imitative. As an analysis of late capitalism, this critique still provides a valuable base for considering relations between the hegemonous state and its subjects, but it participates in a logic about the popular that asserts, "the product prescribes every reaction" (Adorno and Horkheimer 137). As such, the tastes of the reading girl are doomed to reduce her to a mere effect of her penchant for popular fiction. Reading the popular is frequently equated with false consciousness, but this association supposes a subject whose consciousness is not false. In contrast, post structural subjects are always already deluded regardless of inferior or superior aesthetic taste. The girl may be an effect of language, but she shares this condition with all other subjects, not solely those who gratify themselves with trashy texts. Enjoying popular fictions does not diminish the complexity of the reading girl and her pleasures.

Nonetheless, far from totally rejecting the critiques of Adorno, Horkheimer and those who have amended and extended their work, I agree that capitalism co-opts and commodifies all cultural products and positions all subjects. Nevertheless, I would align myself with more recent attempts to account for the different ways in which people inhabit and move between subject positions, in subjectivity as a productive site. As such, the effects of reading require examination in order to investigate the particularities of subjects and account for differences between subjects. More recent theoretical discussions, following Lacan, Althusser and Foucault, recognise all subjectivity as an effect of language thus rejecting the existential notion of the subject who can be rescued from the delusions of false consciousness. Instead, the subject enters (and becomes a subject through) a linguistic system that always already regulates the positions available to the subject and encompasses everything that can be said, thought or performed (*Subject* Silverman). The subject of this thesis, the reading girl, is circumscribed by her position as girl, as adolescent and as future woman. Whatever she says or does will be imitative of something that precedes her, and will be received by others in relation to the discursive position she occupies. Her mobility and her difference, her compliance and transgression are all limited to those positions obtainable in language and the social world it makes available. Nonetheless, she must become a

woman: a category both overdetermined and indeterminate. Consequently, she slips away from certainty and often disappears into the shadows of theoretical discussion becoming its object rather than its subject.

Occasionally, when the reader does make her appearance in reader reception theory, she becomes a site of meaning production, but she is produced through her prior implication in the text or by her membership of an interpretive community (Iser; Fish). Alternatively, meaning making might reside entirely with the reader, but the text is reduced to a scenario where the subject can re-stage the wishes and fantasies already fixed in her unconscious (Holland). Either way, there is still no mobility: the girl is positioned by the text, a community or her regressive fantasies. In my resistance to adopting wholesale any of these theoretical positions, I do not mean to suggest that reading is not social, or that the text does not invite particular emotional, cognitive and ideological responses. Rather, in considering reading as a mechanism of subjectivisation, I acknowledge the disciplinary effects, but I am interested in the implication of reading in the production of a gendered adult subjectivity out of the ambiguous state of girlhood. In exploring the production of this subjectivity, some of the powerful, sustaining myths about identification and reading must be interrogated, including a number of persisting oppositions that can be traced through the reading story and maintain a girl helpless to resist the text. These oppositions include the privileging of rationality over emotion, aestheticism over popularity, singularity over plurality, and rigidity over instability. Using a Lacanian theoretical framework, I will show that subjectivisation through reading partakes in all of these terms as interrelated rather than opposed. As such, I argue that the text and the reader are not mutually exclusive. Neither reader nor text are entirely stable as both are products of particular socio-cultural contexts and linguistic systems. Both lack absolute authority and final completion.

When the pleasures of identificatory reading are endorsed or proscribed according to the status of the reader, the adolescent girl remains as a prisoner of her degraded pleasures. She is trapped constantly between oppositional theoretical positions which do not take her pleasures into account, other than to discount them as irrelevant or injurious. The emotional responses she secures through identification are either denied or seen to function as interpellative enticements. In order to defend herself against such entrapment, she must apply intellect to the

text in order to see through or beyond her emotions, and she must read aesthetically valorised texts. The maintenance of this division between feeling and intellect, excludes the possibility that the two can co-exist thus upholding a modern opposition that has a long history of associating the feminine with the subjugated emotive position.

It is not that literary theory and criticism has entirely dismissed emotional responses from reading. Indeed, as mentioned in the previous chapter in relation to response based teaching, the feelings of the reader are required in some models of reading to ascertain both the meaning and moral intention of a fictional text. In Susan Feagin's work dedicated to exploring *Reading with Feeling: The Aesthetics of Appreciation*, the value of emotional responses in reading is asserted in the opening sentence,

Having emotional and other affective responses to a work of fictional literature is a very important way of appreciating it, and the capacity of a work to provide such responses is part of what is valuable about it (1).

Feagin's examination of the role of emotion in reading, as the title of the work suggests, aims to demonstrate the importance of such responses to aesthetic appreciation. To do so, she examines thoroughly the terms emotion, affect, empathy and sympathy from a philosophical perspective consonant with her focus on aesthetics. In this, Feagin joins many other reading theorists in attempting to specify, categorise and evaluate the feeling responses of the reader (Steig). For my purposes, this focus on the types and value of responses does not address my central question of the role of identificatory reading in the formation of gendered subjectivity for adolescent girls. I am interested in emotional responses as a requisite for the functioning of pleasure and desire as primary sites of subjectivisation, and the role of feelings in arriving at a proper appreciation or interpretation is not central to answering this question. Nonetheless, theorists such as Feagin who maintain that meaning resides with the reader in a transaction with the text do make claims for subjective effects.

Ultimately, Feagin argues for the value of affective responses to reading because they enhance the reader's capacity to imagine different conditions and points of view than those with which she is already familiar. Moreover, Feagin suggests that reading disciplines and trains "emotional control". As such, she is sustaining the

position promoted by Arnold and Leavises that reading can better the subject. Further, the role played by identification and emotion in Feagin's model is subservient to the interpretation it informs because the reader is required to reflect upon and assess the perspicacity of her responses in view of the meaning of the text. Despite these different concerns and goals, I will argue with Feagin that reading disciplines the emotions, particularly those of the adolescent girl reader in her role as trainee woman. Unlike Feagin, though, I do not believe this training necessarily improves the subject or her aesthetic appreciation.

The tendency of the vast body of reader reception theory to privilege interpretative over feeling responses to the text is remarked upon by Lynne Pearce in *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*. In a counter movement, she positions the pleasure of reading within a romance between reader and text: necessarily dialogic and emotional. Pearce's account is distinguished by an avoidance of the term identification because of its psychoanalytic heritage. She argues that the term identification has become associated with psychoanalytic explanations of the initial engagement between reader and character in terms of infantile attachments excluding a more complex and social world. Whilst Pearce is correct to identify the moment of captivation in an Imaginary relationship with a character as one reading (and viewing) process that can be explicated through a psychoanalytic frame, she does not consider the option of applying a psychoanalytic understanding of the social to further explore the permutations of identification as they are manifested in social identity. Her second objection to theories of identificatory reading is that, "the processes of identification are dealt with in such abstract terms that the emotional components of the procedure never get named" (18). Although this is a recognisable feature of many accounts of identification in reading, psychoanalytic accounts do not necessarily and always exclude the naming, or the further exploration of the emotional responses of the reader.

Despite eschewing psychoanalytic reading theories in general, Pearce recognises the contribution of the psychoanalytically inflected theories of Roland Barthes to appreciating the importance of emotion in reader response. She adopts terms from Barthes' *Lover's Discourse* as a trope to describe emotionally engaged reading as enchantment (*ravissement*). Her reader is a feminist or proto-feminist and her interest is in producing fully formed, politically engaged feminist subjects. The

model she develops opposes “hermeneutic” and “implicated” reading processes in which the reader is concerned either with interpretation of, or engagement with, the text. An implicated reader may be engaged with a particular character in a stereotypical identification or with other elements of the reading that can be textual or contextual. In her concluding remarks, however, Pearce sustains the position of other reader reception theorists,

Far from *encouraging* us to surrender to the textual engagement (as do most other theories that have seen reading as a metaphorical/literal expression of ‘desire’ in some way), I now hold up my own model of implicated reading as a *warning*. What my readings do, it seems, is show us all too readily how our enchantment by a textual other – however airy, unspecified or non-human – may blind us to the contexts (gendered, raced, classed, sexualised) in which those relations operate (256).

Her final statements about emotionally engaged reading reinscribe terms of appetite and excess with references to hunger, craving and “uncontainable” desire. Thus, the very binary Pearce warns us against is reinvoked. Again, emotion dupes intellect and stands in the way of feminism.

In an examination of the pleasures enjoyed by women readers of series romance, Hilary Radner recognises the importance of misreading identified by Janice Radway and Tanya Modleski. All three critics remark on the necessity of the heroine and her identifying reader misinterpreting the hero’s abusive and/or dismissive behaviour as signifying his love for her in order for both fictive and material female bodies to receive the enjoyment they seek. Furthermore, Radner applies Constance Penley’s theorisation of the operation of fantasy in reading to the repetitive engagement of the series romance reader with texts where format is immutable and the outcome is known. According to Radner, “The reader invests in ‘reading’ as an identificatory process in which to read is to be positioned within a scene of fantasy” (7). This fantasy reinscribes the aforementioned triumph of the passive woman in converting masculine phallic desire into the love which will unite the couple as an undifferentiated whole. As she also argues, this is a masochistic fantasy. The heroine and reader desire an obliteration of selfhood through absorption into the lover and the text. Radner defends this masochistic desire as a strategy employed by women to gain pleasure despite the constraints of femininity in a male dominated erotic and material economy of sexual exchange. Unfortunately, her

defence maintains the high aesthetic versus low formulaic divide in which the reader of the former has the capacity to penetrate the text whereas the reader of the latter is penetrated by the text. Thus, the passive, uncritical feminine reader of popular fiction continues to be positioned in opposition to the active, incisive masculine reader of literature.

This move aligns the work of feminists such as Hilary Radner with a long line of critics who fear the popular. Indeed, the distinction between the conformist popular text and the avant-garde literary text is sustained by most reading theorists. Roland Barthes' influential *The Pleasure of the Text* (1974) maintains and extends this distinction. In Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text*, a coalition of psychoanalytic and semiotic theories allows for reading as a means of subjective production. *The Pleasure of the Text* heralds an important development in reception theory by applying semiotic and psychoanalytic theory to produce a poststructuralist model of reading. However, Barthes reinforces the divide between literary and popular novels. Popular novels are characterised as texts of conservative pleasure offering the reader the familiar comforts of formulaic fiction. In contrast, texts of *jouissance* invite the reader to navigate a maze of indeterminate meaning full of treacherous gaps in language,

Texts of pleasure: the text that contents, fills grants euphoria;
the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is
linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading. Texts of *jouissance*:
the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts ...
unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological
assumptions, brings to a crisis this relation with language (14)

Thus, the text can still fuck or be fucked by the reader according to its aesthetic status: reading remains a determinedly gendered act. If we are to overcome this literary versus popular obfuscation of the reading girl, we need to explore the mechanism of identification through a psychoanalytic framework. Rather than discriminating between texts of pleasure and texts of *jouissance*, I argue that any and all texts might offer opportunities to a particular reader for pleasure, desire, and fantasy.

The act of reading is central to a Lacanian psychoanalytic model, and such a model has the capacity to disturb the boundaries maintained between emotion and

intellect and high and low aesthetic value. Shoshana Felman's work focuses on the pivotal role of reading in Lacan's work and in the clinical session. Although there may be little similarity between the readings produced in the analytic session and those available through popular fiction, I take Felman's claim, "the activity of reading is not just the analyst's, it is also the analysand's: interpreting is what takes place *on both sides* of the analytic situation" (21) as applicable to the girl reader. Through interpretation, the book does not just write her, she rewrites (or misreads) the book because, as Felman suggests, "the unconscious is a reader" (22). Given that fictions are brought to the service of our dreams and desires, it is not remarkable to claim the unconscious as an aspect of the reading act, but it is precisely this inaccessible dimension that is both implied and omitted from accounts of the adolescent girl reader. Her impressionability assumes a lack of self knowledge and control, but this is rarely explicated through a consideration of the operation of the unconscious in the reading act. Nevertheless, her unconscious can disrupt and misdirect her reading just as it can destabilise her speech and her sleep. In this, she is the same subject as any man or woman in that the Lacanian unconscious is an absolutely barred unknown and unknowable Other to the subject. In any reading of a text, the effects of and on the unconscious are marked, but cannot be recognised or specified by the reader or the theorist.

However, not all pleasures are unconscious even when they participate in fantasy and desire. Janice Radway found that the women who claimed that the emotional pleasure they experienced in escaping the daily toil of housewifery through (mis)reading romance were not deluded about the material conditions maintaining their gendered identities. Instead, the readers celebrated the triumph of love in the novels as an Imaginary feminine victory ameliorating the material practices of daily life. The recognition of the presence of emotion, the importance of fantasy and the inevitability of misreading are central to my account of adolescent reading.

However, the aforementioned tendency of critics to assume that misreading can be considered as an instance of false consciousness can be countered by the Lacanian recognition that all reading is misreading. No matter how rational or sophisticated the reader, she cannot be supposed to know. Nor can the author or the text be supposed to know. No one can be supposed to know because there can be no totalising knowledge. From this perspective, all readings are interpretations and

none can claim final authority. The text will penetrate the girl, but the girl will incorporate the text.

Paradoxically, the reader cannot be supposed to know, yet she knows more than she knows because her unconscious also knows. The unconscious is defined by Felman as,

a kind of *unmeant knowledge* that escapes intentionality and meaning, a knowledge spoken by the language of the subject (spoken, for instance, by his 'slips' or by his dreams), but that the subject cannot recognize, assume as his, appropriate; a speaking knowledge nonetheless denied to the speaker's knowledge (77).

Thus, although the reading girl cannot grasp her unconscious knowledge, her identifications will be fashioned to suit her unconscious purpose. The Lacanian unconscious splits the subject, fracturing the illusion of a coherent, singular identity. Beneath the barrier of repression, the subject relegates her recognition of the maternal and lack or incompleteness in the Other of language which she takes as her own central abyss. Secondly, the unconscious is constituted by the subject's incorporation of part objects represented as signifiers which then disrupt the subject's conscious Symbolic communication. The repressed signifiers form networks of meaning that operate in language through substitution in slippages, dream images, puns and suchlike. Despite its ubiquitousness, unconscious knowledge is inaccessible to the subject. Thus the impossibility of a final or total knowledge plus the implication of the unknowable in the reading act deny the possibility of ever claiming a definitive set of meanings or effects shared by all readers. The critic or theorist can only point to possibilities. The proliferation of possible meanings is infinite because of the indeterminacy of meaning.

To demonstrate the complexity and diversity of the consumption of popular texts in the production of working class femininity, Valerie Walkerdine observes and records the interactions of girls viewing films with their families. In considering a particular viewing of the film *Annie*, Walkerdine suggests that the film inscribes "fantasies [that] provide both a point of identification for Eliana and a way of reading" (*Daddy's Girl* 114). She suggests possible meanings made available in the film for the little girl, Eliana, but she does not insist that these are the meanings taken. Not only does Walkerdine recognise the importance of identification and desire in the

viewing and reading process, she is also alert to the impossibility of producing a single, authoritative truth about the effects of a text upon a particular subject. Further, Walkerdine is one of the few critics to acknowledge the importance of the researcher's own fears and fantasies in the interpretations she makes. Similarly, I am aware that the reading pleasures and associated fantasies of my own adolescence (and adulthood) inform and inflect my argument throughout this thesis.

Another key point made by Walkerdine concerns the mobility of fantasy. Through a reading of Freud via Laplanche and Pontalis, Walkerdine returns to the importance of the primal scene as a "fantasy of origins" (*Daddy's Girl* 177), a narrative into which the child is inserted much as a fictional character is placed in a setting. The primal scene both pre-exists and is the cause of the child. Crucially, it is a sexual scene. Of equal significance to my argument, Walkerdine reminds us that, "Freud postulated that fantasies, from unconscious ones, visible in dreams to day-dreams, were settings in which original fantasies could be recreated and in which the fantasizer could take one of several parts" (*Daddy's Girl* 178). It is this plasticity of fantasy that I want to stress as it pre-empts and prevents the critical tendency to nominate a definite identificatory position to be adopted by the reader according to gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity. Unlike Walkerdine, though, I see this position as consistent with a Lacanian theoretical frame. Walkerdine understands Lacan's assertion that "The Woman does not exist" to mean that the woman and the girl are merely "a symptom and myth of male fantasy" (*Daddy's Girl* 182). As I have argued, Lacan's theory of sexualisation allows for a more complex view of femininity in which female subjectivity is complicated, but not contained, by cultural myths of Woman. Rather than accepting that the "ahistorical and universal categories" (*Daddy's Girl* 180) referred to by Walkerdine are implicit in the Lacanian model, I suggest that a historically and geographically specific subject can be derived from Lacan's work because the form taken by the Symbolic Other of language and society are culturally specific. Similarly, Walkerdine identifies the foundation of fantasy in the capacity of the infant to hallucinate the absent breast and produce pleasurable feelings, which is not incommensurate with Lacan's model of desire emanating out of demand. Also, the *objet (a)* at which desire aims and around which fantasy circles is constituted through a residual body part which may be a breast or can be another imagined source of satisfaction: lips, gaze, voice, anus etc. Despite these differences in accepting or rejecting a Lacanian model to argue for

the mobility of fantasy and its identificatory positions, I agree with Walkerdine's insistence both on the historic and geographic specificity of the material available for fantasy, and on the always already sexualised girl who can engage in transgressive as well as normative identifications in her fantasy life.

A number of queer theorists also insist on the plasticity of fantasy and the unpredictability of identificatory positions. The position of the queer reader who wilfully misidentifies the sexuality of the desiring character and/or the object of this character's desire demonstrates the capacity of the reader to adapt the text to her own purpose. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's version of queer theory is unashamedly utopian suggesting that the queer impetus carries the subject *across* categories of gender and sexuality through identifications with the other sex and the other sexuality thereby mounting a personal and political campaign against the colonisation of the body by the strictures of culture. In this version of reading theory, it is the queer reader who retains the power to mutilate the text. Furthermore, the subject and the text are transformed in this interaction. As the reader coopts, converts and identifies with a character, the character is also incorporated by the subject who is altered in this exchange. However, this liberatory argument aimed at celebrating heterogeneity can also erase difference. Despite the utopian vision of subjects traversing the categorical divisions between them, this argument is nostalgic and regressive as it would return the subject to an undifferentiated, amorphous state with no separation of self and other. This is a form of the powerful and enduring fantasy of the many becoming one, of the loss of self in the collective. My own favourite version of this myth is the Borg, the robotic alien entity featured in the TV series Star Trek aimed at assimilating all other species and famous for their catch cry "resistance is futile". However, there are many other less far fetched versions encountered in daily life, such as becoming one through the drug ecstasy or with God, that are mobilised in the interests of various dominant and counter ideologies. Regardless of the terror or solace mobilised by narratives in which the many become the one, loss of difference is always a form of death. If our sense of oceanic oneness is retroactively produced after our necessary recognition of difference, then our desire for pure being without separation leads inevitably towards the unattainable Real and to death.

A more subtle and cautious version of queer reading is offered by Emma Wilson in *Sexuality and the Reading Encounter: Identity and desire in Proust, Duras, Tournier, and Cixous*. As is evident from the writers referred to in her title, the effects of reading popular fictions are peripheral to the interests of Wilson. However, her explication of the relation of text to reader challenges accounts of the reader as either dominated or dominatrix. It also supports the argument that reading participates in identity formation. In her introductory chapter, she designates the meeting of text and reader as an encounter in which identification is the key mode of exchange. Accepting a Lacanian model of identification whereby subjectivity is constituted through an amalgam of introjects of the others with whom the subject has identified herself, Wilson claims,

The text may engage its reader in a process of fantasy construction and voyeuristic participation as it literally arouses his/her imagination. The text may thus offer the reader new images of himself/herself as desiring subject with which to identify, and new scenarios for the performance of an identity (5).

In the face of this statement, my argument can be seen to share the same premise as well as the same forewarning that identificatory reading does not necessarily lead to the transformation of the subject especially when the text maintains a normative economy of sexual difference. However, because Wilson selects texts that exemplify her argument, she does not take into consideration a misreading of the normative text to produce an unregulated identification. Implicit in her position is the same insistence that texts which sustain dominant cultural discourses will reproduce rather than transform the subject,

for a text to serve a normative function it should, then, offer the reader fixed, coherent, and intelligible *imagos* with which to identify and to incorporate in the construction of his/her identity. This I have seen to be dependent on a hierarchical relation between writer and reader, where the writer, in Lacanian terms, consciously initiates the movements of the images within the text which are copied by the reader (194).

Her readings of four writers who work to destabilise both fixed identities and sexualities lead Wilson to the conclusion that for a fiction to be formative it must disrupt the reader's sense of her own stable identity and frustrate her search for a secure and stable point of identification. Again, transformation is linked to the

production of an insurgent subject through the reading of aesthetically revered texts.

The utopian claims made for fiction by queer theorists are cautiously sustained by Marshall Alcorn Jr. and Mark Bracher in "Literature, Psychoanalysis, and the Re-Formation of the Self: A New Direction for Reader-Response Theory". In this article, Alcorn and Bracher propose a role for reading in reconfiguring rather than merely reproducing identity supporting the Aristotelian notion of catharsis and claiming for fiction a potentially therapeutic function. The aim of the article is to correct Norman Holland's psychoanalytically inflected reader reception model which positions reading as a site of projective identification whereby the text merely supports the reader's pre-existing wishes and fantasies. In contrast, Alcorn and Bracher apply object relations theory to reading and claim that the reader can engage in a transference relationship with fictional texts thus presenting her with an opportunity to reformulate the introjects that structure her psyche. Further, Alcorn and Bracher suggest that classroom responses can be redirected by teachers and peers to the therapeutic benefit of the reader. This process occurs through the reader's entry into a "narcissistic alliance" with a character or author thus introjecting a new ego ideal and recognising the real limits operating on the new ego ideal (349). In their conclusion Alcorn and Bracher acknowledge that not all reading will effectively alter subjectivities and that some reading may have detrimental effects on the psyche of the reading subject but these qualifications are not explicated.

In contrast to film theory, the application of Lacanian theory to reading has not been widely performed or accepted. Such models as exist vary both in the Lacanian concepts they adopt and the extent to which they apply a Lacanian framework. For instance, Patrick Fuery and Nick Mansfield propose a model that maps the position of texts according to their status as canonical, popular or subcultural against the Lacanian concepts of the Symbolic, Imaginary and Real, each represented as the side of a triangle. The trajectory linking canonical to popular texts is aligned with the Symbolic, canonical to subcultural texts with the Imaginary, and popular to subcultural texts to the Real. This model is developed not to describe the forms of psychic investment on behalf of the reader, but to explain the movements of texts within a classificatory system in terms of a cultural conscious/unconscious. As a

consequence, the model is not helpful in considering the reader's subjectivity. Further, there are aspects of this model that defy Lacanian logic. For instance, it is not possible for a text to emanate from the Real as the Real is precisely that which is outside signification. By definition, the Real cannot be inscribed.

There are occasional applications of Lacanian theory in young adult fiction criticism such as those found in the work of Roberta Seelinger Trites, Karen Coats and Christine Wilkie-Stibbs. For Roberta Seelinger Trites, young adult fiction is purposeful. She suggests that the most successful young adult fiction assists the adolescent reader to negotiate patriarchal power and assume a position as a responsible feminist subject through reading. *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels* relies heavily on the valorised notions of empowerment as a key feature of feminist novels for children and adolescents, and her position depends on 'choice' and 'individuality' as the central tenets of liberal feminism, the feminist protagonist need not squelch her individuality in order to fit into society. Instead, her agency, her individuality, her choice, and her non-conformity are affirmed and even celebrated (6).

Consistent with this liberal feminist argument is an unquestioning belief in progress relegating nineteenth century texts such as *Little Women* to a lower rung on the league table of feminist novels than contemporary novels inscribing women's and girls' ambitions for equality. As suggested in the title of her other work on young adult fiction, *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, Trites is interested in the interplay between empowerment and repression in subjectivisation. Her argument employs various literary and poststructural theories including those of Lacan. In *Waking Sleeping Beauty*, Trites proposes a poststructural subject of language occupying diverse subject positions, yet she insists on a developmental process of individuation without addressing the contradiction between subjectivity and individuality. Further, she does not interrogate an underlying assumption that feminist texts make feminist girls, and responsible texts make responsible individuals.

Trites applies Lacan in *Disturbing the Universe* to explain the adolescent protagonist's rebellion against the Father or a substitute for the Father in order to become "an actualised subject" (69). In other words, fictional adolescent rebellion is read as a variation of the Oedipal moment, and the narrative of adolescent rebellion

is read as restaging of the child's entry into the Symbolic and consequent assumption of an individualised consistency within the limits of the law. Trites then presents a number of examples of young adult fictions that stage the rebellion of the adolescent against a biological, substitute or imagined parent. In those texts she considers successful, the adolescent protagonist achieves resolution through submitting to the law, identifying with the parent and sharing authority. This is a reduction of the function of the Name-of-the-Father since it fails to acknowledge that identification with the Father as the bearer of the phallus is itself a misrecognition since the father is castrated, that is to say, he is alienated in language and separated from *jouissance*. More importantly in this context, there is no discussion about the attraction of the reader to the narrative or the effects upon her beyond recognising an implied reader. By inference, the reader is assumed to recognise her own rebellious feelings and accept the necessity of submitting to the law. Whilst appearing to argue that this is a necessary process, Trites does recognise that the myth of the rebellious adolescent "participates in the social construction of the adolescent as someone who must be repressed for the greater good" (83). Nonetheless, her argument is generally complicit with this construction requiring the girl to submit to the text.

Karen Coats has written the only work to apply a sustained Lacanian framework to interrogate the workings of children's and adolescent fictions. Tellingly, Coats uses a developmental structure moving from picture books to young adult fiction to organise *Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire and Subjectivity in Children's Literature*. She analyses the various texts to demonstrate particular aspects of the Lacanian subject thus remaining on the side of the text as the purveyor of meaning. Her position is secured in a pertinent quote from Lacan,

This child, we see that he is prodigiously open to everything concerning the way of the world that the adult brings to him. Doesn't anyone ever reflect on what this prodigious porosity to everything in myth, legend, fairy tales, history, the ease with which he lets himself be invaded by these stories, signifies, as to his sense of the other? (in Coats 4).

Based on this evidence, Coats validates a position that perpetuates the domination of the text. At first glance, this position is more than justified given the textual basis of the Lacanian subject, but it elides the crucial and related notions of misreading and desire. The child reader may be porous, but she is not passive. Pursuing her

own desire, her reading may exceed and transgress the text. Further, the chronological organization of types of fiction conflates a developmental pathway that the child should follow in reading with her psychic development. Not only is the reader penetrated by the text but, in the case of *Alice through the Looking Glass*, by the author as well. Coats makes sense of this text by turning to George Dodgson's desire for Alice Liddell as a child. Despite claiming that she is referring only to an "author function", the reversion to Dodgson's proper name rather than his pseudonym indicates a certainty about his inscription in the text as one that is legible to the reader. Whilst I would not dispute the author marks the text with her or his desire, the reader engages not with the author but with the text, and the author's name serves only as one of the guarantors of the particular pleasures on offer.

Interestingly, Coats abandons the Lacanian stance she has used to explicate children's books and turns instead to Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject to explain the operations of young adult fiction on the reader. Presumably, this is because Lacan does not reference the adolescent in his model of subjectivisation whereas Kristeva retains a Freudian sense of adolescence as a period of psychic reorganisation making adolescence "an open psychic structure" in terms of being open to "that which has been repressed" and "a tremendous freeing up of the superego" (136, *Abjection*). Coats takes the Kristevan concept, the abject, and relates it to the peer group relations figured in much young adult fiction. She argues that the dynamic of social inclusion and exclusion apparent in many of these narratives produces abject characters, characters who abject others and characters that come to terms with abjection. Evoking the Columbine massacre as an example of adolescents inhabiting the abject or excluded position, she claims,

Working through the ethical problems and solutions proposed in young-adult literature helps teens become aware of their complicity in the construction of insiders and outsiders, and they are led to see how exclusionary practices lead to violent behavior (159).

Once again, the text must provide a therapeutic solution for the subject. This represents a misreading of Lacan and Kristeva. The ethical Lacanian subject acts in accordance with her desire regardless of received moral laws and social consequences as represented by the figure of Antigone who acts regardless of the law through her desire for death. As for Kristeva, she clearly states,

The adolescent, like the child, is a mythical figure of the imaginary that enables us to distance ourselves from some of our failings, splittings of the ego, disavowals, or mere desires, which it reifies into the figure of someone who has yet to grow up (*Abjection* 135).

This, Kristeva argues, accounts for the prevalence of adolescent protagonists in novels. They characterise a capacity for polymorphous perversity which the reader enjoys. Although Kristeva discusses an adolescent girl as analysand in the essay, *The Adolescent Novel*, she does not position adolescence as an inevitable maturational stage but as a "mythical figure". For Coats to take the adolescent so literally belies her desire to appropriate psychoanalytic theory to pin the subject down and deny her indeterminacy.

The indeterminacy of text and reader are prominent features of Christine Wilkie-Stibbs' argument in *The Feminine Subject of Children's Literature*. Founding her argument in Lacanian psychoanalysis, Wilkie-Stibbs also applies Kristeva's notion of the abject to the adolescent novel, and she associates this notion with Cixous' proposition of *l'écriture féminine* to identify the inscription of fluid and fragmented expressions of the feminine within the text. Mostly the titular feminine subject resides within the text as Wilkie-Stibbs undertakes readings of a number of young adult fictions to discover "the feminine textual unconscious" (149). When she does consider the reader, she likens the reading act to the analytic encounter marked by transference and counter transference and concludes,

In this one-to-one relationship between the reading subject and literary texts . . . the textualised and structural nature of the psyche is exercised and the textual psyche is laid bare (149).

Whilst I would not dispute the transference elements in the reader's identification with characters, I am not convinced that the text itself has an unconscious despite engaging the unconscious of both reader and writer. Furthermore, I would argue that no unconscious is ever fully revealed since the unconscious speaks through slippages and allusions that disturb Symbolic meaning. The Lacanian unconscious is never amenable to being "laid bare". Notably though, Wilkie-Stibbs readings do recuperate the feminine maternal within a category marked by patriarchal resolutions to Oedipal struggles, but her focus is rarely on the reader and her pleasures.

For my purposes, a more useful model is developed by Mark Bracher in a rigorous and persuasive application of a Lacanian theory of subjectivity in relation to reading. The introduction to *Lacan, Discourse and Social Change: A Psychoanalytic Cultural Criticism* argues succinctly that neither formalism, historicism nor reader reception theory can adequately account for the effects of texts on the subjectivity of readers. Conversely, Lacanian theory emphasises the centrality of signifiers, images and fantasy (the very stuff of fiction) in constituting the human subject. As such, it offers the possibility of examining the subject positions available to the reader without reducing the reader to a mere point of reception. According to Lacan, the human subject becomes coherent through its interrelations with various others – others of material, representational and fancied form. Through fictional representations, the subject can engage with the pleasures of language in the Symbolic and semblances in the Imaginary as well as shiver with a frisson of the Real. Bracher develops and employs a Lacanian analysis of textual reception by identifying twelve forms of desire and their discursive operations. He examines texts and discourses from low and high, public and literary sources, and he detects the shared discourses informing these texts works to demonstrate the capacity of both high and lowbrow discourses “to promote the institution of what Lacan called the paternal metaphor” (16). Not only does Bracher collapse the oppositional divide between high and low, he promotes a diversity of effects on different subjects. For instance, Bracher’s examination of pornography not only acknowledges the support it offers to the dominant patriarchal system of sexual relations, but also recognises its productive effects for some inhibited heterosexual men because it invites them to take pleasure in their desires. Whilst I do not adopt Bracher’s analytic model focussed on modes and forms of desire, I share his aim of “understanding the effects that cultural artefacts and discourses have on human subjects” (14), and recognition of the value of Lacanian theory in achieving this goal.

Lacan himself is a penetrating and penetrated reader founding his work in a re-reading of Freud and embroidering his own texts with constant allusions to, and interpretations of, other texts. These texts are comprehensive in time and topic moving between ancient and modern, theology and science, philosophy and mathematics to name but a few. Indeed, the instigating moment of psychoanalytic theory reiterated by Lacan and others depends upon a fiction: the story of Oedipus. Famously, Lacan’s reading of Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” works to demonstrate the

analytic encounter (Felman; Lacan). Rather than maintaining a disciplinary distance from literary theory, Lacan's psychoanalytic model relies on shared notions of signification. They exemplify, illustrate and, at times, confound Lacan's meaning depending on the reader or listener's familiarity, but they indicate the always dialogic and polyphonic operations of texts on and through readers. They allow us to see and hear that the producer of texts is shot through with texts. Jean-Michel Rabate claims "Lacan reads literary texts in order to learn from them, moreover to learn things he would not find in any other texts or experience" (69). For Lacan, psychoanalytic theory does not operate as an implement for opening up authors or readers to the all knowing analyst. Rather, fictional texts offer the reader an interaction in which we readers are taught something about ourselves (in connection with language, desire, society, gender and so on) not only in so far as our social beings are concerned, but also insofar as our desire is questioned (Rabate 68)

This is not knowledge of self as promoted by humanism, but the exploration of self through the textual other and the pleasures it offers.

The implications of Lacan's theory for textual studies and reader reception is recognised by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan in a paper titled "The Magnetism Between Reader and Text: Prolegomena to a Lacanian Poetics". She argues that "a close reading of Lacan suggests that literature operates a magnetic pull on the reader because it is an allegory of the psyche's fundamental structure" (381). At first glance, this suggests a similar equivalence between text and reader as is proposed by Trites, Coats and other commentators on adolescent reading, but Ragland-Sullivan denies such a neat and constraining equivalence whereby the reader can be inferred from the text. In a dense and rigorous consideration of possibility of a Lacanian poetics, she supports some of my own assertions,

If . . . the purpose of literature is to point to a representational underside of consciousness, and give voice to a hidden dialectic, then neither the 'truth value' of fiction, nor the power of literature, could ever be explained by reference to the rules and conventions of language. Any such reduction of literary meaning to Symbolic order function would omit (elide, deny) the Real (and true) to which the text refers, as well as the overarching role of the Imaginary (subjective) in perception. The reason, then, that literary language is above the norm in ratio of rhetorical to explicit meanings would

be that it is a privileged use of language to display the power of Imaginary resonances and dramas in life, and to refer to their source in the Real of unconscious experience (392).

Although Ragland-Sullivan is referring to literary rather than popular texts, I share her conviction that all three psychic registers (the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic) are involved in the engagement of text and reader. Also, she insists on the indeterminacy of both the text and the reader, refusing a position of dominance or coherence to either.

My aim in applying a Lacanian framework to the reading girl and her fictions is to demonstrate that this engagement is a component of her striving for female subjectivity. This activity cannot reduce the subject to merely an automaton undifferentiated from the rest of the mob despite her popular preferences and consequent commodification. Life and culture depend on the difference between subject and object, self and other and ego and unconscious. Whether the elimination of the space between subjects is imagined as a blissful emersion in oceanic oneness or as a loss of autonomy in a robotic mass, it results in the loss of the subject and the social. Despite the fears of many commentators, reading alone cannot lead a girl to death. Ultimately, the girl subject of my thesis is determined by culture but necessarily misrecognises herself as an individual seeking satisfaction and completion. Along with her fellow subjects, she remains incomplete, dissatisfied and unstable, and it is this condition that directs and circumscribes her mobility. Just as she looks to confirm her coherence through identifying with the image of an apparently unified other, so she yearns to fulfil the desire of the Other, to find the hallucinated *objet (a)* and to lose herself in full *jouissance*. It is the tension between these subjective states that produce the reader as unpredictable and omnivorous. She is bound to pursue contradictory pleasures in order to continue as a desiring subject within the confines of the law which requires her to perform as a woman. Reading presents the girl with an opportunity to engage with her contradictory pleasures and, in this process of subjectivisation, to assume transgressions and submissions as her own through her misrecognition of the other in the text as an aspect of herself through identification.

Preceding castration and entry into the Symbolic, the Imaginary is instituted during the infant's captivation in the movement between self and other, subject and other.

This is the register where we identify others with ourselves. Lacan's discussion of the Imaginary in "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience" explicates the domain as constituted through the proto-subject's misrecognition of an external image (*Ecrits*). This instigating act of misrecognition is based on the infant's belief that she is the infant possessed of a coherent, unified body that she sees in the mirror. This mirror image activates the ideal-I, an internalised image of a perfect self to which she can never measure up. Consequently, the subject seeks perfection in others and incorporates them in her Imaginary as ego-ideals. This dynamic between the subject and others characterises relations between people as both loving and hostile since the subject loves and incorporates the perfect other who can complete her, yet aggressively rejects the other's imperfections. Clearly, the Imaginary is involved in any consideration of identification given the subject's predilection for seeking herself in others in a constant search for perfection and completion.

Reading herself into the text through identification with characters provides the adolescent girl with the opportunity to play with anticipatory and regressive pleasures. Identificatory reading provides an instance of engagement in the Imaginary, the realm where identity is constituted. The Imaginary is, to quote Elizabeth Grosz: "the domain in which the self is dominated by images of the other and seeks identity in a reflected relation with alterity" (46). In reading, the adolescent girl can explore identity through the alterity of the text, and moreover, without surveillance because of the solitary and concealed nature of the actual act of reading. Caught up within the fictional world, the reading girl experiences a sense of seeming freedom to choose her object of desire and identify wherever and however she chooses. Of course such perceived freedom is socially circumscribed by the limited images and practices available within the text, and by the girl's own social training. What remains true, however, is that reading offers an arena of play. Both the reading girl and the text she reads are detached from responsibilities and consequences in the world. Therefore, reading does allow the girl a circumscribed freedom to play safely with objects of desire and identifications. Whilst much of this psychic activity will be normative, it is this space for play that facilitates the opportunity for transgression. The Imaginary is the core constituent of identificatory reading, and it is because the Imaginary is forever associated with an infantile state that identificatory reading is seen as offering a regressive pleasure. Thus, a network

of signifiers works to associate identificatory reading with the childish, the popular and the feminine. Yet once the infant becomes a subject, the Imaginary no longer operates in isolation. Indeed, it never did.

The infant looking in the mirror anticipates her eventual mastery in the future, but Lacan suggests that the moment is paradoxical since it simultaneously involves fending of the retroactive knowledge that she has been a fragmented body in the Real. Thus, identification is anticipatory and regressive, adoring and aggressive, a wish and a defence. Neither the Imaginary or the Real, or the subject, are possible without the Symbolic register of language and the Law. The proto-subject of the Imaginary is lost in dyadic relations seeking equivalence with the other that she can never achieve. She requires a third term to intervene and establish her desire as the desire of the Other. With birth, the infant moves from the simple level of biological need, where appetites are satisfied without intervention, to demand because not all appetites are satisfied immediately, but demand exceeds need because it calls for total loving attention from the provider of satisfaction. This demand must always fail because total loving attention cannot be immediately provided on all occasions. Sometimes the provider has something else on their mind, and it is this something else (or third term) on the mind of the other (her desire) that produces desire in the subject. Citing Freud's Oedipal myth, and recognising the patriarchal organization of culture and the inexorably sexed body, Lacan refers to the third term as Name-of-the-Father or the paternal metaphor. The father stands for what the mother has on her mind, her desire. Crucially, the father's refusal to tolerate the incestuous mother-infant dyad initiates the child into the law of culture and the network of language at the same time as, and because of, demonstrating that the mother lacks. The mother is lacking that which she desires, and that which she desires appears to have the master signifier: the phallus. Once the infant is barred from unmediated access to the mother and has submitted to the master signifier, she becomes a subject: irrevocably split from knowledge of the Real conditions of her constitution, subjected to the laws of culture and driven by the desire to be the desire of the Other.

Although identification takes place in the realm of the Imaginary, the Symbolic register must not be excluded from this account. Indeed, the Imaginary is imbricated in the Symbolic of which it is both a prerequisite and a requisite. As

such, the Imaginary can only operate within, and be represented through the Symbolic because the Symbolic is the domain of representation. Discourses inhabit the Symbolic: they are produced in and by language and they articulate the Law of the Father. It is through the discourse of femininity available in fictions that the girl reader is disciplined into womanhood. It is also, here, in the Symbolic that she can adopt a critical reading position and exercise aesthetic appreciation. In other words, she can accept or resist the ideological pressure of the text depending on her personal position. A proto feminist will tend to align herself with fiction featuring strong, active female protagonists, and to reject fictions suggesting heteronormative romance and domesticity are the destination for all heroines. Given that every subject's desire is the desire of the Other, the girl reader enjoys the recognition of the Other in any form including fiction. At the heart of all desire, is the desire to be recognised and wanted by an Other. The capitalisation of Other signifies the alterity of the Other we want to attract. This Other can refer to the unconscious, the opposite sex, language and society. In the case of the Other as society, the subject seeks recognition from the sectors of society with which she identifies herself. Hence, the girl reader might seek patriarchal or feminist approval, and her identifications will accord with this desire. In the Symbolic, she can enjoy identifying with a character who meets the approval of the social Other whose recognition the girl requires.

Furthermore, the girl enjoys mastery of the text in the Symbolic. She achieves mastery through solving the crime, understanding the meaning, appreciating the poetry or revealing the ideological urge. She may perform an admirable reader response, or reproduce a narrative or poetic piece of her own. In other words, the girl can comprehend the text through any of the analytic frameworks provided to her. Despite the ongoing insistence on a masterful reader who is removed from the feminine and popular, the girl reader does penetrate texts. It is her ability with language that informs contemporary anxieties about the non-reading boy. His sister surpasses him as master of the text. Her authority as a maker of meaning is pleasurable not only because she excels, but also for the sheer pleasure of making sense from language. In Lacanian terms, she can also take a particular pleasure in meaningless language: the senseless flow of sounds linked to maternal murmurings which produce *jouis-sens*. The texts I examine in this thesis are narratives that strive to signify, so they rarely offer the opportunity for *jouis-sens*. Nonetheless, the

reading girl must not be considered as excluded from this form of *jouissance*. Arguably, the nonsense lyrics of some pop songs and the prolific word play in rap music could bear traces of the infant's immersion in sound without meaning or signifiers with no signifieds. Of course, *jouis-sens* emanates from the Real rather than the Symbolic. As such, nonsensical language games and poetic language flows that produce *jouis-sens* are excessive in that they resist the rigid determining effects of societal discourses.

Reading provides two distinct, but concomitant, occasions for transgression. First, the alterity of the text offers multiple opportunities for identification. Through identifying with characters who master their fictional environments, the girl reader may acquire knowledge, break taboos and successfully act even if only in fantasy. She re-experiences the moment in the mirror phase when she celebrates her apparent cohesion and mastery: a moment of triumph and pleasure. She can access those peculiar states that are identified as masculine: activity, knowledge and mastery (a condition that announces its gender). Indeed, she may well identify with masculine characters, and toy with the conditions of masculinity. Second, by immersing herself in the Imaginary through reading, the reader might also feel the tug of that moment in the mirror phase of unconscious realisation of the chaos and incoherence that she has been and fear her dissolution. Because it is a realm of play, reading allows the girl to flirt with that which is foreclosed in the mirror stage, and by the requisites of social being: the Real that is beyond language. In reading too, the reader's absorption in the textual other might signal a loss of coherence: the frightening, nostalgic, exciting, and necessarily transgressive pull of the Real. The reading girl not only enters the realm of the Imaginary where she identifies herself with others and pursues her desire, she may encounter traces of the radical incoherence of the suicidal - the 'self' outside language.

Chapter Four

Reading to the Rescue: Young Adult Fiction

Young adult fiction suffers from the same identity crisis that plagues many of its protagonists. No one seems to be able to agree about what it is or what it should do. Finally accepted by the American Librarians Association in the 1970s as the preferred label for books aimed at an adolescent reader, the category 'young adult fiction' was gradually adopted throughout the English speaking world replacing other terms such as 'juvenile' and 'adolescent' fiction (Wheatley). As a category invented to direct the reader towards a particular section of the library, the term was equally attractive to the publishing industry who could use it to target a specific market. The publishing industry has been the most obvious economic beneficiary from this categorisation, but the classification 'young adult fiction' also mobilises the discourses of gendered adolescence. The constitution of a category called young adult fiction has provided a site where the discourse of adolescence can operate to produce heteronormative subjects. Furthermore, the discourse of femininity is imbricated in debates about the texts in this category and their readers. Indeed, the category young adult fiction generates constant disputation about its literary, psychological, pedagogical and moral value. As Roberta Seelinger Trites suggests, young adult fiction is positioned as a paternal metaphor re-enacting the Oedipal moment of entry into the Other of language, law and culture for the girl reader, but this position denies the already established direction of her desires. The textual father and his laws may not always be able to control the desire of his devious daughter.

The difficulty of agreeing on a definition for young adult fiction parallels the difficulty of defining the adolescent. Obviously, age is the crucial definitional marker in both cases, as both are marked by western beliefs in a maturational model of human development. Consequently, the text and the reader occupy the same frictional status that is neither child nor adult. Not unsurprisingly, the emergence of young adult fiction as a category and marketing tool coincides with the emergence of the teenager. Of course, this date is impossible to establish with precise historical

and geographic accuracy. To further confuse the issue, texts now considered to be the first publications to fit in the young adult fiction category predate and establish the conditions for its formation. As argued previously, adolescence as a life stage is shaped during the nineteenth century and becomes fully established as a discourse by the twentieth century. Similarly, it is sometimes suggested that the first novels to address the adolescent subject were nineteenth century texts such as *Little Women* and *Treasure Island*. Although such novels are generally accepted as so called 'coming of age' novels, some commentators dispute their status as young adult fiction because they do not focus on adolescent identity crises and related conflicts with parents and other authority figures (Nimon and Foster). In other words, they are not tales of *sturm and drange*. Other originating texts mentioned include the adventure and career series of the 30s and 40s featuring young adult protagonists, or the 1942 publication for an adult market of Maureen Daly's *Seventeenth Summer* due to its use of a first person point of view of a seventeen year old girl (Cart). Another argument nominates 1967 as the key date due to the 'new realism' that was to become a primary feature of ensuing young adult fictions and first became apparent in novels such as S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (Nimon and Foster). This selection of dates and texts taken from the ongoing debate is intriguing since it indicates not only the degree to which this category parallels fluctuations in the discourse of adolescence but also the gendering of texts. At the outset, adventure stories were for boys and domestic fiction for girls. As middle class women entered the workforce in increasing numbers during the twentieth century, particularly in the years between school and marriage, career series for girls became a feature of the young adult market. Finally, the early 'realist' or issue based novels focussed on the 'problems' of sex and romance for the girl and delinquency and drugs for boys. Arguably less obviously and proscriptively, this gendered divide continues to be inscribed in young adult fiction.

Just as identifying the specific point of emergence of the young adult fiction as a recognisable category is not possible, neither is the constitution of this category and its readership easily distinguished. Different commentators indicate varied aspects of books published within the category as significant shared features. These include restricting the point of view to the central adolescent character, adhering to realism, focussing on issues relevant to the adolescent reader, portraying conflict between the adolescent protagonist and authority figures, maintaining a straightforward

narrative and using language familiar to the adolescent reader as long as this precludes gratuitous swearing. The American Library Association refers to young adult literature as a genre, but this nomination is also disputed on the grounds that the texts are classified according to readership rather than conventions. Other terms such as 'problem novel' or 'issues novel' derive from the supposed focus of young adult fictions. Similarly, the 'coming of age' novel is frequently applied to relate the age of the reader to that of the main protagonist. Despite the certainty of many commentators about the state of adolescence and the needs of its constituents, the stipulated form and content of young adult fiction participate in the social production of the adolescent as suffering from an identity crisis that is problematic and must be resolved through growth and maturity.

Clearly, novels promoted to and read by young adults did not always receive a young adult fiction classification, nor do young adults read only novels within the category. More of the uncertainties expressed about the age of readers are apparent through another designation: the 'crossover novel'. The 'crossover novel' is a term applied to detail one of the functions of young adult fiction as providing a conduit from children's books to adult novels: "The crossover novel requires more serious concentration from young readers and helps move them from the pleasures of light reading to the pleasures of literary reading" (Hunt). This notion of adolescent readers requiring a bridge to adult novels again points to the developmental model underpinning the category. This model promotes the ideal adolescent reader as progressing from young adult fiction to crossover fiction before entering the world of adult fiction. Ideally, according to Hunt, the reader completes her adolescence with an appreciation of "literary" fiction reinforcing the aesthetic versus popular divide and linking the former to the model adult subject. Moreover, the hierarchical ranking of material aimed at adolescent readers supports the claims of author, Melvin Burgess, that young adult fiction is not read by older adolescents, but by younger readers:

any book addressing the more adult areas of teenage life was labeled as a teenage book yet marketed at 11-year-olds. Complaints were thus neatly by-passed, and since 11-year-olds were flattered to think they were reading above their age - they weren't - the teenage labeling worked as a marketing ploy as well as placating the moral right (2007).

As Burgess points out, adolescent readers access the texts they desire regardless of labeling. When critic, Maureen Nimon, called for commentators to delineate their appeal for more 'hopeful' writing following a number of articles criticizing authors of pessimistic fiction aimed at young adults, a sixteen year old responded in a letter to the editor. In his response, Robin Dixon points out,

Those of us who really want to read have usually moved on to literature or fiction written for adults by the time we fall into the age group that adolescent literature is aimed at (47).

Again, adolescents may not follow our directions. Reading can be relatively private and whilst parents, teachers and librarians can direct the reader to certain texts, the reader can also access adult texts. Indeed, the only book I have ever stolen was *My Secret Life: The Sex Diaries of a Victorian Gentleman* by Walter. My friend and I were fourteen, and we thought we would not be allowed to buy the book. I have no idea how we identified the book in the first place, but we knew that it would contain salacious details to satisfy our bodies and our minds. Not only can the girl reader access texts, but also a lack of direct surveillance of the reader enables her to secrete away any text that might be censored. However, she need not indulge in theft and pornography to pursue her desire. Even when she is reading novels categorized as young adult fiction she may be incited to skew the meaning of the textual father.

Uncertainty about the age of the young reader permeates the publishing arena. The inconsistency of both the category and the practices of publishers is apparent in the differing classification in US, UK and Australia of Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Sonya Hartnett's *Of a Boy* and Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* amongst others. In the end, the only claims that can be made with confidence about young adult fiction is that the term operates as a marketing and library classification. However, this ignores the moral dimensions of the category that cause the greatest anxiety amongst commentators and establish the text as an alternative guardian of the reader's well-being. Given the girl's propensity to read beyond her limits, I will be considering novels aimed at the adult and adolescent market in the following two chapters, but first I want to consider the reading site for adolescents where the Other looms over her shoulder: young adult fiction.

A further obfuscation employed in the young adult fiction category concerns its complicity in the ongoing gendering of reading. The logic informing the claim that adolescent readers require an adolescent point of view is based on the assumption that they will identify with characters whose subject position is similar to their own. Extending this logic, the central character must be of the same gender as the reader. Feminist interventions in this arena risk reinforcing such a perspective through critiques of the text that judge representations of girls in terms of their feminist characteristics (Trites; Gilbert & Taylor). This insistence on feminist characters can work to restrict representational possibilities, and to exclude characteristics that are widely associated with the feminine. Consequently, some young adult fiction reverses the masculine/feminine binary by reinscribing women within the hard and rigorous masculine rather than disrupting the binary by introducing the personal, mushy and messy into the masculine fictional worlds. Innumerable sites insinuate gender into the reading mix: book covers show images of a boy or girl, a warrior or a princess; on-line book stores have search engines that respond with different lists to 'young adult boy' as opposed to 'young adult girl'; concerns are expressed about reluctantly reading boys being surpassed by their clever reading sisters, and so on. Despite this insistence, girls do not necessarily comply with the gendering of reading. Within my family books were promoted according to enjoyment as the chief criteria rather than gender appropriateness. As a girl, my mother read against gender prescriptions preferring W.E. Johns' *Biggles* series and the novels of Rider Haggard to romance and love stories, despite loving Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*. Similarly, I read all the James Bond spy series and Paul Brickhill's *The Great Escape* at around 14 when I also read the entire Georgette Heyer series of Regency Romances and the ubiquitous *Rebecca*. Despite popular assumptions, the reading girl can easily evade gendered prescriptions, but she will still be pursued by the textual Father's law.

The operation of the text as paternal metaphor ensuring the submission of the reader to cultural normativity depends on an assumption that she will identify unproblematically with the main character and assume her resolution as a proper subject or avoid her demise as a failed subject. The frequent use of first person narratives and a stylistic preference for realism are considered to be the primary mechanisms for securing such an identification where the reader recognises herself through the description of familiar settings, characters and emotions. Indeed,

realism is frequently asserted as a defining feature of young adult fiction although this realism is asserted rather than defined. For instance, Michael Cart claims,

it is inarguable that *something* was happening to young adult literature in the late sixties, if it was not a full blown eruption of realism, it was, at least a transition from a literature that had traditionally offered a head-in-the-sand approach to one that offered a more clear-eyed and less flinching look at the often unpleasant realities of adolescent America (62)

Having associated this change with realism (if not full blown), Cart proceeds to characterise the new novels as prepared to “break the taboos with candor [sic] of voice” (63). After nominating a few such novels and the taboo subjects they address, Cart then rejects the problem novel as a diminution of the realist novel despite having also provided a single issue for each of the preferred realist novels on his list. The extent to which a realist text is assumed to address problems underpins much of the commentary on the content and function of young adult fiction.

For John Marsden, the author of *Letters from the Inside* and many other books for young adult readers, “Realist fiction is fiction that tells the truth . . . and does so in an authentic way” (More Power 107). There is no doubt in Marsden’s mind that “Books reflect the world as it is” (108). Along with many other commentators on young adult fiction, Marsden clings to a largely discredited view that fiction can straightforwardly represent a reality that is concrete and directly apprehensible. In this view, authenticity and truth are privileged over other traditional markers of realism such as the detailed description of a particular social world associated with classic realist fiction. Furthermore, such assertions about young adult fiction relegate the field to a somewhat old fashioned acceptance that language is stable and transparent with a direct relation between signifiers and signifieds. There is no room for slippages or excesses in the language of young adult fiction. Furthermore, observations about mimesis in young adult fiction seem to be located not just in language use, but particularly in the use of profane language. There is an insistence on characters in young adult fiction speaking in voices that Marsden calls genuine and Cart associates with candour. Genuine language for young adults is apparently associated with slang, swearing and simplicity according to Marsden’s explanation.

Marsden maintains "another characteristic of good realist fiction is credibility" (More Power 108). He supports this claim by opposing the insistence of some commentators that fiction for adolescents should present narratives with hopeful resolutions as if hopelessness was a guarantor of credibility. Of course, I agree with Marsden that the material lives of adolescents are as varied as those of adults, and there is no need to protect adolescent readers from narratives marked by poverty, violence, sexuality, unhappiness and discrimination. This part of his argument is consistent with my own, but his promotion of fiction that purports to realistically reflect adolescent worlds as inherently hopeless and painful fails either to account for the popularity of all genres and writing styles within young adult fiction, or to recognise that not all adolescent lives comprise of misery and hopelessness on the one hand or ignorance and repression on the other. Thus, Marsden positions himself as a myth-buster whose stated aim is to introduce the adolescent reader to 'reality', and to liberate her from the ignorance imposed on her by protective adults.

In this desire to expose the reader to 'reality', Marsden is expecting the text to perform the paternal function. Just as the infant is subjected to the Law of the Father when she is forced to recognise that her primary love object desires someone or something other than herself, so Marsden wants to propel his adolescent reader out of her cosy and deluded innocence. In this sense, Marsden intends his fictions to perform precisely the function allotted to young adult fiction by critics and commentators such as Trites and Coats. Like them, he assumes that the text will penetrate and discipline the reader, subjecting her irrevocably to the law of social reality, yet he does not account or allow for the desire that moves her reading. Nonetheless, some of Marsden's work was amongst a series of young adult fiction labelled 'grunge' fiction by the press when it was published in the 1990s. The label associated the texts with a popular music subculture recognised for its dirty guitar sounds and opposition to commercialisation. The moral panic it instigated was based on a view of the music as representative of a nihilistic, cynical and apathetic generation. Marsden's novel, *Letters from the Inside*, was amongst these so-called 'grunge' novels. The novel focuses on two adolescent girls and the effects of violence in their lives. Presumably, the reality offered to the reader of *Letters from the Inside* suggests the supposedly everpresent threat of violence in female adolescent lives.

The story is told through the correspondence of two fifteen year old girls, Tracey and Mandy. The novel begins with the first letter in a series written by Mandy who responds to a request for penfriends placed by Tracey in a magazine. At first, their lives seem to typify normative Australian middle-class girlhood. They live at home with parents and a brother and sister apiece, love their pets and popular music, gossip with friends about boys and complain about school. From the outset, Mandy hints at a difficult relationship with her older brother, Steve, but Tracey's early letters describe an idyllic family and social life. Gradually, Mandy detects discrepancies in Tracey's claims about her life. Mandy's fear of her abusive older brother is slowly revealed throughout the period of correspondence, but Tracey hides details about her own life behind a fabrication until she is confronted. About midway through the letter writing period, Mandy demands the truth from Tracey in a series of letters that are initially ignored or dismissed. In response to Mandy's persistence, eventually Tracey admits that she is serving a long sentence in a maximum security institution for girls for a crime she refuses to name because, "that'll be the end of any friendship, for a good reason—you won't want to have anything to do with me" (64). Just before their correspondence ends abruptly, Tracey does confide in Mandy about her upbringing. Her violent father is serving a sentence for murdering her mother as a consequence of which she was separated from her brother and sent to live with her Nanna. After the death of her Nanna, Tracey runs away from authorities with an older boyfriend. For most of the narrative, the correspondence seems to operate to reform and rehabilitate Tracey, but the novel ends with Tracey's letters to Mandy returned to sender and Tracey's emotional breakdown. The reader gathers that Mandy's brother has massacred the family through references in Mandy's letter to his increasing alienation and fascination with guns, and Tracey's Christmas Day dream of "knives and bullets and blood, and shapes in the dark" (138).

The identificatory position of the reading girl appears obvious in *Letters from the Inside* with its two female protagonists as the only characters. She is presented with the opportunity to form an Imaginary identification with one or the other, or both, in the familiar good girl/bad girl dichotomy that structures so many modern narratives (Griffin, *Good Girls*). Amongst innumerable others, this opposition can be seen in the twinned characters of Cinderella and her step-sisters, Catherine Morland and Isabella Adams in *Northanger Abbey*, the first and second Mrs De Winters in

Rebecca, and all the heroines and villainesses of Mills and Boons and similar series romances. In all cases, the female reader is confronted with the bifurcated representation of the Woman for Good or Evil. As adolescent trainee women, Mandy and Tracey are not rigidly attached to their allotted positions, and Tracey can be redeemed through her relationship with the good Mandy. Entrenched in the discourse of maturation, Tracey's development has deviated from the norm, and she has lost all her primary attachments to family through death and violence. Mandy's friendship is portrayed as therapeutic in enabling Tracey to make different choices and reform herself as a potentially good woman. In this, the novel supports the popular perception of the dual causes of deviance being upbringing and individual choice.

Symbolically, the girl reads a conservative call to domestic womanhood through the careful choice of husbands. In this narrative, male violence is pervasive. Since Tracey and Mandy discuss dating and boys, their futures are predicated in identifying a boy who will become a loving non-violent husband. Furthermore, Mandy's vulnerability to her brother and his disaffection are represented as effects of parents who are absent due to career. Although the mother is not held directly responsible for this situation, the narrative strongly advocates for a parent to take up the domestic, maternal position. Indeed, Mandy's role in Tracey's life increasingly resembles the traditional maternal function of affirmation: the yes of the pre-oedipal mother. Vulnerable young women can only be defended by other women as manifested in terms of the loving care Tracey received from her Grandmother, the acceptance and encouragement offered to her by Mandy, and Mandy's reliance on her older sister to protect her from their brother. In this text, to be a woman is to be vulnerable; to be an evil woman is to be an aggressive woman; and to be a good woman is to be domestic and loving.

The twinned girls may present a powerful mechanism for calling forth an Imaginary identification since the doubling of the characters is evocative of the doubling of the jubilant mirror infant and her Ideal-I (*Ecrits* 3). The misrecognised self in the mirror is an idealised self. The subject attempts to fulfil the impossible promise of this ideal self, and judges herself accordingly. After the infant enters the Symbolic, she looks at the Other to identify ego ideals or representatives of her ideals against whom she can evaluate her own performance. Thus, Tracey and Mandy can function as ego

ideals for each other and for the reader. Although Tracey and Mandy may be positioned differently in relation to the law, their age and desires are matched, and the reader is assumed to be similar in terms of age and culture. It becomes apparent that the affinities between the two protagonists extend beyond the generational as they exchange information, opinions and experiences. Their social interests are established in the early letters where they chat about school, music and boys again limiting the adolescent girl's world to a relatively trivial preparation for womanhood. It is violence that disrupts such an apparently innocent and idyllic girlhood and inculcates the girls into the corrupt adult world. Even though the life Tracey invents at the start of the novel is a fantasy, this fantasy upholds the ideal of the nuclear family. Mandy and Tracey both yearn for normality. In relation to her avoidance of any discussion about Mandy's aggressive brother, Tracey recognises the experience and fear of male violence, "I've met a few Steves in my time. I think Raz was a bit of a Steve – maybe that's another reason I don't want to hear too much about your brother" (94). Despite their differences, these two girls are remarkably similar and their reader can find herself within this semblance.

Generally, it is assumed that the girl reader might be tempted by the bad girl's lack of decorum, but will be disciplined into identifying with the good girl through the exposure of the bad girl as lacking and the rewarding of the good girl. As such, the young woman attains the socially acceptable form of the feminine as passive and contained. However, in the case of Tracey and Mandy, the girl reader might be more attracted to Tracey's belligerence and aggression than to Mandy's compliance. Mandy is unable to resist her brother's hostility and depends on her older sister for protection whereas Tracey fights, "I thought the only way to survive would be to be the biggest meanest mother of them all" (96). For the girl reader seeking an Imaginary identification, it may be pleasurable to imagine the performance of anger and rebellion in terms that are usually coded masculine. Through such an identification, the girl reader can imagine transgressing the strictures of femininity. Taking an aberrant position is available to the girl reader through identification with Tracey with the added attraction that Tracey's crimes are not defined, so that the reader can control the extent of her imagined violence. Tracey can be placed in the stereotypic position of a hapless girlfriend caught up in her boyfriend's violence, or in the transgressive position of an equal participant. Since the reader does not know

who the crime is committed against, she does not have to sympathetically identify with the victim of this crime.

Predictably, Tracey's crime is punished by incarceration, and Mandy's life of school, friends, parties and boys is presented as preferable. As in most normative fiction, to desire violence is to be inescapably bound by violence whereas to pursue normative desires is to be free to take them appropriately further. In contrast to Tracey, identification with the character of Mandy seems to accomplish the work of the paternal function in presenting a heteronormative pattern of young femininity in which the girl's desires are pursued within the confines of the law. If the narrative concluded with the rehabilitation of Tracey through her correspondence with Mandy then it might accomplish the disciplinary task allotted to it by Marsden: it might demonstrate that violence is sometimes a part of 'reality', but that violence will mutilate the life of the perpetrator as much as that of the victim. In this text, however, the lives of all women are maimed or ended because of male violence. Tracey's mother is murdered by her father, Tracey's sanity is destroyed by her own complicity in Raz's violence, and Mandy is murdered by her brother as are her entire family. Apparently, 'reality' is fatal to women. This view accords with patriarchal discourse that circumscribes the public movements of women as a protective measure—but in *Letters from the Inside* the family is as dangerous as the street or prison. The only narrative clue explaining Steve's aggression and alienation refers to the long working hours of both parents who have middle class professional careers. Given that they are represented as loving parents, references to the diminution of family life in favour of career seems to reinforce the discourse of the family as a unit based on a working male and home based female. The only other available reading of Steve's anger presents violence as a force that disrupts and destroys a perfectly normal family. Given that this violence is signified through Tracey's dream, the implied savagery emerges from the unconscious suggesting a rage at the heart of the subject which must be repressed to maintain civility. Moreover, the domestic feminine is the most effective prophylactic against this condition.

What then attracts the young female reader? There is no doubt that she is attracted to *Letters from the Inside* as Marsden continues to be one of Australia's best selling authors, and this book is no less popular than his others. Online book reviews and discussions about the novel indicate a large female readership and intense interest

in the putative fates of its twinned heroines. For instance 'Eskimokisses' submits this comment to an on-line forum:

Most people in my class went with idea that Steve killed Mandy, and even though I think this is the most likely scenario, my final chapter revealed [sic] that Mandy was a schizophrenic patient in a hospital who had been writing letters to and from herself. Like [sic], when she was Mandy, she was writing about her old life and since she got admitted to hospital she has thought of herself as Tracey in a prison and at the end when Mandy stops writing it signals that she is forgetting about her old life (Eskimokisses).

By merging the two characters into one, 'Eskimokisses' recognises the dynamic opposing and uniting the girls as participating in a singular discourse of femininity.

Another feature of the on-line discussions and reviews is the degree to which comments indicate the reader's involvement with both Tracey and Mandy.

Reviewing the novel on the Amazon site, 'Christie' declares:

I felt every bit of threat that these two girls must have felt if it were true. I believe that any girl that loves a book with real life situations teenagers go through everyday will enjoy this book until the very end. (Christie)

'Christie' reinforces Marsden's claims that his fiction is based in 'real life' despite the contrived and unlikely events that form the narrative. Unsurprisingly, many adolescent readers seem to uphold the dominant discourse of adolescence as marked by violence and danger, and they are attracted to texts that comply with this perspective. In the debate about 'grunge' fiction, some commentators subscribed to the view that narratives marked by female casualties are attractive to the adolescent readers because their adolescent status renders them vulnerable to hopelessness and despair (Legge). I certainly do not dispute the attraction of narratives of hopelessness and despair based on the annihilation of young female protagonists. In fact, much of my argument goes to proving the veracity of this statement. Rather, I suggest that there are certain pleasures associated with Imaginary visits to sites of aggression, transgression and disintegration. Rather than despairing at another's despair, the girl reader can enjoy herself.

The Lacanian subject is at core ambivalent. She is constituted as an apparently stable identity in her first recognition of herself as whole and consistent in the mirror moment, but this moment also establishes a concomitant aggressivity as a defence against the realisation that, unlike the triumphal mirror other, she is

fragmented and incoherent, "Aggressivity in experience is given to us as intended aggression and as an image of corporeal dislocation, and it is in such forms that it shows itself to be efficient" (*Ecrits* 10). As such, we require our aggressivity as a necessary structural component of the primitive ego. Ultimately, our aggressivity is sublimated when the paternal function institutes distance from the primary maternal object, and the subject is secured in the social world becoming "a signifier for another signifier" (*Ecrits* 149). Social interactions require us to identify, and hence cooperate, with our neighbours. Mostly, we do cooperate to the extent that we engage in civil interactions, but sometimes situations activate our primitive aggressivity. In *Letters from the Inside*, the girl reader is provided with an opportunity to observe the imagined effects of aggressivity in the prison where its excesses are contained, in the family where it is retroactively constituted, and between siblings where it is first observed. Mandy's inability to control her relationship with her brother might be familiar to the reader, and it might also be irritating. After all, Mandy cannot defend herself and is annihilated. Similarly, Tracey's seemingly therapeutic friendship with Mandy renders her incoherent. Both female protagonists are returned to the fragmented Real state that the subject fears. With Tracey's dream of death and her psychic detachment from the Symbolic, the girl reader can shudder at the threat of the Real confusion that underpins the seemingly organised subject. Consequently, the girl reader is just as likely to recognise the necessity of justifiable aggression as a defence of the self as she is to become hopeless and despairingly incoherent. Pleasure might be taken in her desire to stand up for Tracey and Mandy, and by implication, herself.

Surprisingly, Marsden's claims for *Letters from the Inside* can be sustained, though not in the sense he intended. If he aims to represent reality, he achieves his goal by reinscribing the dominant discourse of adolescence and femininity. Although the plot is contrived and the events are far fetched, the text promotes the network of Symbolic signifiers that reproduce the adolescent as volatile and the feminine as caregiver. In this sense, the text tells the truth about the reproduction of femininity through the operations of the western nuclear family. If Mandy's mother had stayed home to supervise her teenage children, if Tracey's father had not murdered her mother, if Tracey's loving Grandmother had not died, if Mandy had been able to complete her role as loving sister—there would be no story. If the volatile adolescent girl does not learn to sublimate her desires and direct her energy

towards womanly nurturing pursuits, then death and disintegration ensue. However, Marsden does not share my understanding of reality as a network of signifiers that mask the Real lack of meaning at the core of the Other of law and society. His understanding of truth and reality depends on the equivalence of signifier and signified, and the capacity of language to convey the meaning of the speaker or writer straightforwardly and transparently. As such, he positions himself as a purveyor of the truth of patriarchal law in the guise of wise, compassionate guide, and the texts he produces further this mission.

However, the girl is not reading Marsden; she is reading *Letters from the Inside*. She may take pleasure in being the master's dutiful daughter, and recognise the dangers of adolescence, masculine violence and aggressive femininity. The Other of the text might recognise and refine her efforts to masquerade as a nurturing Woman in training, and this recognition is her reward. In contrast, she can enjoy the Imagined pleasures of aggression and violence; she can be recognised by the Other of the text as adolescent and violent. Although these readings contrast, they are not mutually exclusive. Just as the discourse of female adolescence attempts to contain the girl, its by-product is the girl who exceeds her limits. The twinned characters of Tracey and Mandy invite the girl reader to identify with the good girl and the bad girl. In the Imaginary realm of identifications, the girl reader can enjoy being the nurturer and the aggressor. Actually, the determination of the law to reproduce her as maternal and domestic depends upon her desire to be the desire of the Other who pretends to have the phallus. Consequently, she must masquerade as the phallus requiring her to submit to alienation in language, and to respond to another as a site of mixed feelings since the desire to be absorbed in another is only as strong as the desire to reject the other in order to move on to the next object. The ideal object of one day may be the despised discard of the next. In the search for an Imaginary ideal, the other as friend or lover arouses the urge to aggressively defend the self against this same other's alien invasion. These emotions are as twinned within subjects as they are in the characters of Tracey and Mandy. Thus, the reading pleasures of the Symbolic and the Imaginary can coexist for the girl reader of *Letters from the Inside*.

The inscription of the Real in the text offers the girl a further pleasure. Although the death of Mandy and the madness of Tracey are intended as cautionary notes in

Symbolic terms, death and madness also figure as Real because they reach beyond the limits of language and reason. In both states, the coherent speaking subject disintegrates. The horror that the girl might feel on reading such a fate acts not only as regulator, but also as a provocation. She is stirred into looking at the edge of the precipice where language, identity, psychic and bodily coherence collapse. Despite the alarm of commentators who argue that *Letters from the Inside* will produce or enhance nihilism, the view from the edge of the precipice is insufficient cause for the girl to jump. Indeed, *Letters from the Inside* holds the Real at bay leaving acts of sex and violence to be imagined by the reader. Although the boy chat addresses the pressure placed on girls by boys to engage in sexual activities, Tracey and Mandy never speak of their sexual desire. As for the violence, the girl reader can control the extent of blood and dismemberment within limits that she is willing to entertain. Even though *Letters from the Inside* is popular fiction without any particular aesthetic value, the text remains firmly based in the Symbolic Other of social discourses and laws. The girl reader is directed to heteronormative womanliness by the fatherly text, but she can read against the gentle, vulnerable woman in favour of the unruly woman who can resist.

The problem shaping the narrative in Melvin Burgess's *Junk* is not violence but addiction. A British young adult fiction novel published in 1996, *Junk* won the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize and the Carnegie Medal in 1997. Its claims to authenticity preface the novel in an author's note stating,

All major events have happened, are happening and will no doubt continue to happen . . . As for the people here . . . some are pure invention, some are seeded from real people and then fictionalised, so are fictitious with bits of real people stirred in . . . The book isn't fact: it isn't even faction. But it's all true every word.

It is noteworthy that truth claims frequently preface novels enjoyed by, and marketed to, adolescent readers. Such claims are made in the endlessly popular *Go Ask Alice* (1971) marketed as the anonymous diary of a teenage addict serendipitously found and edited by Beatrice Sparks who has gone on to publish other so-called diaries of vulnerable adolescents. Both *Junk* and *Go Ask Alice* chart the familiar story of the adolescent's descent into addiction, prostitution and death. This story is familiar because it is told again and again. Many of the versions are based on the lives of rock n' roll celebrities including autobiographical survivor

stories such as *Scar* by Anthony Keidis. Appealing to embodied and reified subjects authenticates the text in both its cautionary and provocative fascination. In its narrative structure, *Junk* is a repetition of many other thrilling stories of drug dependent depravity. Despite Burgess's avowed intent to show the pleasurable as well as the deleterious effects of drugs, the text privileges the degradation and depravity associated with heroin use in the familiar narrative of corrupted innocence.

Declarations of accuracy based on experience seem to anchor adolescent fictions to features frequently identified as markers of the category: realism and contemporaneity. According to Stephen Thomson, the preface to *Junk* functions as "the guarantee that the text will speak to the youth of today" by proclaiming the author's credentials as a participant observer of teenage subculture (23). Thomson identifies the sleight of hand involved in marketing the book through signifiers connoting the rave culture of the nineties such as the use of psychedelic colours and the words "rave", "love" and "party" on the cover even though the narrative is set in the punk culture of the eighties. Rather than undermine the veracity of the text, this ambiguity works to endorse its assertion of truthfulness through signalling both the author's and the readers' notions of authentic youth cultures. As Thomson recognises, cultural narratives of adolescence are obliged to devastate any remnant of childlike innocence and pleasure. Protagonists and readers must learn about the limits of personal freedom in order to enter adulthood. Once again, young adult fiction seems to perform the paternal function of anchoring the adolescent reader safely within Symbolic prohibitions and pleasures that protect her from excessive *jouissance*.

In *Junk*, the story is told from the perspectives of ten different characters who narrate discrete chapters. Principal amongst these are the main protagonists, Gemma and Tar. This dual focus plots their trajectories from the parental homes they run away from at fourteen years of age, through their lives as addicts and concludes with their prospects as viable citizens obedient to the Symbolic Other of regulation. The other narrative voices are supplied by central and peripheral characters who participate in Gemma and Tar's lives. For most of the narrative, Gemma and Tar share a squat with another young couple, Lily and Rob, who provide a peer perspective. Consequently, their lives are placed in a social context.

In the sense of providing shifting viewpoints, *Junk* extends the first person narrative that is typical of young adult fiction offering a more complex view of the social dynamics surrounding adolescence. The multi voiced structure of the narrative incorporates the perspectives of peers, parents and quasi parents and acquaintances all of whom misrecognise both themselves and others. As David Rudd points out, "this ineluctable relativism" denies any singular truth and complicates judgements about wrong and right (121). However, he also recognises stylistic limitations constraining the effects of this polyphonic device in that the characters are not sufficiently differentiated from each other in terms of voice. Although *Junk* is similar in structure and content to a novel recommended to adolescent readers by Marsden and Burgess, Irvine Walsh's *Trainspotting*, it fails to establish such distinct characters and locale. Locale in *Trainspotting* is geographical and historical providing a context that positions the narrative as a critique of the neo conservative policies of British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. Despite inhabiting the same historical period, the characters in *Junk* do not comment on their socio economic context. No allusions are made to the political significance of squatting and gluing the locks of banks as anti capitalist acts, and anarchy is enacted as fashion rather than resistance. The effects of this elision diminish the "brutal honesty" associated with the novel privileging the familiar loss of innocence narrative instead (Rudd 121).

Ultimately, this predictable narrative does not offer a wide field of Symbolic play as it confines adolescent rebellion to its usual causes. Granted, these causes differ between characters but all are familiar both from other fictional sources and from media commentary about drug use. Tar is the victim of his parents' alcoholism and resulting physical and emotional violence, and Lily has been in care where "They did things to me you can't even talk about" (131). As the son of a stereotypical hippy mother, Rob has been smoking pot and stealing since the age of eight whereas Gemma rebels against her loving but controlling parents. Each of the characters represents a strand of a contemporary discourse about drug usage: it can be the consequence of parental addiction, parental abandonment, lack of discipline or *sturm and drange* depending on the character in question. In this way, the text is stripped of its historical specificity and the underlying myths of adolescence supply its structure. Heroin functions as a device that will expose the hazards presented to the adolescent who must eschew the childish pursuit of pleasure in favour of an

adult recognition of limits. These hazards are magnified by parental failure to instil the child with a proper balance of adventure and caution. By the end of the novel, Lily and Rob are still in rehabilitation, and Tar has a methadone script but “slips” occasionally. The only character who lives a heroin free life is Gemma who is back in the small town she ran away from with a baby and the support of her parents.

The juxtaposition of Gemma and Tar differentiates their characters in terms of gender despite their shared adventures and addiction. Gemma’s passage from girlhood to womanhood parallels her movement from rebellion to regulation and irresponsibility to maternity. In contrast, Tar is always an outsider, and his attempts to enter and maintain normative social relations are continually thwarted. Boyhood beauty and innocence are sacrificed on entry to a masculinity marked by unreliability and unhappiness (Thomson). Too wounded to take his rightful place as husband and father, Tar is left to drift around the margins of domesticity. Presumably, the claim made in the preface about truth and authenticity demand this outcome for the victimised boy and addicted man, but Tar’s marginal existence is not available to the girl characters, Gemma and Lily. They descend or ascend; they do not circle the periphery. For the female characters, there is no ambiguity. As Thomson notes, Tar’s alcoholic mother represents the tainted sexuality of a woman who has pursued her pleasures, “her fag in her hand and her lipstick smeared off her lips and her dress hanging off her shoulder” (121). Tar’s mother is not properly contained – she exceeds her limits. In *Junk*, femininity occupies a within or without position in relation to social boundaries, and addiction functions as a conduit from rebellion to degeneracy.

In terms of the young women, degraded femininity is represented not by Gemma but by her friend Lily. Again, forms of acceptable and unacceptable femininity are distinguished through paired female characters. As with Tracey in *Letters from the Inside*, Lily’s bad girl disposition is framed both by the extremity of her unregulated behaviour, her inferred neglected and abused status as a child, and her lack of proper parents. When Gemma first sees Lily, she is drawn to Lily’s “daring” appearance,

She had this black net string vest on. That was it. It took a while to sink in. At first glance you saw this vest, it was just clothes. And then suddenly your eyes went POP, right through it and there she was, bare as a baby (100).

To Gemma, Lily's near nakedness signifies the freedom she promotes, but her appearance is a lure that will entrap Gemma. The promise of freedom becomes the experience of slavery. Heroin addiction leads Lily and Gemma to the site popularly associated with absolute ruin for women: prostitution. Gemma works at a massage parlour indicating a relatively clean, safe and socially tolerated environment, but Lily works the streets. Working the streets is shown to be more dangerous and desperate when Lily is almost killed by a customer. For the girls, the discourse of addiction condemns them to abjection leading to death with full recuperation into normative femininity as the only alternative. It is significant that both Gemma and Lily have babies. Despite loving her baby, Lily is unable to resist the allure of heroin. One of the most distressing images in *Junk* involves Lily injecting in a vein in her breast while feeding her baby. In contrast, Gemma's pregnancy motivates her permanent withdrawal. It is also worth noting that Robin Klein's *Came Back To Show You I Could Fly* also features a drug addicted young woman whose pregnancy instigates her withdrawal from drug dependency and reunification with the conservative family she was seeking to escape. It seems that returning the girl to her domestic location as daughter and mother is fundamental to curing the female drug addict.

Junk presents the girl reader with a cautionary tale pointing out the dangers of excessive rebellion. In this case, rebellion leads to debasement through addiction, and the girl reader is warned to heed the regulations of normative femininity or risk her future status as a mother. In *Junk*, mothering is the acme of the feminine Symbolic. The text is replete with mothers and mother figures. Tar's alcoholic mother proves the case that addiction nullifies mothering; Gemma's mother validates the importance of mother love when she finally asserts her superiority to her husband in this feminine mission; and the older squat resident, Vonny, demonstrates that mothering need not be biological through her attempts to lovingly contain Gemma. Containing Gemma means containing her pursuit of *jouissance*, but it is through this pursuit that the reading girl can take pleasure beyond caution. The back cover of the 1996 edition promises, "JUNK = HEROIN = BLISS = DESPAIR = A LOVE AFFAIR YOU'LL NEVER FORGET". An invitation to bliss and an unforgettable love affair are offered alongside the admonitory despair. In Lacanian terms, bliss is *jouissance*—a residue of the Real excitation from which the proto-subject is separated when she submits to the paternal metaphor and enters

the Symbolic as a properly constituted subject. As such, full bodily *jouissance* is not available to the subject who is haunted by the idea of a blissfully complete unison with objects. Nor would the subject want to lose herself in a permanent state of *jouissance* since this state is not purely pleasurable as it exists beyond pleasure and incorporates pain, anxiety and inertia with no admittance to language. The Symbolic Other prohibits access to *jouissance*, but in doing so it also incites transgression by establishing a barrier to bliss. This dynamic of prohibition and incitement is necessary to maintain a limit to subjectivity because of the lethal properties of *jouissance* for the subject. The subject must defend herself from the deadly appeal of unmediated *jouissance*.

The drug addict abandons all else in the repetitive pursuit of *jouissance* (*Plague* Zizek), but the drug cannot maintain the subject in a state of *jouissance* as this state defeats the subject. The narrative of addiction engages the subject in an initial satisfaction or wisp of bodily *jouissance*. The subject then repeats the behaviour in an attempt to sustain this state of full satisfaction, but, paradoxically, satisfaction is stultified by repetition, so the addict requires more heroin to reproduce the initial effect. Hence, addiction is characterised by greed, excess and death – the markers of *jouissance*. In many respects, addiction works as an exemplary tale of the dangers of *jouissance*. The addict is fixated on the next hit which takes precedence over all consideration of self and other preservation. Basically, *Junk* is true in to its title: it tells the tale of addiction from the first blissful moment to full blown symptom. Using a psychoanalytic framework, Rik Loose describes addiction as “a matter of the subject being caught, as minister or slave, between two masters and it is characterized by the choice of the subject for (going ‘lock, stock and barrel’ for) the One (of *jouissance*) rather than the Other (of language)” (136). He develops Lacan’s characterisation of the addicted subject as one who wants pleasure without recourse to the Other. In other words, the addicted subject aims to be self sufficient in accessing pleasure whilst bypassing the Other of language and law—the constituents of desire. In terms of discourse, the adolescent novel and addiction share a narrative. One of the defining features of young adult fiction places the adolescent protagonist in an oppositional relationship with the authoritative Other who is often the parent. The resolution requires the character either to resolve the conflict by identifying with the Symbolic Other in a different form, or to suffer exclusion from the Other through death, madness or banishment. Because the tale

of addiction is so apt for demonstrating the necessity of the subject pursuing desires in the Symbolic in order to maintain sociability, it is exemplary as a narrative standing as the name of the father. *Junk* fulfils the criteria for young adult fiction by presenting its characters with the forced (no) choice underpinning Lacanian subjectivity: your freedom or your life.

But where does this leave the reading girl? For the most part, she will be an obedient daughter and express her horror at the degraded life of the heroin addict. However, Rik Loose translates a remark made by Lacan in 1975: "There is no definition of a drug than this one: it is something that permits the separation from the marriage with the 'little willy'" (qtd Loose 136). As Loose points out, this places the addicted subject in the position of the psychotic. The psychotic structure defines the psychic, social and linguistic position of the subject who forecloses on the name of the father. That is, psychotic and addicted subjects do not recognise the difference of any Other and seek the one of *jouissance*. If the reading girl is anchored in the normal neurotic state of the social subject, she will reject the degradation and danger of heroin addiction. My own aversion to heroin and needles was secured through narratives of addiction such as the 1956 ghost written Billie Holiday autobiography *Lady Sings the Blues* and the ubiquitous *Go Ask Alice*. Hence, I hold attitudes that are normative for my summer of love generation: pot and opium tea as good versus heroin and cocaine as bad. Cigarettes and alcohol hold a strange position as addictive but sociable and normal because they have been acceptable to the Other. Thus, I hold the normative attitudes for my social context, but I cannot claim that this is a matter of reading alone. On the whole, narratives of addiction such as *Junk* merely confirm and reinforce always already dominant discourses. Even if the reading girl has a psychotic structure, *Junk* is unlikely to send her directly to addiction and vice. The psychotic structure may or may not lead the girl to drug addiction, but it will take more than a book to force her choice between her freedom and her life.

So, where is the pleasure for the girl reading about the degraded feminine and the price of freedom? Again, as with *Letters from the Inside*, the girl might recognise and confirm her own morally superior status as non-addicted and unsullied. In this sense, she can imagine her future immaculate conception as a Woman without blemish. Feeling gratified is pleasurable, but is it constant and is it enough?

Although the reading girl might be recognised by the Other as a proper Woman, such certainty cannot be sustained before she is reminded of her lack—the lack she desires to fill. *Junk* offers little chance of filling the gap with phallic *jouissance* because sex is only for sale. Despite the numerous young couples, sexual desire is strangely absent. Indeed the aforementioned description of Lily dancing in her string vest as observed by Gemma constitutes the sexiest moment in the text, yet none of the couplings are same sexed. Again, heterosexuality is not only the usual option; it is the only option and a joyless option. When Gemma decides to bestow Tar with “a present, see. Me. I wasn’t wearing a stitch” (67), the event is somewhat precarious in terms of pleasure with Gemma declaring “Sometimes you’ve got to work harder than you want to” (67). A few short and timid sentences later, the inevitable ellipsis appear. When Lily and Gemma engage in sex work, third party reporting distances the reader, and Gemma is more concerned about describing the relative safety of her working conditions as a parlour worker in contrast to the risks Lily takes on the streets.

The ambiguous Skolly, a local tobacconist, narrates bookend chapters early in the novel and towards the end. In the first chapter, he describes taking Tar around to the anarchists’ squat. His visit prompts a comparison between petty criminal activities and anarchist resistance thus diminishing the high minded rhetoric of the anarchists and introducing a disturbing challenge to the text’s moral centre. Recognising Gemma as the worker who serviced his desires, he contemplates the economic and social rather than the sexual engagement he has enjoyed. Indeed, this novel offers little erotic pleasure to its characters, and the girl reader is unlikely to be stirred by sexual passion and the accompanying phallic *jouissance*.

The perspectives offered in the variously narrated chapters do not represent the Other of language and society as particularly appealing. Tar and Gemma’s early pleasures taken in clothes, music, art and rebellious adventure are not only lost in addiction, but also in adulthood. No one sustains love or enjoyment in this text regardless of whether they become junkies, or attempt an alternative lifestyle like Vonny and Richard. All have to settle for the ordinary: heterosexual relationships marked by domesticity but not passion, and careers that are necessary but dull. To some extent, Skolly is exemplary of the forced choice bleakly framed in this novel as he presents a shadowy constellation of loveless marriage and joyless sex,

compassion and contempt, tolerance and discrimination, citizenship and criminality. By the end of the novel, all of the young characters are as compromised as Skolly by the bleak concessions demanded by the Other. In the face of such a cheerless fate, the girl reader may well agree with Lily when she addresses the reader directly:

Everything is free. That's the secret.

The only thing that isn't free is you. You do as your told: you sit in the seat until they say, 'Stand'. You stay put till they say, 'Go'.

Maybe that's the way you like it. It's easy. It's all there. You don't have to think about it. You don't even have to feel it (131).

For Lily, life in the Other is life as an automaton without feeling or freedom, yet Lily can barely keep herself or anyone else alive. She overdoses and turns blue, she is almost murdered by a client, and she gives up nothing for her baby. Apart from this one chapter, she is outside the language of the novel with her speech reported through others. Nonetheless, it is Lily who provides the thrills. She swings naked and high over the fence; she dances; she is "chirpy as ever" (163). Through Lily, the girl can identify with the urge to be free. Arguably the most damaged of the young characters, she represents desire in the early chapters as she moves through the Symbolic following this and that pleasure. Unfortunately, the text seems to underscore Gemma's perception of her parent's belief in the "Slippery Slope school of thought. They had no doubt at all that unless my life was made as miserable as possible, I'd be a junkie whore by midnight" (54). Nonetheless, the girl reader has also been caught up in the early part of the novel when the young characters approach life with an appetite for all its pleasures: swings, music, altered states, candle light, art, colour and action. Despite the textual father slamming the prison door closed, his daughter's desires might be leaning towards the pleasures of good company, movement and fun. As such, she would continue to rebel against the loveless couplings, suffering maternal, and soulless work to seek out spaces in the Other that limits freedom but engenders life.

Violence against the other rather than the self marks the next young adult fiction text I consider. Blood and fear drench the pages of *Strange Objects* by Gary Crew, the winner of a number of prizes including the 1991 Children's Book Council Book of the Year: Older Readers and the Edgar Allen Poe Mystery Fiction Award. Often considered to be a 'crossover novel', *Strange Objects* does not comply with the

criteria associated with young adult fiction. Importantly, it is not narrated by the central adolescent protagonist, nor do all the multiple voices offer first person perspectives. The novel is composed of entries from two journals fragmented and framed by personal correspondence and documents from official, media and academic sources. Thus, there is no single point of view. Moreover, the different accounts and observations contradict each other and refuse any final authority adding to the text's overall ambiguity. Despite incorporating a historically verifiable event in the wreck of the *Batavia*, and the characters Jan Pelgrom and Wouter Loos, the novel announces its fictional and fantastic status in the H. P. Lovecraft quote introducing the "Messenger Documents":

For there are strange objects in the great abyss,
And the seeker of dreams must take care not to stir up,
Or meet, the wrong ones . . .

The narrative is marked from the outset by uncertainty and mystery about fact and fiction, past and present, and fantasy and reality.

The first document in the novel, entitled "Notes on the Disappearance of Stephen Messenger, aged 16 years by Dr Hope Michaels, Director, Western Australian Institute of Maritime Archaeology", alerts the reader to the mystery of a missing ring and a missing boy. Except for an 'Afterword [sic]' attached by Dr Hope Michaels describing the ongoing investigation and excerpts of the Inquiry into Stephen's disappearance, the reader is informed that the remainder of the text has been assembled and partly authored by the missing boy. The first text in Stephen Messenger's assembly of the story is a newspaper article outlining his discovery of a large iron cooking pot referred to as a "cannibal pot" containing a mummified hand and "a man's leather wallet" (6). The article evokes the familiar fear of Australia's sparsely inhabited outback that informs popular imagination through true and fictional crime stories. The investigating police officer warns:

'The isolation of the area means that backpackers and campers may be placing themselves at risk from visits by undesirables who are attracted to these out-of-the-way places,' he said. 'The wilderness region of the Murchison basin has a history of unexplained disappearances' (6).

The first entry from Stephen Messenger's journal describes his discovery of the pot, hand and wallet on a school camping trip. Lying on the periphery of the group,

Stephen is established as a loner in his account of his classmates telling horror stories of bush murders shortly before he finds the iron pot,

There was a hitch-hiker, a homicidal maniac, who walked the highway at night, waiting for victims. But if anyone stopped to pick him up – maybe a tourist, or even a truckie – then days later that person’s vehicle would be found abandoned and empty. And between the meat ants’ nests, beside the highway, a cop might find bits of clothing, maybe some buttons, or a buckle or a zip, but never a body, not so much as a single bone (7).

Structurally, the first few pages establish the plot and introduce many of recurring elements of Stephen’s narrative such as meat ants and disappearing hitchhikers, but more importantly they signal the crime and horror genres enticing the reader to solve the mystery and feel terror. Thus, the girl reader is engaged rationally as detective and viscerally as victim.

In the next few entries from Stephen’s journal and media sources, the historical context of contact between Aboriginal and white people becomes evident as the age of the artefacts is established, and the Aboriginal elder, Charlie Sunrise, is introduced in the context of the ring. The man’s leather wallet turns out to be a second journal recording the experiences of two of the murderers from the Batavia who are castaway onto the West Australian coast in 1629. The writer, Wooter Loos, and a seventeen year old boy, Jan Pelgrom, took part in the massacre by a small group of young men of one hundred and twenty survivors of the Batavia shipwreck. Although Loos belonged to this group, there was no evidence that he engaged in murder, so he was set adrift with Pelgrom who escaped punishment on the grounds of his youth. Even the context of the historical part of the story is steeped in rape, torture and death. Loos’ (fictional) journal describing first contact with the land and its people told from a white perspective is incorporated into Stephen’s account in the form of serialised newspaper releases. The newspaper account has an introduction by the translator, Professor Hans Freudenberg, who has rendered the journal into familiar contemporary English. Freudenberg uses the introduction to share his opinion of Loos as a humane individual—a view that is disputed in a letter to the Editor from ‘A Sceptic’. Earlier in the Messenger documents are two conflicting psychological profiles of Pelgrom in extracts of books with full reference details as if they can be sourced despite being invented. One author identifies Pelgrom as a psychopath whilst the other sees him as the victim of a charismatic

leader who perpetuates his own psychopathic tendencies through others. All of this unusual collection of documents purports to be factual, yet they are challenged by at least one other perspective. As with his own journal entries, Loos and Pelgroms' story is interspersed with Stephen's journal entries and other documents. Thus, *Strange Objects* offers no single continuous narrative leading the reader to a neat resolution. The narratives adhere through a parallel linking of the disproportionate attachment of Stephen Messenger, in the present, and Jan Pelgrom, in the past, to the ring which they both invest with meaning beyond its object status.

When Stephen finds the ring amongst his possessions, it has already been declared missing and he states, "No matter what happens, I'm going to have to have this. I'm going to keep it until I am ready to give it up." (27). Once he has made this decision, he begins to experience nightmares in which his uncanny dream persona is connected to the ring and to the frightening attraction of a Real encounter. In a dream,

Stephen Messenger looked. He was kneeling in blood. The highway was heavy with it, banking against his ankles, soaking his jeans. Where he reached down, his fingers were webbed, dripping with blood.

Stephen Messenger remembered this, the filth of it, and he remembered also looking up into the white centre of the ring, screaming, begging to be taken . . . (38)

In Stephen's dream world, where repressed materials can emerge from the unconscious through metonymy and metaphor, he is drowning in blood signifying the base elements of the Real body in its elemental pre-subjective state. This is the retroactive memory of the soiled and bloodied body of birth as it emerges from the maternal. It is an elemental body that is met with fear and disgust: fear that we might return to this abject state stripped of all our pretensions of coherence and containment, and disgust for our origins when our mother's body was our body and our blood was shared. Even though the discontinuous narrative works to interrupt reader identification, the disturbance to Stephen's coherence as a subject might attract the girl reader to accompany him to the brink of the Real as she shivers with disgust. Also, the ring begins to acquire the qualities of an *objet (a)* that can fill the gap and keep our Real status as elemental creatures at bay. At this stage in the story, the girl might invest in these qualities hoping for a magical resolution for

Stephen. On the whole, though, the narrative is so fragmented and interrupted that I doubt her identification would be fixed.

Other factors contribute to the disruption of the reading girl's identification, not least of which is the dominance of male perspectives. Women are relegated to the margins in the case of Dr. Hope Michaels, the marine archaeologist who seeks the ring, or silenced in the case of Stephen's mother and the castaway girl, Ela. Stephen's mother exists in the margins of his journal as she worries about his health and his dreams. Only in the "Afterword [sic]" written by Dr Michaels is Mrs Messenger directly quoted from the evidence she gave to the Inquiry. In this transcript, the reader learns that Stephen's father had been killed in a trucking accident three months before the discovery of the ring, hand and pot. Stephen had referred to his father as being 'up North' in his journal categorically denying his father's death presumably to himself as well as others. Despite, or because of, her access to crucial information, Mrs Messenger is largely absent from the text. Similarly, the central female figure, the shipwrecked girl Ela, never speaks directly. She appears first as a hallucinatory vision to Stephen in a manifestation either of his madness or of supernatural powers. Both in Stephen's vision and in Loos' journal, she speaks only a few words of English which appear to confirm Stephen's vision, as do the rock painting showing western ships, Ela's dead mother and baby brother, Loos and Pelgrom, the ring, the white stockings Loos hopes to trade, and the name 'ELA'. In an overview of Gary Crews' ambiguous fictions, "Writing on the Edge: Gary Crews Fictions" (1998), Alice Mills suggests the absence of female voices operates to reinforce the patriarchal character of colonisation, but that, consequently, *Strange Objects* risks complicity in the exclusion of the feminine from history. Still, Ela has recorded her history and attained a special status in Aboriginal history, and Dr Hope Michael is an authoritative voice framing the novel and offering a sympathetic interpretation of Stephen Messenger's position. Hence, the feminine is to some extent recuperated from the perspective of the Other culture, and within the contemporary professional sphere. The girl reader might identify fleetingly with Ela in terms of adventure and exoticism, just as she might aspire to the compassionate and scientific voice of Dr Hope Michael. Furthermore, as I have argued consistently, the absence of female characters does not deny a point of identification to the girl reader who can and does identify across gender.

In *Strange Objects*, however, the multiple and fragmentary narratives, and the repellent attributes of the main protagonist work against any singular identification. Any fixed identification with Stephen as a contemporary adolescent character is likely to be eroded by his strangely detached and unsympathetic attitude to others. By the end of the novel, the reader could conclude that Stephen is schizophrenic as suggested in the final document, or infer that he is psychopathic from earlier documents apparently included to explain the psychopathic behaviour of the adolescent castaway, Jan Pelgrom. Stephen's story and that of the castaways are full of parallels, and Stephen's visions incorporate the story from the past. Alternatively, his strange behaviours may be the effect of grief about the death of his father six months earlier about which he appears to be in denial. The possibility that the ring he finds does indeed have supernatural qualities is also left open through the testimony of a witness who claims to have seen the fantasy Stephen Messenger from Stephen's visions three days after Stephen is reported missing. All of this increases the mystery around Stephen and keeps the reader fascinated but not identified with the central character. As Stephen becomes increasingly strange, he is also shown in his journal to be callous and contemptuous towards others. Regardless of the reader's interpretation of the cause of Stephen's disdain for others, any initial identification is likely to collapse as his manipulative and murderous behaviour towards other people and animals repulses sympathy. Released from a single fixed identification, the reader may engage in fleeting mobile identifications as she engages with the central captivating mystery: the origins and powers of the ring.

Reading *Strange Objects*, the girl is driven not by a fixed Imaginary identification, but by the mystery of an object that is more than itself, an object that metonymically stands for the impossible Real: an *objet (a)*. The ring causes the desire of the most important characters: Dr Hope Michaels, Senior Sergeant Norman, Stephen Messenger, Jan Pelgrom, Ela and Charlie Sunrise all desire the ring, and their overlapping trajectories towards the ring form the narrative. From the start, Stephen is an outsider separating himself from his classmates and their horror stories – horror stories that will invade Stephen's mind and reappear as facets of his disordered thinking. Significantly, the ring is not spoken about until it is lost. Only when it constitutes a lost cause of desire does Stephen find it in his possession, and once attained it leads him to the Real of psychosis and death as it

has led Jan Pelgrom before him. Similarly, Loos becomes distracted just as Jan Pelgrom tells him about the ring's history, so the ring's originating moment is never known but it associated with the myth of El Dorado. Hence, the ring emerges from a history of violent invasion and lust for gold. It can be described as a small gold ring with a garnet stone, but its meaning and properties are more than can be spoken. It produces strange halo effects around Jan's blonde hair, and provides an uncanny conduit for Stephen's hallucinations. It is more than itself, and this more is unsignifiable. Within the narrative, the ring functions as an *objet (a)*: cause of desire. The *objet (a)* stands between the subject and the hole in being upon which she is constituted promising to make her whole. In some sense recognising the significance of the ring, Loos writes in his journal "But even yet she wears the ring, his bright one which made him whole" (173). This object holds out the (false) promise of fulfilment and completion beyond alienation in language, that is, it offers access to *jouissance*. When a non psychotic subject approaches the cause of desire, she realises that the object was not what she wanted, and so her desire moves her on to seek out the object somewhere else. In this movement she can maintain a safe distance from the impossible Real, but Stephen Messenger and Jan Pelgrom approach and claim the ring bringing them to the position of the psychotic who comes too close to the *objet (a)* and cannot move onward.

Psychotic, grief stricken or possessed, the reader cannot finally identify the source of Stephen Messenger's psychic disintegration, but she can recognise his racism. Ultimately, *Strange Objects* is about the racism that informs contemporary and historical relations between western cultures and Australian Aborigines. *Strange Objects* was written within the period of Australia's so-called culture wars in the 1990s when comment became polarised between those who portrayed the effects of colonisation as predominantly benign (known as the white blindfold view), and those who argued that Aboriginal cultures suffered massacres, cultural genocide and dispossession during and since the invasion (the so-called black armband view). Significantly, Dr Hope Michael dates her Afterword "1988", the year Australians celebrated two hundred years of colonial rule. The novel aims to cut across the denial of violence, death and betrayal that has been reiterated in some media, government and academic institutions since the 1990s. Walter Loos and Jan Pelgrom are terrified in their first encounter with an Aboriginal group who they fear might be cannibals despite the lack of aggression with which they are met. From

Stephen's labelling of the 'cannibal' pot at the beginning of the novel to his murder of Charlie Sunrise at the end, the historical and contemporary journals record white racist fantasies about Aborigines that have permeated Australian history since the first invasion. Reading and extending Lacanian theory, Slavoj Žižek suggests that racism is based on fantasies about how the racialised Other organises his *jouissance* so as to enjoy something not available to us, and to steal our enjoyment (*Looking Awry*). Jan Pelgrom and Stephen Messenger associate Aborigines with a savagery that both frightens and attracts the white men who are themselves the bearers of violence and death to the Aborigines. When Stephen first meets Charlie Sunrise, his fear and disgust are tangible:

I felt my stomach turn over. His mouth was open, ready to speak, and with his missing teeth in front and his wide nostrils, his face was horrible. I saw his eyes were black and half-closed and around them watery pink veins (20).

In selecting these particular details to describe Charlie Sunrise, Stephen effectively dehumanises the older man. Each of his encounters with Charlie Sunrise are experienced by Stephen as abhorrent even when they go together to the rock art gallery and Sunrise suggests to him a way of understanding his strange experiences through Aboriginal belief systems. In response, Stephen kills Charlie Sunshine repulsing both his physical and metaphysical presence. Stephen experiences Charlie Sunshine as stealing the *jouissance* he gains from the ring, and as having a special *jouissance* associated with his knowledge of the ring and its meanings. Similarly, Loos and Pelgrom perceive the Aborigines as stealing their trading goods, and Stephen Messenger thinks Charlie Sunrise "hung about drinking cheap grog near the dump on the edge of town" (19). For anyone living in Australia, the discourse of the savage, drunken, lazy, thieving Aborigine is horribly familiar. This discourse positions the Aborigine as one who enjoys the freedom to survive without labour, and who then steals and enjoys the fruit of our white labour. Thus, *Strange Objects* insists on representing the repetitive trauma underpinning post-invasion Australian fantasies about Aboriginality.

But where is our girl reader in all of this? In terms of identification, she may begin by identifying with Stephen Messenger as he lies in his sleeping bag listening to scary stories about hitchhikers, lorry drivers and murder on the long lonely highway. However, as Stephen's cruelty to animals and alternately manipulative and contemptuous attitudes towards other people become apparent, she is unlikely to

associate herself with him. Nonetheless, she remains engaged. Certainly, this text invites a critical or Symbolic reading as privileged by educators and literary theorists. The stylistically varied documents draw the reader's attention to language just as the search for clues calls for close attention to the text. In this sense, the reading girl is firmly anchored in the Symbolic register of language and meaning, but this is unlikely to be a singular response because *Strange Objects* also evokes the Real. The blood, the hallucinations and the murder all speak to the girl of *jouissance*. Only *jouissance* can account for the excessive, the deadly and the mystical attributes of Jan's and Stephen's attachment to the ring. It is the foreclosure of the paternal function that renders the psychotic defenceless against the waves of painful *jouissance* that invade his or her body. All subjects pursue *jouissance*, the elusive feeling of wholeness and completeness unmarred by lack, but the psychotic is teeming with *jouissance*. Foreclosure of the paternal metaphor means that difference and lack are not instituted in the psychotic who acquires language but does not enter the social contract. Because the psychotic does not apprehend the difference or lack in the other, the primordial signifier of the phallus does not secure language as a means of Symbolic exchange with, and necessary distance from, other people or objects. Instead, the psychotic either rejects or merges completely with his or her surroundings thus encountering the obliterating totality of *jouissance* at every juncture.

Being at the mercy of *jouissance* is painful, frightening and isolating for the psychotic, but fascinating for the reading girl. As a normal subject, she is attracted to *jouissance* but the movement of her desire instigated by her awareness of lack and difference protect her from full immersion in its lethal substance. However, the movement of desire also propels her to seek *jouissance* even though she will receive only a fleeting trace. Stephen Messenger disappears into death or delusion, but the girl continues having recognised the limits of madness: "Not only can man's being not be understood without madness, it would not be man's being if it did not bear madness within itself as the limit of his freedom" (Ecrits 215). In other words, this novel offers the girl reader an opportunity to glance at the "strange objects in the great abyss" referenced in its Preface whilst she is not at risk of stirring more than her imagination. Identifying madness through fiction allows the girl reader to confirm her own sanity and freedom.

Of the three novels I have considered in this chapter, *Letters from the Inside* and *Junk* provoked considerable debate about the form and content of young adult fiction despite complying with the function of the father. The narratives explore the prohibited sites of drug addiction and violence that were once the domain of “boy” problems, but these problems can only be resolved by domesticity or death when they are transposed into a feminine context. The respective authors, Marsden and Burgess, allege that their work realistically reflects the lives of adolescents and expresses their voices and feelings authentically, but the adolescent characters are products of discourses of adolescence that maintain the category as a buffer state separating childhood from adulthood. The central characters must navigate this problematic territory and accede to their womanly and domestic future or die. In contrast, *Strange Objects* does not follow a simple trajectory. The novel is about historical relations between Australian Aboriginal people, not about the adolescent and her problems. In this case, the novel as father opens the door to a more complex and multi-voiced linguistic and social Other. On the other hand, *Letters from the Inside* and *Junk* position the text as a strict father standing at his daughter’s bedroom door controlling her access to the outside world and warning her of its dangers. These texts operate to maintain oppositions between good girls and bad girls, parents and children, *jouissance* and sociability. In terms of the discourse of adolescents, the girl cannot have her pleasures and stay alive. Daddy is standing at the door offering the reading girl a forced choice between her freedom or her life, but he cannot police her pleasures as she stares into the abyss of madness and oblivion even though she will almost certainly step back and forego her freedom for her life.

Chapter Five

Excessive Reading

"Dead, dead, and never called me Mother", my own mother proclaimed to indicate an excess of sentiment and sensation. Even though it does not appear in the novel but was added to later stage and film versions, the phrase is popularly attributed to the novel *East Lynne*, written by Mrs Henry Woods and first published in 1861. In my childhood, the phrase signified contempt for any and all melodramatic pathos. Nonetheless, we loved the bravery of heroines who quelled their fear to resolve the mysteries of Daphne du Maurier and Mary Stewart. We indulged in fictions of inscrutable suitors, imposing houses and family secrets. Daily existence in a post war working class British family might mitigate against the unrealistic, but the pleasures of aberrance and fear haunted our Imaginary domestic. Prefiguring the psychoanalytic family drama, gothic and melodramatic fictions became popular in the nineteenth century as a correlative to the dominance of realism with its determined rationalism. Indeed, gothic fictions seem to herald the dark desires at the heart of the Freudian family and the modern psyche. Rather than confirming the social order, novels in this style disturbed notions of marriage and family rendering them macabre and threatening. Despite resolving ambiguity and menace in denouements favouring the restoration of social stability, these novels marked by heightened emotion and extreme events offer reading girls a family drama that unsettles their normative heterosexual fate.

I have selected three family dramas on the basis of their apparent popularity with young female readers. All of these novels represent family relations between parents and children and siblings that disturb the socially conservative notion of the nuclear family as the privileged site for turning children into citizens. Aimed at different audiences and accomplished in different styles, they share a dark vision of family life and an appetite for sensation. *The Pact* by Jodi Picoult (2003) and *Flowers in the Attic* by Virginia Andrews (1979), are bestsellers marketed to adults but popular with both adult and adolescent female readers according to online reviews and discussions. Both are set in the USA. *The Pact* features teen suicide and

love between the children of two families who have been friends since the children's birth. *Flowers in the Attic* is the tale of a girl locked in the attic of her wealthy grandparent's house with her three siblings. The last novel in this section, Sonya Hartnett's *Sleeping Dogs* (1995), is an Australian novel published as young adult fiction. It won a Children's Book Council Award and a Victorian Premier's Literary Award in 1996. *Sleeping Dogs* explores the relationships between five siblings and their parents on a run down farm and caravan park in rural Australia.

Central to all of the novels are the constitution and formative function of the nuclear family as the main narrative theme. Despite this thematic similarity, the texts differ from each other in crucial ways but all employ melodramatic or gothic elements to provoke emotional responses in the reader. Both the melodramatic and gothic modes of address have been associated with female readers since the eighteenth century. In the 1860s these two modes coincided in the form of the sensation novel that introduced plots featuring sex and violence into domestic settings through a combination of elements associated with romance, realist, mystery, melodrama and the gothic genres (Brantlinger). The genre is exemplified in the aforementioned *East Lynne*. Novels such as this earned the scorn of literary commentators as well as eliciting cultural anxiety about their effects, particularly on young women readers. Kate Flint cites the Archbishop of York in 1864 accusing sensation fiction of,

exciting in the mind some deep feeling of overwrought interest by the means of some terrible passion or crime. They want to persuade people that in almost every one of the well-ordered houses of their neighbours there [is] a skeleton shut up in some cupboard (276).

Woe is the girl reader who doubts the discipline of domesticity. She might refuse to assume the properly feminine position preferring either the masculine active capacity for violence or the overly passive feminine manifested in indolence and emotional wallowing. She might see the forbidden, know the unknowable, reveal the enigma, enjoy the suffering and exact the revenge.

This idea that sensational and sentimental fiction will warp the girl reader's understanding of normative social structures continues up to the present just as elements of the sensation novel continue to be incorporated into contemporary forms of fiction. Although the sensation novel is specific to a particular historical moment, the key features characterising the genre continue in many female

identified popular fictions. As defined by Brantlinger, the sensation novel “deals with crime, often murder as an outcome of adultery and sometimes bigamy, in an apparently proper, bourgeois, domestic settings” (1). Although the content of the novels examined in this chapter may not be as immediately focussed on crimes disturbing monogamy and marriage, they are equally sensational and address topics such as suicide, infanticide and incest. In contemporary terms, divorce laws operate ensuring that the modern family can survive adultery and rendering bigamy unnecessary. Nonetheless, sex and violence still perturb domesticity but in different forms. A narrative structured around a secret is another feature of the sensation novel identified by Brantlinger – a feature shared with gothic and melodramatic popular fictions. All three novels centre on family secrets involving relationships between parents, children and siblings: incest and abuse lie at the dark heart of all three narratives.

Both *The Pact* and *Flowers in the Attic* tend towards the melodramatic in their concern with ethics and their tendency to pathos. Melodrama is a broad category that might best be described as a representational mode of address marked by excess both in style and response. As a genre, melodrama refers to a Greek dramatic form differentiated from tragedy and comedy by its incorporation of both musical and dramatic modes (Kaplan). Its modern manifestation as a theatrical form emerges with and in revolutionary France (Brooks). This form is differently inflected as it is imported into different European countries and the USA (Elsaesser), but it continues to represent the particular ideological formations that produce the modern bourgeois subject. Various applied to theatrical, fictional, televisual and cinematic texts, the descriptor ‘melodramatic’ lacks the necessary coherent or formulaic narrative elements to be identified as a genre. Whilst certain narrative directions such as the slave story and the family saga might recur across historical periods and media, the key shared feature of melodramatic texts is heightened feeling rather than narrative form. The plasticity of the melodramatic mode allows for the incorporation of elements as diverse as the stock characters from medieval morality plays, the heightened sensibility of the eighteenth century sentimental novel, the suspense of the horror story and the violence of the crime genre.

Originating in post revolutionary French theatre according to Peter Brooks’ influential work “*The Melodramatic Imagination*”, the modern melodrama did not

establish its reputation for extreme pathos and unlikely plots until the nineteenth century when realism became the privileged aesthetic mode. The earlier French manifestation of melodrama did not attract the critical opprobrium that was directed at later melodramatic works. Rather, the pursuit of a post revolutionary, moral code, which Brooks identifies as the momentum for melodrama, was critically and aesthetically sustained. For Brooks, melodrama emerges in a world that has rejected the sacred and yet remains nostalgic for the moral certainty that religion had supplied. This moral urge can be recognised in ensuing melodramatic works, and it is a key component of the novels examined in this chapter. These narratives are centred on questions of right and wrong, guilt and innocence and good and evil.

The melodramatic and the gothic have always occupied such similar terrain that it is difficult, if not impossible, to clearly distinguish between the two literary classifications. Both the search for moral certainty in melodrama and the revelation of a mystery in the gothic are encoded in gestures and phrases burdened with an excess of meaning: hair stands on end, shivers wrack the body, and words reveal a hidden significance. Good and evil must be recognised and distinguished even though they are concealed attributes that can only be intuited from sympathetic signs. This insistence on bodily and emotional knowledge as opposed to rational intellect positions melodrama and the gothic as feminine in the ubiquitous binary of modern logic – the weepie and the bodice ripper being the most derogatory labels applied to the respective forms. The gothic is more consistently associated with death, darkness, evil and the supernatural. The gothic breaks the law. It transgresses the laws of physics with hauntings and visions; it transgresses the laws of society with deviance and crime; it transgresses the laws of biology with aberrant bodies and abnormal couplings; and it transgresses the generic limits of literary form.

The Pact is replete with domestic detail with precise details about particular people and places that are more redolent of realist than melodramatic forms, yet the tale and the telling are sensational and sentimental. In a number of interviews Jodi Picoult cites Charles Dickens as the model for her own work alluding to a similar moral impulse organising and driving the narrative: "When I think about writers who use fiction as social commentary and to raise social awareness but who are also very popular, I think of Dickens" (qtd in France). Like Dickens in his own era, Jodi

Picoult is enormously popular occupying positions in the bestseller lists internationally (France), but unlike Dickens, she is not accorded any status by the literary establishment. Her novels are narrative driven, focused on families, brimful of domestic detail, melodramatic in tone, and structured around fears that preoccupy the western popular media such as child abuse, medical technology, school shootings, abductions and suicide. The melodramatic aspects of a Picoult novel can be recognised in the emotionality, the unlikely plots, the ethical problems and the courtroom scenes that provide the resolution in many of the plots. All of these elements are apparent in *The Pact*, a novel offering the girl reader an opportunity to explore the thrills and fears of life, death, desire and domesticity. The two middle class families at the centre of the story are violently disrupted by the death of one of their adolescent children in a seemingly failed suicide pact involving the child of the other family. According to Picoult (2005), *The Pact* has acquired "cult status" among American teens. Recommendations and critiques of the book can be found on a number of websites oriented to adolescent girls—advice about the need for tissues frequently accompanies the recommendations signalling the book's status as a "weepie".

Sex and death initiate the action with a kiss and a gunshot. The action moves from the scene of the shot to a restaurant where two sets of parents, the Golds and the Hartes, enjoy a shared meal. Their familiarity and intimacy as neighbours in a semi-rural area populated by professionals are established before they become aware of the fatal event involving their children. Thus, Emily Gold and Chris Harte and their respective parents are firmly established as representatives of normal middle class America. This picture is ruptured by the death of Emily Gold in the presence of Chris Harte who is arrested for her murder despite his statement that they had made a suicide pact. He claims he was unable to complete his own suicide because he fainted after Emily was shot. Apart from Chris no one has recognised that Emily is suicidal, no one knows her motivation, and no one knows if Chris shot her. The remainder of the novel serves the dual purpose of resolving these mysteries and exploring the effects of Emily's death on Chris and both sets of parents.

A chronological account of Chris and Emily's lives from their births to her death is provided in alternate chapters entitled "Then". These chapters both exhibit the ordinary daily lives of the two adolescents and their families, and expose the secrets

informing Emily's decision. Juxtaposed are chapters entitled "Now" that relate the aftermath of the death. This aftermath includes the revelation that Emily was pregnant offered initially as a motive for Chris to murder Emily, and later as a motive for Emily to commit suicide since she booked in for an abortion but was unable to proceed. She will neither abort the foetus nor marry Chris who does not know about the pregnancy. Her refusal of either option is based on the second reason offered to the reader to explain Emily's suicide: she was molested in childhood and has revealed this event to no one. The reader is made aware of the event and its importance in the flashback chapters, and through her mother's discovery of the secret when she reads Emily's journals after her death. Melanie Gold destroys the journals and tells nobody about her discovery. Molestation operates as a *roman de clef* explaining Emily's inability to enjoy sex with Chris, to undergo an invasive abortion or to envisage a future. This device offers a neat resolution to unanswered questions and positions the threat to normality outside the confines of the family, but the text offers a third and more disturbing option: incest. Although no act of incest occurs in a legal sense, Emily is disturbed by her sibling intimacy with Chris.

The final denouement takes place in the courtroom bringing law, desire and truth into confluence. Against his lawyer's advice, Chris takes the stand at his own murder trial and recounts the events of the night. Chris had taken his Father's gun, loaded it with two bullets and accompanied Emily to a spot she had chosen to commit suicide. He is unable to dissuade her, and she is unable to press the trigger. Finally, Emily persuades Chris to free her from the pain he doesn't understand by shooting her, but he cannot pull the trigger. She puts her hand over his, presses, and a shot is fired. The jury find Chris not guilty and so his truth telling restores him to family and society, but Emily cannot be restored and her family unit is irreparably damaged. They move away from the neighbouring Hartes to a new house, "someone heard that it had three bedrooms. One for Michael Gold, one for his wife, and one for Emily" (450). The Golds now constitute the veneer of a family with no intimacy and a dark secret buried in the Mother's mind.

The narrative is intensely social in that it offers information about the achievements and careers of all four parents as well as incorporating scenes involving the single father lawyer and his son. During his time in prison, Chris is subject to intimidation

and solitary confinement as well as forming a tentative friendship with a man who has killed his baby in a fit of frustration. All of these characters, as well as others who feature in the trial, represent a social world where the love and protection of children is the governing principle for families and individuals. Moreover, the protection of children is represented as an uncertain and difficult task. The man who has committed infanticide talks about holding the corpse of the infant he has just shaken to death: "Do you know what it's like, to hold this . . . this little person in your arms . . . afterward . . . and to know that you were supposed to be the one to protect it?" (197). His perversion of the parent/child relationship illustrates the extreme vulnerability of the fictional child given that parents cannot always trust themselves with a child's safety. Unfortunately for these textual parents, no amount of protection is sufficient to ensure the child's survival.

Emily Gold was sexually molested in the male toilets of McDonald's at the age of ten. Both her parents and Chris's parents were present, but they did not see her enter the men's toilets to fulfil a dare from Chris. Her molester is described as,

In his late twenties, he had long black hair and a walleye. Adults politely said there was 'something wrong with him.' Kids called him The Creep and fashioned stories about him roasting infants in the French fryer and cleaning his nails with a bowie knife (76).

Clearly, this description complies with grotesque and monstrous features that are generally associated with a gothic sensibility. It also locates the monster outside the domestic as a recognisable threat whose appearance and manner express his nature, yet still the parents cannot protect the always vulnerable girl child. Tellingly, the attack occurs in the filthiest location in the modern social world: the men's toilet. The assault on Emily's body by a monstrous outsider is overwhelming allowing her no breathe, no movement, no escape,

His breath falls into my mouth, the only air I have. His hands start at my ankles and slide up my shins, pulling them apart like a vise, and I know what is coming as his fingers stab into me (201 italics in original).

This is evil represented in stereotypic terms: a deviant male forcefully destroys the innocence of a pure young girl. The deviant then disappears from the text since it is the effects not the origins of evil that are the central concern of *The Pact*, but these effects offer a more ambiguous reading in which it is female sexuality and intimacy that disturb the smooth surface of the nuclear family.

Immediately after the assault, Emily appears to suppress the memory until she becomes sexually involved with Chris when the memories of her original introduction to sexual knowledge overwhelm and destroy her desire for Chris. The passage quoted above is italicised in the text to signify Emily's hallucinatory experience when Chris's sexual advances trigger her suppressed memories. Whilst Emily's inability to respond sexually to Chris is clearly linked to the previous molestation, it is also referred to the degree of intimacy between Chris and Emily. Emily and Chris have grown up together and Emily fears their sexual relationship might be incestuous:

If she sometimes went home after making love with Chris and vomited for hours; if she sometimes couldn't bear his hands roaming under her bra and panties because it felt more like incest than excitement—could she really spend her whole life married to him (237)?

Emily's feelings could be dismissed as manifestations of the damage caused by the assault, but the text insists on restating the incest motif. Gus Harte, Chris's mother, meets secretly with Michael Gold, Emily's father, before and during the trial. Michael refuses to accept that Chris would murder Emily, and he and Gus become closer—so close that they almost become lovers as they experience increased distance from their respective partners. It is in the context of this movement from friendship to sexual liaison that Gus considers the incestuous aspect of Emily and Chris's relationship:

She had come to Michael tonight because he needed her. It felt perfectly natural—after all, he was almost a member of the family.

Which was, in itself, a little horrifying.

And incestuous.

The heavy china cup clanked onto the table as it slipped out of Gus's hand. Both she and Michael had felt the odd simultaneous ease and discomfort of this attraction. But they were old enough to move away from each other, when reality—in the form of a Chinese waiter—intruded. It might not be as simple, for someone younger.

Who was to say that Emily hadn't felt it, too, blithely pushed into a romance with a boy who might as well be her brother?

Pregnant with his child? (317)

Looked upon from this perspective, Emily's suicide is not a consequence of child sex abuse alone but, rather, of an imbalance that does not allow her enough room to pursue her desire.

Brother-sister incest and quasi incest are staple features of traditional gothic narratives. In the case of Chris and Emily, their relationship follows the classic pattern of quasi incest: they spend all their time together growing up in an idyllic pastoral environment before falling in love and marrying if they survive. They will not survive if the female party is corrupted by civilisation (MacAndrews). Quasi incest operates conversely to actual brother sister incest in the gothic narrative. When the lovers are biologically related as brother and sister, the relationship manifests the evil of unnatural behaviour and unbridled passion. On the surface, Chris and Emily comply with this pattern if McDonald's and the deviant stranger signify the corrupting influence of contemporary American civilisation. Yet, Emily accounts for her disgust at having sex with Chris in terms of actual incest, and her response is confirmed by Gus. This narrative deviation could be read as indicating that all sex threatens female subjectivity regardless of whether the male partner is intimate or distant.

Alternatively, intimacy and distance as aspects of sexuality lead to problems for most of the adult characters in this novel. The lawyer who is rearing his son regrets that he might never feel the closeness in love that Chris feels for Emily; Chris's father nearly loses his relationship with his wife and son because he is a somewhat remote man due to his elitist education and background; Emily's mother indicates that she is sexually distant as well as responding to her daughter's death by cutting off all contact with the Hartes and withdrawing further from her husband. Although the Hartes reconstitute themselves as a family, the issue of intimacy and distance is not resolved.

One of the pleasures of this text for the reading girl may be that she must also learn to navigate between intimacy and distance if she is to become a proper woman and ensure she finds the safe harbour of domesticity. The love story of Chris and Emily with its tragic yet romantic connotations of *Romeo and Juliet* appeals to the powerful social myth of overwhelming love to guide the girl to her marital home. Since the enlightenment, religious imperatives and inheritance based on genealogy

no longer provide the impetus for marriage. As these institutions were eroded, love became the lure for marriage. The knowledge offered the girl in *The Pact* appears highly conservative in the course to domesticity it charts: strangers outside the bucolic middle class American family are sexual predators who prevent the girl from reaching her marital destination. Then again, the family of origin who are supposed to protect and preserve the girl before she exchanges their home for her own fail in this novel not only because they do not recognise the outside threat but also because the comfort of home inhibits her desire. Emily is as effectively entombed in her solicitous family as any gothic heroine in her ancient castle. Paradoxically, safety and the preservation of innocence prevent Emily from pursuing her desires.

Emily does not desire, she is driven toward death. "I don't want to *be*" Emily insists (319). In commenting on the instance of a young woman who commits suicide immediately after having been seen on the street with a lesbian lover by her father, Lacan states that such an immediate response without leaving a note can be interpreted as dissolution rather than a solution of the subject who is propelled to escape the Symbolic Other. The subject of lack wants-to-be complete and so she is propelled by desire to search for realisation through the Other. Not only has Emily given up this search, she does not recognise the object she seeks. From birth, the Other of her family and social world have directed her towards Chris, but her relationship with Chris is marked by the primitive absorption of the infant in the maternal figure of the primary carer. There is so little psychic distance between Chris and Emily that they cannot distinguish themselves as individuals: when one is hurt the other bleeds. Whereas adolescence does propel Chris into separation in the form of a brief relationship with another young woman, Emily remains caught in the fundamental fantasy of heterosexual romance. For Emily, there is a sexual relation in which oneness and completion are achieved by loving opposite sexed partners. When sexual attraction fails, Emily claims the failure as her own thus sustaining the fantasy. She would rather remove herself from the Other than admit the lack in the Other.

For the adolescent girl reader, identification with Emily offers the pleasure of this narrative that sustains romance: there is one other and we two will become the completed One. Of course, this is precisely the problem for feminists—the romance narrative positions the girl to reproduce heteronormative femininity. She may

identify herself with Emily and read herself into the perfect love illusion maintained by blaming breakdown on the threat from outside rather than the failure of the fantasy. However, this argument assumes that the girl will ignore alternative readings. Given Emily's sexual revulsion and the absence of any erotic encounters offering the limited, phallic *jouissance* of orgasm, the reader must recognise that, for whatever reason, Emily does not desire Chris. Emily dies to maintain the excessive Imaginary love of the uncastrated child. Her love for Chris does not permit the separation and alienation of the desiring subject. She justifies her suicide as ensuring this love eternally, "All I am trying to do is to keep it that way, forever" (326). The reader may enjoy the idea of a union of perfect accord, but she will also recognise the contradiction of preserving something by ending it irrevocably. Furthermore, Chris offers an equally powerful point of identification. The effects of suicide on Chris and both sets of parents mitigate against a reading based solely on an Imaginary identification with Emily. The girl reader remains with Chris in the Symbolic world of the law experiencing vicariously imprisonment, trial and judgement. These are all Symbolic institutions arbitrating right and wrong - the central concern of melodrama. The girl reader has the opportunity to consider the rights and wrongs of teen suicide within the confines of the law.

Nevertheless, this contemplation is not without the pleasurable tug of the Real. Once again, the girl reader encounters the thrill of full *jouissance* as represented by death. Generally, the limit to the human subject presented by death functions as a protective device preventing the subject from partaking in dangerous pleasures since the subject who becomes overwhelmed by *jouissance* makes no distinction between pleasure and pain or life and death. Indeed, *jouissance* is that which does not distinguish. For as long as the subject pursues the object and cause of desire, she achieves only the modicum of phallic *jouissance* indicated by the little death of orgasm. Should she exceed the limits of these ordinary pleasures, she risks a living or an actual death as she becomes submerged in *jouissance* and fails to recognise difference. Emily's suicidal drive propels her into the void that opens up when she is forced to recognise sexual difference and non rapport. Again, the reader remains firmly anchored in the Symbolic order of the narrative. However intense her identification, she can only sense the thrill of the Real as a trace when she reads the long, emotional and romantic suicide scene.

Despite a highly emotive narrative, *The Pact* is restrained in comparison with Virginia Andrew's *Flowers in the Attic*. A constant feature of bestseller lists since its publication in 1979, this novel exalts in all forms of familial aberrance. Murder, incest, rape, sadism, incarceration, betrayal, abandonment and voyeurism indicate the degree of deviance from normative family conduct exhibited by the Foxworth/Dollenganger family. This first novel in a series focuses on Cathy Dollenganger and her family. For most of the novel, Cathy is imprisoned in the attic of her grandparent's mansion with her older brother, Chris, and her younger twin brother and sister, Cory and Carrie. Cathy is twelve years old at the beginning of the attic sojourn, and Chris is two years older. They live in the attic for just over three years. Tellingly, these three years cover Cathy's physiological and sexual transition from girl to woman. Moreover, her persecutors are her Momma and Grandmother. It is the children's mother and grandmother who lock them in the attic to hide them from their grandfather because the mother will be disinherited if she is found to have had children by their dead father. The children are told that their father was their mother's half-uncle accounting for their grandparents' rejection and their parents' changed surname from Foxworth to Dollenganger. As time passes in the attic, Momma gradually abandons her children; Grandmother beats the Momma, Chris and Cathy; Momma poisons the children; brother Chris rapes/seduces Cathy; and Grandmother starves and spies on the children. This deviant family narrative has continued to appeal to adolescent girl readers since its publication almost thirty years ago.

Occasional mention of *Flowers in the Attic* can be found in examinations of the reading preferences of adolescents (Cherland). Generally, observations about the popularity of the novel are neutral or hostile, but there appears to be no critical examination of its ongoing popularity among young adult readers. When I surveyed seventy-five young women between fourteen and twenty years old for a previous research project, I found that fifty-four (70%) of them had read the novel (Armstrong). Of these readers, twenty-nine rated the book as 'great', thirty-six rated it as 'good' and ten rated it as 'OK'. None rated it as 'awful' demonstrating the divergence of expert and adolescent evaluations of the novel. Discussions about the novel on blogs confirm both the popularity of the novel amongst adolescent female readers, and the ambivalence of adult women about its suitability for young readers even though they have read the book as girls themselves (Larbalastier; Bazelon).

Many of these adult readers own up to their adolescent love of the book as if confessing a shameful secret. Their shame is based on criticisms of style as well as subject matter. Intriguingly, this split between younger and older readers replicates the ruptures that underpin the narrative structure of *Flowers in the Attic*. By dividing the younger reader from her parental guides, the illicit reputation of the novel is reinforced and the girl is enticed to read partly because of this transgression. In true gothic spirit, *Flowers in the Attic* disrupts, disturbs and exposes the boundaries that organise and limit social behaviour and personal integrity including the border separating the discerning adult from the tasteless adolescent.

First among the many ambiguities that mark the text is the status of the narrator as truth teller. The prologue to *Flowers in the Attic* is written in Cathy's voice and she claims that the narrative is copied from the "old memorandum journals that I kept for so long" (3). Charles Dickens is invoked as a model for the narrator. Whereas Jodi Picoult names Dickens as an inspiration for the social commentary in her own writing, Virginia Andrews deploys his name to authenticate Cathy as a truthful and authentic narrator: "So, like Charles Dickens, in this work of 'fiction' I will hide myself away behind a false name, and live in fake places" (3). These claims of authenticity were supported in early editions by the statement 'based on a true story' appearing on the cover. In this sense, *Flowers in the Attic* complies with the requirement of young adult fiction for a first person adolescent narrative based on lived experience. As a consequence of the obfuscation of misleading publicity and a duplicitous prologue, the truth status of the novel continues to confound readers and is a subject of debate in some on-line discussion groups (Snopes). The erosion of the boundary between truth and fiction presents the reader with the chance to indulge the possibility that Cathy is a pseudonym for Virginia Andrews, the author, imagining that she was really locked in an attic for four years where she became her brother's lover and was subject to the sadism by her grandmother and neglect by her mother. Gothic horror creeps even closer when considered as an authentic account of an embodied life—it becomes a possibility in the reader's world.

The disintegration of formal boundaries is a feature of gothic fictions that combine elements of romance, realism and folktale (Halberstam). Not only is the distinction between autobiographical and fictional writing blurred in *Flowers in the Attic*, but also the structure is particularly intertextual. It references children's stories, fairy

tale, sentimental and medieval romance with Cathy and Chris reading, commenting on and enacting roles from these genres. Amongst the many texts cited are *Jude the Obscure*, *Peter Rabbit*, *Mary Poppins*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *The War of the Worlds*. Chris and Cathy debate the merits or otherwise of a romance novel in gender stereotypic terms with Chris asserting "It was just a stupid, silly story. Ridiculous! Only insane people would die for the sake of love. I bet you a hundred to one a woman wrote that junky romantic trash" (262). Reading is a constant companion to the captive adolescents: "Through books Cathy and I have lived a zillion lives . . . our vicarious way to feel alive." (242). Just like her reader, Cathy is an adolescent girl trapped in the family home reading her way to adult knowledge. There is a pleasure here for the reader in the familiarity and the companionship of shared stories. This mutual activity is one of many textual features that could intensify the identificatory delight of the reader.

Despite the implausible events of the story, its appeal may be enhanced by the proximity of Cathy's life to that of her female readers. Metaphorically, her life offers an exaggerated account of the conditions experienced by girls between eleven and sixteen. Directed towards the impossible state of Womanhood, she is circumscribed by the law of the family. In this sense, Cathy shares with Emily of *The Pact* an inability to set her desire into motion, but the story has been transposed from the suburban to the horrifying domestic. *The Pact* is melodramatic and sensational in tone and event, but the narrative is embedded in the staple components of social realism: ordinary families, ordinary homes, ordinary community. Similarly melodramatic and sensational, *Flowers in the Attic* leaves the suburbs at the start of the novel and moves into the territory of gothic horror where the setting, characters and events are all extraordinary. Typical of the popular gothic, the children are incarcerated in a mansion style house featuring the architectural and economic excess associated with the castles of the original eighteenth century gothic (Heller). This wealth is accrued through American capitalism rather than European aristocratic lineage, but the problems of inheritance are still the staple characteristic of the narrative. As is frequently the case with the gothic, inheritance in *Flowers in the Attic* is both economic and subjective, and the female subject is in the precarious position of both guarantor and threat. At stake are wealth, lineage, desire and morality.

When Chris rapes Cathy, the incest taboo is broken and he takes possession of her, "You're mine, Cathy! Mine! You'll always be mine!" (297). Thus, Cathy cannot enter the system of exchange that circulates money and sex through the exogamous marriage system. Through Chris, she remains the possession of her birth family. This transgression of the boundary between the inside and outside of the family further imprisons her as a true heir of the Foxworth family legacy. So convoluted are the Foxworth family interrelations that they are hard to describe without producing confusion paralleling the bewildering genealogy. In a prequel to *Flowers in the Attic* entitled *Petals in the Wind*, the reader discovers that Cathy's mother and father (Corinne and Christopher) are not only half uncle and niece but also half brother and sister. They share the same mother; Christopher's father is the Grandfather's father (Garland) and Corinne's father is the Grandfather (Malcolm). Corinne is born as a result of the grandfather (Malcolm) raping his own stepmother, Christopher's mother. The rage and warped sexuality displayed by Malcolm Foxworth in this prequel is explained as an effect of his own mother's abandonment of the family in his early childhood.

In this family the lines of desire travel do not travel along accepted trajectories. Cathy concludes, "Love, it came unbidden. You couldn't help whom you fell in love with – Cupid's arrows were ill aimed" (162). There is a sole ill aimed desire permeating the novel and the series: mother love. Mother love is all encompassing and enmeshing in this story. Because his own mother abandons him, Malcolm Foxworth takes her substitute and the pattern is established. Chris is unable to leave the house because he is erotically bound to his Momma. After an outburst of anger during which the mother slaps Chris, she recovers his confidence through offering her breast and appealing to infantile desires:

She drew him into her open arms and covered his wan, splotched, moustached face with quick little kisses that sought to take away the harm she'd done. Kiss, kiss, kiss, finger his hair, stroke his cheek, draw his head against her soft, swelling breasts, and let him drown in the sensuality of being cuddled close to that creamy flesh that must excite even a youth of his tender years (170).

Until Chris transfers his affections from his mother to his sister, he is unable to act since he cannot leave the mother. Even when the direction of his desire moves away from the maternal body, the movement returns him to his sister whose

resemblance to Momma is reiterated throughout the novel. Before the father's death, the family had been living under the name of Dollenganger recalling the notion of the doppelganger or double and emphasising the resemblance of family members to each other. This physical similarity reinforces the inverted psychic formation of the family where all desires are formed and trapped.

At the centre of the Foxworth family are the monstrous phallic mother and father of *jouissance*: the Grandmother and Grandfather. The Grandmother enforces the rules controlling all the children's bodies and appetites. Eating, toileting, looking, speaking, moving, touching, bathing and thinking are all subjected to the Grandmother's rules. She sets the rules, monitors compliance and punishes transgressions:

I am an observant woman who misses nothing. Do not think you can deceive me, mock me, or play jokes at my expense, for if you do, your punishment will be so severe that your skins, and your egos, will bear lifetime scars, and your pride will go down in permanent defeat (47).

In this form, the Grandmother represents the all powerful feminine associated with the pre-oedipal maternal as a kind of dominatrix wielding her power over the infant's body. She wields her whip across the backs of the mother, Cathy and Chris. When she whips Cathy, Cathy screams at her "You're not a woman! You're a monster! Something unhuman and inhumane" (229). Judith Halberstam comments on the both the non human and non maternal as aspects of the gothic monster who transgresses and exceeds all boundaries. As a monster, the Grandmother violates the discourse of femininity. She is the phallic mother who lacks for nothing. As such, she is monstrous. She is the mother who makes demands of the infant.

In the normative family, the mother's phallic power is only one aspect of her relationship with the infant. The maternal also encompasses the loving mother who accedes to the child's demands, but for most of this narrative the loving and punishing maternal are split between Momma and the Grandmother. As the terrifying phallic mother, the Grandmother is described in terms of metals and animals emphasising her inhumanity:

Her hair was a strong, steel-blue colour, drawn back from her face in a severe style which made her eyes appear somewhat long and cat-like . . .

Her nose was an eagle's beak, her shoulders were wide and her mouth was

like a thin, crooked knife slash. Her dress, a grey taffeta, had a diamond brooch at the throat of a high, severe neckline. Nothing about her appeared soft or yielding, even her bosom looked like twin hills of concrete (31-32).

The representation of the Grandmother in terms of rigidity and cruelty inverts the stereotype of the maternal feminine as yielding and gentle. Cathy dreams of the grandmother as "the witch to end all witches!" in a version *Hansel and Gretel* whereby the witch threatens to devour the children in her "fang-like tonsils" (199). Even more disconcertingly for Cathy, this grandmother-witch figure morphs into Momma. The mother not only becomes monstrous, but she recalls Medusa whose head of serpents was famously associated with the phallus in the guise of penis by Freud in "Medusa's Head":

Momma! Her blonde hair flowed as silken, streaming ribbons writhing on the floor to snare us both like snakes! Slithering coils of hair twined up and around our legs, to creep nearer our throats . . . trying to strangle us into silence . . .

I love you, I love you, I love you, she whispered without words (199).

Thus, the loving mother is associated with the phallic mother and her neglect of the children becomes conspiracy in infanticide. Simultaneously, the Grandmother is discovered as wearing a wig when the Cathy and Chris resist her power and plan their escape. Like Medusa, she is symbolically decapitated. In other words, she is castrated and revealed as lacking. Whilst under her control and surveillance, the children are trapped. Only when she is exposed as lacking are the children able to act independently, but they must also expose the myth of the father of *jouissance* before they are free.

Just as masculinity can only be structurally sustained by the exception to the rule, the man who is uncastrated and has access to all women and all goods, so the Grandfather sustains the Foxworth family narrative. It is the Grandfather's edict that banishes the children to the attic; it is the Grandfather's control of the wealth that keeps them there; and it is the Grandfather's ownership of all the women that maintains the circulation of ill aimed desire within the family. He represents the obscene father who is the exception to the rule of castration and so enjoys without limit. As such, the incest taboo does not apply to him. As Lacan explains, the father of *jouissance* is always already dead leaving only his patrilineal Name to limit the subject's access to *jouissance* and to constitute her as a desiring subject (Ethics

309). Similarly, the children have no direct access to the grandfather throughout the narrative, and they finally discover that he has been dead for the last eight months of their incarceration. Their imprisonment is predicated on a myth, but this revelation exposes the desire of the mother as the central impasse preventing the children from escaping the attic.

Negotiating the desire of the mother is a precarious and necessary manoeuvre in the procedure through which the infant becomes a subject. Famously, Lacan likens the desire of the mother to a crocodile mouth which may snap shut and devour the infant if the name-of-the father does not intervene and place a prop in her crocodile mouth to prevent the child from being entombed within her desire (*Seminar XVI* 129). The crocodile image resonates with the Foxworthy children incarcerated at the whim of the mother's desire without a protective father to ensure their ability to leave the attic. As Bruce Fink points out, the desire of the mother indicates both the infant's desire for the mother and the mother's own unpredictable and restless desire. Within the family drama, the infant attempts to fulfil the mother's desire. Necessarily failing to gratify the mother, the infant realises that the mother desires the phallus as symbolised by the father, although anything that draws the mother's attention from the infant serves as the phallus. This recognition coincides with the institution of the incest taboo—the social law alienating the infant from a total unity with the mother's body described by Lacan as the name-of-the-father or the paternal metaphor.

Flowers in the Attic begins with a description of Cathy and Chris watching the mother apply her make-up before the father's return home when "her lips curved in a welcoming smile that lit up our father's eyes, and he 'd take her in his arms, and stare down into her face as if he hadn't seen her for at least a year" (5). At this point, desires appear to be circulating within the family in a socially prescribed manner. The mother and father are the objects of each other's desire, and their children watch and learn. With the death of the father, these familial coordinates directing the children's desire into socially acceptable forms no longer function, and the children risk death as the desire of the mother overwhelms them. At first, she justifies the situation to the children as a temporary measure designed to keep them hidden until she has regained the grandfather's affection, and can reveal their existence without compromising her inheritance. At this point, Cathy and Chris's

desire is the mother's desire. They fit in with her plans, and share her desire for wealth and acceptance. However, the children remain in the attic for more than three years, and they see less and less of Momma. Her desire is engaged elsewhere and she remarries without the children's knowledge. Until her remarriage, Chris remains enthralled by the maternal body as indicated previously by her seductive, "Kiss, kiss, kiss, finger his hair, stroke his cheek, draw his head against her soft, swelling breasts, and let him drown in the sensuality of being cuddled close to that creamy flesh that must excite even a youth of his tender years" (170). On the other hand, Cathy doubts Momma from the outset. In true gothic style, Cathy's doubts about Momma are apprehended in bodily signs, "A cold chill shivered down my spine" (16). Furthermore, Cathy attributes her special relationship with her father to her physical resemblance to Momma who Cathy recognises as her rival for the father's attention, " 'I look like you,' I said, still feeling some of that envy I always had, because I came in second after her" (14). This narrative simulates the populist reading of Freud's Oedipal love story with the daughter desiring daddy and the son desiring mummy, but it is the Oedipal taboo that propels the child of either sex to abandon the mother's body suggesting that Cathy is more firmly established as a desiring subject. Not only does she recognise the lack in Momma, but also the Father is dead so she must search for a substitute. However, she is bound to her mother by the aggressivity and envy associated with Imaginary where the subject's relation to others is cannibalistic and she both seeks and fears absorption in the other. Cathy envies and rejects the mother she resembles.

Representing the opposing urge of the dyadic Imaginary, Chris tries to merge with the desire of the mother. He is unable to act because he is enthralled by Momma and does not recognise her as a desiring and lacking subject until she remarries. This information enables him to plan an escape. It sets his desire in motion, but this desire travels only as far as his sister whose appearance and behaviour is likened to Momma's throughout the novel. Again, she rivals Momma for Chris's affections, "I cupped his face in my palms first, then drew his head down to my breast as I had seen Momma do in the past" (268). Still, Chris is unable to leave without a further provocation as supplied by Cathy. Upon finding and reading a book illustrating the sexual act, Cathy loses the innocence associated with childhood and assumes the position of the seductive woman. During one of their secret explorations of the house, she finds Momma's new husband, Bart, asleep, and kisses him placing

herself once again in the position of rival. This rivalry continues throughout the series and Bart becomes one of Cathy's husbands in a later novel. Nonetheless, Bart acts as the necessary prop to keep the crocodile mouth of the mother's desire open long enough for the children to escape the domestic and enter the wider social world beyond. When Momma moves out of the mansion with Bart without telling the children, Chris discovers that Momma is absent, the Grandfather is dead, and the Grandmother is bald and, by implication, impotent. Finally, he learns that Momma has been poisoning the children with arsenic and is responsible for Cory's death. No longer is there the impediment of mother love to prevent the children from leaving the family, but the cost of knowledge is steep.

Once Chris knows that Cathy has kissed Bart, he becomes "primitive, savage" (297) and rapes Cathy: "he took me, and forced in that swollen, rigid male sex part of him that had to be satisfied. It drove into my tight and resisting flesh which tore and bled" (298). Knowledge about the desire of the mother for the phallus and about sexual division releases Chris and Cathy from domestic incarceration and sets their ill aimed desire into motion. Knowledge corrupts. The innocence of childhood and suburbia are corrupted by puberty, sex, wealth and lineage. In terms of sexual relations, Chris must inhabit the uncontrollable, savage masculine and Cathy the duplicitous, passive feminine. Cathy responds to Chris as would any heroine in a ripped bodice—she wants him and blames her feminine wiles, "I played upon his needs, testing my femininity, having my own burning yearnings for fulfilment"(299). This bifurcation of sexual behaviours into the masculine active and aggressive versus the feminine passive and manipulative represents one of the greatest dangers to the identificatory girl reader for some feminist critics. Certain romance narratives rely on this dyadic coupling where rape is a manifestation of feminine as much as masculine desire, but the girl reader may recognise her own complicated position in Cathy without replicating the outcome. After all, the desiring female adolescent body is problematic both for its inhabitant and her others.

Denied the opportunity to enact her sexual desires, the girl must gather her pleasures where she may. Fictional as opposed to actual rape permits erotic pleasures without admitting an active female sexual desire. Granted, this reinforces the feminine position of being the phallus for the man, but it might also allow the reader to experience sexual pleasure without threatening her ambiguous position as

a chaste proto-woman. Of all the difficulties associated with assuming the feminine position, the management of sexual desire presents the most extreme problem for the girl. Despite occupying a sexually capable female body, the girl is supposed to control and limit her sexual expression. Regardless of changes in sexual mores during the latter half of the twentieth century, sex is still associated with risk for the teenage girl. Whether through the threat of 'teen pregnancy' or the ongoing deployment of terms like 'slut' and 'whore', the adolescent girl is split between restraint and desire. Fictional rape represents an opportunity for erotic pleasure as well as a reinforcement of sexual division and masculine power.

This particular rape is further complicated by the sibling relationship and family history. It is likely that the girl reader will be further disturbed by the scene because of its violation of the incest taboo as well as its violation of the female body. This rape cannot be fully transformed into an affirmation of the passive power of the feminine and romantic due to the horror aroused by the consanguine relationship. The Foxworth family repeat their original sin and, again, mother love is perverted, and the foundational social law against incest is broken. In the novel, this horror relates not only to the moment of violation, but also to the familial repetition of ill-aimed desire. Coalescing in this scene are the oppositions of innocence versus sin, free will versus destiny, masculine versus feminine and adult versus child. Despite their own efforts and the surveillance of the grandmother, the siblings re-enact the Foxworthy family drama proving that they are indeed "the devil's spawn". As Cathy has already deduced "Devil's issue was the same as devil's spawn—something evil, rotten, born to be bad" (99). Sin is inscribed in Cathy by the words of her grandparents. Once Cathy passes through puberty and becomes a woman, she loses her innocence, her femininity is her destiny and she assumes her guilt. The fall of Adam and Eve underpins this tale of sin originating with the Grandfather of *jouissance* as the satanic figure who creates the conditions for Eve's seduction of Adam. Inescapably, Cathy inherits the sins of the mother: the elemental sins of the Woman that forever condemns men to yearn for the original state of blissful union they have always already lost.

The deadly pleasures of mother love are enhanced in this narrative by a textual insistence on the developing body, its functions, its pleasures and pains, and its erotic charge. The Grandmother's rules establish a regime over the body which

must always be kept clean, never be seen naked or played with, never make noise, and never lose control of its basic functions. Similarly, the children are to keep their surroundings clean and tidy with particular reference to those domestic requirements for clothing, cleansing and covering the body: toilet, bath, sheets and towels. Set against the grandmother's regulations are childish and innocent bodily pleasures as represented in the actions of the young twins:

The twins loved to be naked and play babies. They laughed and giggled when they used terms such as 'do-do' and 'twiddle-dee', and enjoyed looking at the places where do-do came from, and wondered why Cory's twiddle-dee maker was so different from Carrie's (125).

These pleasures are associated with a lack of control as Cathy describes the difficulty of getting the smaller children to the toilet in time. The text is inscribed with the pleasure and repugnance associated with urinary and faecal release, control and substance. The naive charm of 'dodo' and 'twiddle-dee' turns to disgust when the older children have to manage twins' wet beds and diarrhoea, or they have to clean up after the toilet overflows. The laws of the grandmother transform innocence into taboo. Oral pleasures and distastes also mark the text. Both the cold miserable meals and occasional treats eaten by the children are described and designated qualities according to texture accentuating the combined oral sensations of taste and texture. For instance, Carrie describes cranberry salad as "lumpy-bumpy stuff" (137). When the Grandmother punishes the children by denying them food for a week, Chris feeds the twins his own blood and skins and guts mice in anticipation of eating them alive. (The arrival of food rescues the children from a feast of raw mice). Finally, the children are slowly poisoned by arsenic sprinkled donuts that eventually kill Cory. From gravy to lollies to raw mice to arsenic, in *Flowers in the Attic* taking food into the body can be sweet, repulsive, aberrant or deadly. The boundary dissolves between that which should be incorporated as nourishment and that which should be repelled as dangerously or perversely other.

According to Lacan, the oral, anal and genital erogenous zones are those areas of the body invested with an erotic charge by the infantile memory trace of the actions of caregivers in feeding, organising, stroking, touching and examining the infant's body (Ragland). Each attentive gesture cuts into the world of indistinguishable unity insisting on a part rather than the whole, and maps the body through a series of

presences and absences, containment and release, pleasure and displeasure, inside and outside, self and other. According to Lacan,

The cut remains, for this cut remains present in that which distinguishes the drive from the organic function it inhabits; . . . The very delimitation of the "erogenous zone" that the drive isolates from the metabolism of the function . . . is the result of a cut (*coupure*) expressed in the anatomical mark (*trait*) of a margin or border—lips, the enclosure of teeth, the rim of the anus, the tip of the penis, the vagina, the slit formed by the eyelids, even the horn shaped aperture of the ear. . . . Observe that this mark of the cut is no less obviously present in the object described by analytic theory: the mamilla, faeces, the phallus (imaginary object), the urinary flow (*Écrits* 314-5).

For some girl readers, these reminders of infantile sensations may evoke distant pleasures of flow, but the same sensations also threaten the subject's imagined bodily coherence. She is not regressing to an earlier truth so much as being haunted by the recognition that the unified body is an ongoing delusion. This recognition might overwhelm the girl reader were she not safely distant from the disturbing materials. When the reader identifies with Cathy's disgust at the overflowing toilet or the dead mice, she can be attracted and repelled simultaneously. Recall of the mapping of the infantile body into its differentiated parts returns the reader to the mother as primary caregiver and controller of the infant's world. Furthermore, the maternal body is evoked through blood which features throughout this novel as a signifier of the maternal and breached borders and bodies. The blood of Cathy's period transgresses the boundary between the child and the Woman and putative mother; the blood from Grandmother's whipping of Momma, Cathy and Chris breaks the boundary of skin that physically separates the inside of the subject from the outside, hinting at a uterine existence when the subject was inside and cushioned by blood; Chris letting his blood to feed his siblings transgresses the taboo against cannibalism whilst also suggesting maternal blood sacrifice; and the blood signifying Cathy's broken virginity violates laws prohibiting so-called underage sex, rape and incest as well as propelling her into the position of the Woman in her manifestation as the mother. This text emphasises the splitting of skin for developmental, punitive, sexual and sacrificial purposes associating blood with the normal and the abnormal, the evil and the good, the perverse and the conventional. In this text, the mother absents herself and leaky and bleeding bodies threaten to disintegrate, the toilet overflows, the food is

unappealing or lethal, and the children look in the wrong direction to each other. Inevitably, lack of maternal nurture results in the death of one twin and the stunted development of the other as their bodies, psyches and desires develop abnormally. The importance of good mothering in providing wholesome food and teaching bodily control is impressed upon the girl reader.

Flowers in the Attic can be read as a primer in populist child development theory as it tracks the defective maturation of the four children. Just as the twins are the foci of infantile pleasures and displeasures, Cathy and Chris regard and remark on the bodily changes associated with puberty: "Peculiar things were happening to our bodies. We grew hair where we hadn't had hair before – funny-looking, crispy, amber-coloured hair, darker than was on our heads" (180). Although Cathy dislikes this particular signifier of sexual maturity, she welcomes the development of breasts: "I was very pleased I was beginning to swell out in front – when I was alone, in a private place – but I didn't want anyone else to notice" (180). When Chris does look at her breasts she believes "those little hills betrayed my modesty" (180). Cathy continues to suggest ambivalence about becoming a woman alternating between pride and shame as her body transforms. Chris informs her about the male body and nocturnal emissions whilst Momma tells her about menstruation. Initially, Cathy tries to reject bloody periods and childbirth as feminine imperatives associated with pain in the first case and a loss of personal fulfilment in the second. Nonetheless, disgust and desire coexist and Cathy wakes "up throbbing and yearning for some fulfilment that I could never reach" (219). The adolescent girl reader may well share Cathy's ambivalence about the meaning of puberty and the constraints of womanhood.

The attention to bodies and bodily changes featured in *Flowers in the Attic* is rarely found in adolescent or adult fiction. Furthermore, Cathy describes all of these oral, anal and genital pleasures and displeasures in sensory terms. The privileging of bodily sensation as a form of information is consistent with melodramatic tone of the novel, but it also accentuates the transitional status accorded the female pubescent body in the discourse of adolescence. The pubescent body in development theory is volatile, unpredictable, changeable and dangerous, and the reading girl is likely to experience her own body in these terms. Because the adolescent girl occupies a pivotal position in the persistence of the myth of the

Woman, her relationship with law and desire places her in an impossible position. To occupy the feminine position she must be the phallus for the man masquerading in the various guises of Womanliness and attracting his desire, yet she must remain chaste within the law. In terms of the young adolescent girl, the sexual act is forbidden regardless of the girl's desire. Subjects are constituted through and by desire, so the girl reader is a desiring subject, but her access to phallic *jouissance* is limited by legal, social and cultural prohibitions. Her imprisonment within these laws is not merely figurative given that her freedom of movement is curtailed by such mechanisms as curfews, surveillance and 'legal age' requirements. Moreover for many a girl, her keeper is her mother, and her jail is her home. The girl might identify Cathy's incarceration with her own.

For the reading girl, Cathy's imprisonment in the family home may project her own confinement in exaggerated terms. Circumscribed with rules imposed by her family, the young adolescent girl could well feel trapped in the domestic. Her time and space are controlled by strict curfews, organised timetables and restrictions on access to particular people and places. The Symbolic Other of law and society condemn the girl to remain in the family, despite her desire to turn away. Within the psychoanalytic family drama, the girl seeks to differentiate herself from her mother whose lack she fears repeating and whose potency she denies. After all, her mother is both the origin with which the girl was once united, and her rival for recognition from the father who she imagines as having the phallus. Underpinning and undermining this psychoanalytic family drama is the mystery of femininity. In simple terms, Freudian theory cannot account for the structure of femininity because normative development dictates that the feminine subject must switch her object of desire from the originary body of the mother to that of the interceding father. For the boy child, this transfer is logical since he has only to shift his desire for the mother to a substitute feminine subject. The Lacanian solution is to recognise that the interdiction against the mother's body establishes desire to be or to have the phallus regardless of the sexed body hence the sex of the love object is an effect of culture rather than nature. Ultimately, "there is no sexual rapport" regardless of whether desire is ill or well aimed, and this is the lack that the subject and the Other conspire to hide. The nuclear family functions as the pre-eminent ground for the sleight of hand that establishes the subject whose desire will propel her fruitless and endless search for a fallacious unity in relationship. Although Lacan's

recognition that all non-psychotic subjects undergo radical separation from the mother's body and adopt a masculine or feminine position, the fantasy of the Woman maintains the girl's difficulties with her mother. To be or not to be her mother; this is the girl's problem.

The mother continues to be a problem in the adolescent girl's life because the family reproduces culture and sustains the myth of the Woman. The proximity of Woman to the object *a* in Lacan's graph of sexuation accounts for the ongoing reification and vilification of this non-existent category. Because Woman is a symptom of man rather than a universal category, no subject can embody the fantasy sustained through powerful chains of signification: the discourse of femininity. This discourse attempts to determine the Woman, and embodied women must struggle with the fantastic forms projected onto her. None of the names of the Woman can satisfactorily limit or define the embodied female subject, yet she cannot escape her overly determined body. "Mother" is one of a list of powerful signifiers associated with the cipher: Woman. "Mother" places Cathy and her girl reader in a predicament. The Lacanian topography of the subject traces the emanation of rivalry to the mirror subject of the Imaginary, but envy and aggressivity are intrinsic to the girl's relationship with the figure of the mother in the Symbolic since she must compete with her for the recognition of the other (male) subject. To attract his attention, the girl must be like the mother as the text insists Cathy is like Momma, but to submit to the prohibition on incest and take her place in the Symbolic, she must differentiate her desire from her the desire of the Other, her mother, as Cathy does not. At the same time, the girl yearns as hopelessly as any subject for reabsorption into full unity with another as represented by the body of the mother from whom she must separate. Should she stay or should she go? Furthermore, she may become a mother herself, so she must engage with the fiction of the all powerful, all embracing, all caring Mother. From the reading girl's perspective, a failed mother represents a model on which she can improve, but she will also confront the hyper femininity that distracts and disables Corrine as a mother.

To add to the girl's difficulties as represented by Cathy, she must contend with other manifestations of the fantastic Woman. If she adopts the feminine structure of being the phallus, her masquerade can attract several of the names of Woman

such as Virgin or Slut. The first term reifies an absence of sexualisation, and the second term vilifies an excess of sexualisation. Like Cathy, the girl reader must learn to navigate her sexually desiring and desirable body between these polarised positions, and Cathy's capacity to arouse inappropriate and uncontrollable desire in Chris accentuates the danger of such a body. Because she is a symptom of man, he cannot leave the Woman alone. All in all, *Flowers in the Attic* presents the adolescent girl reader with a nightmare of excessive femininity and womanhood from the perspective of an adolescent girl whose narrative encapsulates and exaggerates the problematic position the girl occupies within the nuclear family and its psychodrama. Perhaps the popularity of this text amongst adolescent girl readers is not so surprising when considered in these terms.

In contrast to Picoult and Andrews, the Australian author, Sonya Hartnett, is known for prize winning rather than book selling. Her list of prizes culminates in the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, the world's most lucrative award for children's and young adult's fiction. The novel I consider next, *Sleeping Dogs* (1996), won the Miles Franklin Katherine Mitchell Award and was shortlisted for a number of other writing honours. However, recognition from arbiters of the cultural aesthetic does not guarantee popularity amongst adolescent readers, and it is difficult to find any net chatter about *Sleeping Dogs*. Unlike *The Pact* and *Flowers in the Attic*, *Sleeping Dogs* is categorised as young adult fiction although there has been debate about the validity of this classification on the grounds that the main protagonists are older than the assumed reader, and the resolution is not optimistic. Indeed, it seems that Sonya Hartnett's work may have received this classification because of her similarity to S.E. Hinton in that her first novel was published when she was sixteen, and it was introduced to publishers through another young adult fiction author, Robert Cormier. In addition to adult criticisms about the classification, the silence of the girl readers on the net might indicate that such criticism is justified. On the other hand, this silence could suggest that *Sleeping Dogs* does not offer the excessive pleasures of the previous texts.

The structure, style and tone of the novel are gothic, and the narrative is similarly focussed on a dysfunctional nuclear family and brother-sister incest. The narrative is consistent with the gothic form and melodramatic mood in its concern with ethics, morality and the nature of good and evil with an emphasis on the fallibility of

human judgement. In this sense, it shares the same terrain as *The Pact* and *Flowers in the Attic*, yet the emotional tone is restrained rather than sensational. Secrecy and menace pervade the text leading to a dark and disturbing resolution, but the language and structure are frugal avoiding the pathos of the other two novels. The incestuous relationship between Michelle and Jordan Willow provides the central problematic underpinning the plot, but this relationship is barely registered beyond its capacity to perturb the strange patterns of the Willow family life. The narrative point of view moves between the different children and the invasive visitor, Bow Fox, drawing back from the characters to describe places and events with authorial omniscience. As is typical in the Australian gothic tradition, the bush operates as an open air version of the ancient castle reproducing the fears associated by G. Turcotte as emanating from the colonial experience: "isolation, entrapment, fear of pursuit and fear of the unknown" (1). The front cover displays a quote from the well known American young adult fiction author, Robert Cormier, that clearly marks the novel as thematically and structurally gothic: "Hartnett invites us into a decaying Garden of Eden where the Willow family lives and where sin is somehow innocent". Again, the text focuses on the distinctions between guilt and innocence, nature and culture, good and evil. Despite the realist reporting of domestic detail, *Sleeping Dogs* is formed through a transgressive and troubling narrative of family dysfunction in a specifically Australian context. Regardless of the silence of adolescent readers about the novel, and its subtle and controlled tone, *Sleeping Dogs* offers the girl reader excesses aplenty.

Griffin Willow, his wife and five children live on a failing farm that doubles as a caravan park. The family are isolated from any social contact except for the transient caravanners and a suspicious and wary local community. The father, Griffin, represents a particular type of Australian masculinity. An anti-social Vietnam veteran who wants dominion over his land and his family, he is lost in failure and anger fuelled by alcohol. In traditional patriarchal terms, the family lives in relative segregation from the public sphere according to his need and decree:

Griffin orphaned, Griffin unwanted—Griffin has a word for it, he calls himself a *foundling*. Griffin looking for love and being denied, Griffin endeavouring and failing, Griffin hindered by everything beyond his control. Griffin, all his life brewing a bitter desire to be left alone but wanting a family of his own,

and managing to combine the two, he had his family, and everyone left him alone (72).

Like the *jouissant* father, Griffin originates without precedent as a “foundling”, and he rules over his domestic empire without pretenders. Exemplifying the masculine form, he behaves as if he has the phallus and rules his familial subjects accordingly, but he reveals the masculine delusion. Like all subjects, he is castrated and lacking, and only the collusion of his family support his illusion of control. In his youth, he has rejected one aspect of the Symbolic Other after another, abandoning the study of law to join the navy only to leave these authoritative institutions to return to the traditional role of “landowner” and patriarch (67). This role sustains the masculine delusion as it permits the masculine subject to lord it over all in his immediate domain. He isolates his wife, Grace, from her birth family subjecting her totally to his demands; he proliferates familial subjects impregnating Grace eight times and producing five living offspring to do his bidding; he favours his adult daughter who sacrifices her sibling lover in an act of fealty; he disdains the caravanners but still holds court over them. Furthermore, a substantial number of the families who pass through the caravan park are not accompanied by fathers reinforcing the image of Griffin as the *jouissant* father—the uncastrated man who can enjoy all the women and brooks no rival. Nonetheless, he proves unable to control his subjects since “all subjects are submitted to the phallic signifier” including Griffin Willow (Seminar XX 73).

Even though the family maintains the illusion of total compliance, the land does not submit:

it would seem the land did not want to be owned by him, and foiled his plans again and again. Crops died, animals died, Griffin claimed his dreams died as he shifted around the countryside, searching for some plot that did not hold a grudge against him (67).

This is Griffin’s third farm and it cannot be sustained without the added income from the caravan park. The rundown farm is a resonant sign in the Australian psyche where drought conditions prevail, crops fail and domesticated animals die of starvation. The land does not thrive when subjected to colonial farming techniques dashing many a coloniser’s dream of transforming the land and the self into the image of the gentleman farmer and his bountiful estate. The unfamiliarity of the Australian bush to its colonisers, and its intransigence to their control, has rendered

the bush as an uncanny location in the Australian gothic. This association of the land with the uncanny is accentuated by the origins of the nation state as a prison, and the massacre and abjection of the Indigenous inhabitants (Turcotte). As such, the Australian bush functions as a post edenic landscape where colonisers are brutal and doomed. Griffin personifies this failed Australian masculinity. In contrast, his eldest son, Edward can make the land productive. The vegetable garden is, "Edward's realm. He likes knowing that, while nothing will grow for Griffin, under his own hands things sprout, come rapidly to life, seem eager to thrive" (62). Unlike his father, Edward's does not seek to dominate nature, "He treats the land with respect, even reverence" (62). As such, he exposes his father's impotence and status as another castrated subject who does not have the phallus.

Griffin's attempts to deny his castrated status are most evident in his treatment of the third oldest child in the family whose paternity he questions,

The Willows have black hair, all except Jordan, who is yellow as corn, and their fair greying mother. This makes Jordan a favourite with his mother and attracts his father's evil eye. 'Is this child mine?' Griffin asks. 'Look at his brothers and sisters – is this child mine?' (12).

Rather than occupying the role of the *jouissant* father who is certain of his mastery, Griffin is threatened by the most basic of phallic fear: the masculine fear that underpins the institution of marriage, the fear of *not* being the father, the fear of women cheating and lying, the fear of *not* having the phallus. He denies his fear of lack with brutality aimed at the object that unsettles his authority as the master:

He must not believe his own doubts, because when he thrashes Jordan and Grace makes feeble noises to defend her favourite, Griffin says, 'If he's mine I can do as I like with him' (12).

Jordan had hit his father back on a single occasion, but his sister, Michelle, persuades him that the beatings are justifiable punishment for their incestuous relationship—a relationship about which Griffin knows nothing. Similarly, "Edward thinks that Jordan deserves what he is going to get, and if this is an unreasonable thing, that is just the lie of the land" (14). The family are complicit in maintaining Griffin's illusory power and concealing the secret that will expose his elemental lack.

Like the land and the farmhouse, the mother of the Willow family, Grace, barely functions. Grace's submission to Griffin's will has virtually erased her as a subject.

She is detached from social contact beyond her family, and her capacity to play a maternal role has been exhausted by childbirth, miscarriages and disappointment. Unable to prevent him beating Jordan, she hides the bruises and fails to act. Consequently, she has facilitated her husband's brutal dominion. Denied any illusions of agency, Grace retreats even further for:

Grace treasures her children and her husband, but long ago the care of them had become more than she could bear . . . her mind travelled and travelled until it reached a quiet dim place that she found greatly to her liking (15).

This quiet dim place is associated with Grace's beloved teapot decorated with a painting of "a collection of women in Victorian dress. The women are very tiny and they stand and lie around a tree" (14). The teapot is also a music box that plays a song redolent of slavery, home and death: *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*. Grace "thinks it a very beautiful thing and it reminds her of beautiful times and places" (14) where she can withdraw from the sounds of Griffin beating Jordan, and the sight of the derelict farmhouse and parched land. Grace retreats from this place of inharmonious relations between man and wife, parents and children, human and nature into a fundamental fantasy of past harmony with nature and release from alienation through death. So tenuous are Grace's links with the social Other within and beyond her family, she is barely a subject at all. Even so, her fantasy is typically founded to cover up the traumatic knowledge of her (non) relationship with the other sex by imagining that she can fulfil masculine desires in a past that supports the illusion of the perfect patriarchal family where women can frolic at leisure in a pastoral idyll.

The five living children react differently to the family circumstances, but all are subject to their father's desires. Edward, the eldest, wanted to buy and train a racehorse, but his father's scorn puts pay to his desire. Instead, he maintains the farm proving more capable than Griffin as a farmer, but submitting to a joyless existence as a consequence:

'We must be ruthless,' Edward snarls, 'because we lead ruthless lives: you, of anyone should understand that. This is our existence, Jordan, this house, this land, that father, that mother – there's no pity, there's no mercy, there's probably no escape. It is *hard*, Jordan, and we have to be hard to survive it, and the best we can do is fight anything that threatens to make it worse' ().

Edward's submits to a joyless existence giving way on his desire and submitting to a life predicated in a fruitless stoicism. The second eldest child is Michelle, her father's favourite. She appears to please herself, and replicates Griffin's disdain for the social world of the townspeople and caravan people. She pleases herself in terms of her op shop clothing, petty theft and rude behaviour. Although she shops and provides meals for the Willow family, she shows no interest or commitment to these or any other domestic tasks. Despite her feminine beauty, Michelle Willow is structured as masculine. She does not need to be the phallus and masquerade as the Woman because she acts as one who has the phallus: she is her father's favourite; she does as she wants; she initiates an incestuous relationship with her younger brother; she insists that he accept the beatings from his father as just punishment; she betrays Jordan to the father. Michelle is positioned to support the *jouissant* father from whom she derives her power. The youngest child, Jennifer who is known as Speck, demonstrates a similarly masculine structure with her minor acts of sadism against the caravan children and her refusal to be the phallus for anyone. The young female characters in *Sleeping Dogs* are structured as masculine in their conviction of their own superiority, but they continue to be caught up in the desire of the Other as they accept Griffin's authority and their consequent isolation.

Interestingly, the characters in this novel who manifest the feminine position are the two boys, Jordan and Oliver. Oliver is fifteen and desperate for friendship. He dreams of going to university, but doubts his ability to follow his desire. When an artist, Bow Fox, arrives at the caravan park, Oliver seeks to please him by showing him beautiful views and discussing the Willow family. It is his will to please, to be the phallus for the masculine other, that causes Oliver to expose the secret of Michelle and Jordan's sexual relationship to Bow Fox. Oliver's need for attention reveals the normative feminine position of lack and wanting, but Jordan's feminine structure reaches further than the normative indicating that Other ecstatic *jouissance* associated with the feminine position. Jordan does not entirely comply with the law of the father in that something of him escapes despite the beatings to which he submits. A certain otherness surrounds his observations and drawings of birds in flight and his dream

of a slim sailing boat . . . he wishes nothing more than to board this boat, waiting for it to leap the wave and skip forward, fast as a hound, to feel the ocean pounding through the floor. Away, away, away (44).

In his other worldliness and his misery, Jordan bears the mark of the ecstatic. His feminine structure is observable in the dynamic between himself and his sister/lover: it is Michelle who instigates and directs her sexual relationship with Jordan, it is she who insists that he bear the punishment, and it is she who will betray him and make him pay with his life. In all of these respects, Jordan is marked by lack while Michelle denies lack. Nonetheless when Jordan leaps over a fallen tree, "he knows he can fly like a bird, jump like a horse, and he clears the log with his arms thrown out and laughing" (45). Finally, it is Jordan who is martyred when his father shoots him after the secrets and shame of the Willow family are breached.

So where might the girl reader identify herself in this family of battered, bent and deformed characters? According to the normative gender assumptions underpinning much of the work on identificatory reading surveyed in Chapter Three, she will identify with Michelle. Indeed, it is possible that she may initially be attracted to Michelle's non-compliance with the constraints of normative femininity especially when Bow Fox desires her and notices her beauty. Furthermore, the reader is unlikely to be deterred from identifying with Michelle by the incest because allusions to this relationship are muted with an accent on romance rather than aberrance. Although Jordan "has slipped uninvited into bed beside her" (1) on the first page, he is clothed and merely kisses Michelle and wishes her a happy birthday. As such, these discreet references are more likely to intrigue the girl reader than to repel her. However, it seems unlikely that the girl reader would continue to want to associate herself with this imperious, selfish and treacherous young woman as the narrative moves towards its conclusion. Furthermore, Michelle plays no more important a role than any of the other characters. In this sense, the text does not offer a singular point of identification, yet the reader is drawn constantly to Jordan who offers her a perspective on an unusual otherness. It is he who attracts the reader's attention. In his peculiar and poetic aberrance, Jordan's character typifies the gothic urge to disturb, but the boundaries that are transgressed in *Sleeping Dogs* differ from those that are unsettled in *The Pact* and *Flowers in the Attic*.

Although all three novels share the focus on family and morality, *Sleeping Dogs* enters different territory when it upsets the distinction between human and animal

behaviour. Before the Willow family are introduced to the reader, the text opens with a description of the farm dogs that belies and supplements the title:

THE DOGS DO NOT EVER REALLY SLEEP. Sometimes they close their eyes, often for long periods at a time, but always there remain one or two watchful in the dark, and while these are so the pack can be considered awake (1).

An immediate equivalence is drawn between the animal world and the human world in the paragraph following where Michelle "thinks the weight is an animal of some kind, wandered into the room and drawn by the sight of her, and it is not for some moments that she realises it is Jordan" (1). A later description of the sleeping patterns of the family reinforces this equivalence,

the entire Willow family has in them an incurable, lifelong insomnia. Two or three of them are always awake, no matter what the time, sentinels watching over nothing, waiting for nothing to happen (22-3).

Such correspondences occur throughout the text, so Grace's "knotted guts" from a tubal ligation recall the "falling gizzards" (4) of the sheep whose slaughter by Edward and Jordan is described in gory, savage detail. Similarly, Speck is "as quiet as a spider, nimble as a flea" (98). On the whole this association of the family with animals focuses on tribalism and savagery, but these qualities are not exclusive to the Willows. As his surname suggests, Bow Fox, the intruder who upsets the family balance and exposes its secret, is apparently more civilised but finally as brutal.

Bow Fox is an unusual visitor to the caravan park in that he is a single young man with illusions that he is escaping the system by travelling around painting picturesque scenes for an undiscerning market. Oliver takes a fancy to Bow Fox as someone he can talk to and assuage his loneliness, but Bow Fox takes a fancy to Michelle who does not respond to him. The family in the rotting farmhouse intrigue Bow Fox who recognises the power of the *jouissant* father over his stunted family, but his attempts to disrupt the imposed isolation and patriarchal control are motivated by his own desire for Michelle. His position in relation to the Willow family is intrusive, uninvited and oppositional: "If there was ever an example of nurture over-riding nature, your family is a prize! You should give yourselves up for scientific experiments" (88). Assuming that Jordan is the dominant partner in the relationship, Bow suggests to Jordan:

You should think of your sister. She deserves better – you know she deserves better. Let her get out, meet other men, experience new feelings. There’s a whole world of emotions that she’s being deprived. She’s a pretty girl, she deserves her chance” (89).

At this point, the girl reader may still identify with Michelle who is desired by her brother, indulged by her father and coveted by the stranger. She may want Michelle to escape the confines of her family as Bow Fox suggests, but she is unlikely to blame Jordan for Michelle’s situation. Jordan embodies beauty and innocence, and the reader has access to the dynamics of the Willow family that are occluded from Bow Fox’s partial gaze. Indeed, the reader knows that Bow Fox has it all wrong, and he as cunning and sly as his name suggests. Although his savagery is concealed by a civilised façade, Bow Fox displays the same asocial tendencies as Griffin Fox with a similar rhetoric of contempt to justify his egotism.

Bow Fox’s fear of dogs seems to be testament to his cultivated veneer, but the relation of animal and human in *Sleeping Dogs* is not simply oppositional. Despite the equivalences drawn between human and animal brutality, animals are also associated with loyalty, innocence and beauty. When the Willow siblings manipulate a ritual Christmas hunt so that Bow Fox is their prey, “He hears the dog baying and panting and he covers his head with his hands but hears them still, hears and smells them, feels the weight on his back, a nose digging in his armpit and his ear” (108). However, the dogs do not harm Bow Fox. In this novel, animals do not hurt humans; humans hurt humans and animals. Although the title and the opening paragraph indicate the bestiality of nature, savagery is finally recognised as a human attribute that interferes with justice. Throughout the text, one or another of the Willow siblings reads Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* as required by Griffin Willow, and the matter at the core of *Sleeping Dogs* is: who commits a crime, and who should be punished? This novel disturbs and does not restore domesticity at the heart of social stability. Contrary to the usual deployment of sibling incest as the sinful secret corrupting the dark heart of the gothic tale, Michelle and Jordan’s relationship is the catalyst rather than the crime. The crime is masculine desire because Griffin, Bow and Michelle pursue phallic *jouissance* to the cost of all others including the reading girl who must lose her connection with Jordan.

When Bow Fox writes to Griffin Willow to inform him of the relationship between Michelle and Jordan, Griffin likens them to animals: "Like dogs, Michelle, like animals! A sin against God! Filthy sinners, filthy disgusting animals, spitting in God's eye – " (122). Griffin understands the relationship in terms of sin, and he evokes the ultimate patriarch as the judge and victim of the act. Michelle claims she is blameless and that Jordan had forced himself upon her thus sacrificing Jordan to save herself. Consequently, Griffin shoots Jordan and his dog, but not before Jordan realises the limits of his existence:

He understands he will never leave the farm. He knows he inhabits his life but that he does not live it, he doesn't control it. He has a peculiar sense of being created before he was born. The farm and his father set the boundaries of how he may live, Michelle adds some small sparkle to that life, but Jordan merely drags himself after his body and after time. Yet he has something that defies tyranny. He has a gift for drawing and he has his fair colouring and if he has no true independence he has, instead, a freedom inside himself, a streak of wilfulness that Griffin will never thrash out of him (123).

It is this "something that defies tyranny" and "freedom inside himself" that intimate feminine *jouissance*—a *jouissance* predicated on recognising the limits of subjectivity and the social Other, and suggesting there is something more to the subject than she or he can distinguish. The girl reader is likely to identify with this feminine young man, but he is sacrificed to save his sister, his family and Bow Fox. In this text, the real excesses continue because they are the excesses of patriarchal and phallic power, the excessive need to deny lack. Ultimately, the innocent boy and his dog are punished whilst the guilty survive. The girl identifies transgression in the brutish behaviour of human beings, and with the dangerous beauty of feminine *jouissance*. As such, she reads the limits of both the masculine and feminine positions.

Familial excesses mark all three novels, and all explore the problems of femininity. The adolescent characters in these novels belong to families that are inverted and perverted. For the feminine subject, the central problem involves directing her desire away from her captivating family. The monstrous mother and despotic father figures are remnants of the infant's experience of separating from the illusion of blissful unity with the body of the mother, but they are also profoundly implicated in

representations of deviance. Through the transgressions of characters produced within aberrant family structures, the reading girl can consider the ethics of femininity and masculinity as well as indulging in the unconscious delights of perversity.

Chapter Six

Death by the Book

The perverse girl is a fearful figure: she may be contrary and deviate from the feminine path. In terms of reading, perversity is associated with excessive sex and violence, and the societal fear that the girl will be infected by the perversity of her chosen text. Often, popular commentary is focussed on sexual violence, masculinity and the boy viewer rather than femininity and the girl reader because he is the assumed perpetrator and she is his potential victim. Nonetheless, femininity is equally at stake in this argument. The public imagination features the girl in the lead role of victim for the perverse man, but she appears also as her own alter ego: the terrifyingly perverse Woman. Either way, perversity deflects the girl from her domestic and reproductive function, as neither the perverse woman nor the victim of perversity can become wife and mother. To preserve the domestic feminine, the girl reader must be protected from perverse materials on the same assumption outlined earlier: the text maketh the girl. Again, the key to public fears about the reader lie with her identifications: will she identify with the sadistic killer or the masochistic victim? Once more, moral conservatives fear her corruption and degeneration, and feminists fear her victimisation. When it comes to sex and violence, the social world of language and law suspects the text of being the murderer of the girl: the book did it.

The texts I examine in this chapter are distinguished by their insistence on blood and gore, and their associations with perversity, aberrance and deviance. I have chosen *Carrie* by the popular horror writer, Stephen King, and the true crime text, *An Evil Love: The Life of Frederick West* by Geoffrey Wansell. These are texts that terrify. *Carrie* aims to provide pleasure whereas *An Evil Love* aims to educate. When reading horror, the reader expects and invites a state of excitement, terror and disgust, and the genre works to induce these responses. Nearly all of Stephen King's fifty plus novels can be classified as horror, and *Carrie* clearly meets the criteria of the horror genre incorporating both fantastic and realistic events designed to appal and appeal the reader. In contrast, *An Evil Life* can be described as 'true

crime' writing because of its reporting of real crimes and focus on a non-fictional murderer. Nonetheless, I would suggest that the young girl reader might not be interested in this distinction. The attractions of true crime and horror narratives are similar in that they enable the reader to seek fear as enjoyment. Because I am interested in the horrified reader, I have chosen these particular books because one focuses on the adolescent girl as a supernatural murderer, and the other concentrates on a serial killer of young women. In one text, the girl is the perpetrator and in the other she is the victim; in both, girls are the subjects and objects of extreme violence with intense sexual connotations. Consequently, these two books are exemplary of the societal fears raised by the reading girl and her murderous books.

Admittedly, this chapter may appear redundant given that all the novels considered in the previous two chapters are marked by sex and violence. Both *Carrie* and *An Evil Life* feature monstrous mothers and families similar to those addressed previously. As such, they are equally excessive and engaged with the domestic feminine. They also share some generic features with *Flowers in the Attic*, which is frequently categorised as horror due to the graphic description of sadistic punishments and infanticide. Furthermore, Cathy's restless desire and the incestuous rape scene connect an atmosphere of heightened sexual feeling with deviant and sadistic behaviours. The young adult fiction novels I have examined are equally concerned with acts of murder and mayhem. For instance *Strange Objects* is graphically violent and, although there are no direct descriptions of sexual acts, desire for the girl, Ella, haunts the text further inflaming the madness of the two central male characters. All in all, much of the material read by adolescents seems to incorporate some degree of sexual and violent content. Still, not all of this material is subject to the same degree of censure. Some such texts are approved as exemplary reading for adolescents. For instance, John Marsden recommends the Brett Easton Ellis novel, *Less than Zero*, as suitable reading for adolescents. It features male prostitution, a snuff movie, and the rape of a twelve year old girl in its description of the lives of a group of wealthy, young Californians. Presumably, the text is validated for its critique of the culture it represents, and it is assumed that the reader will receive it as such because Easton Ellis is considered a literary writer. As I argued in Chapter Three, there is a tendency amongst theorists to conflate the literary with the educative, and the popular with the destructive. The

authorisation of such texts as *Less than Zero* supposes a literary text that leads the reader to reject rather than reproduce the behaviours it describes.

Recommendations of novels featuring sexual and violent content indicate that the young adult reader may read sex and violence as long as the text is deployed as a deterrent.

Whilst some of the novels examined in the previous chapter such as *Strange Objects* and *Sleeping Dogs* are often placed in the category of text as disincentive to deviance, *Flowers in the Attic* is more likely to be located in the category of text as enticement due to its popular status and lack of literary finesse. However, my reason for addressing this text in the previous chapter is the significance of the domestic feminine in its attraction. I would argue that this preoccupation with the maternal and familial is a key indicator of the gothic (Kaplan). Despite the porous state of the boundary between the gothic and horror genres, horror is distinguished by its insistence on the bodily violations and transgressions. As such, the texts are structured around the key distinctions between heteronormative masculinity and femininity: active/passive, sadist/masochist, violator/violated. Despite this textual insistence on the dynamic between these couples, examination of the texts reveals a less predictable pattern of reading positions and related pleasures. Regardless of the moral conservatism of both text and context, the girl can read perversely.

Representations of sex and violence underpin the cultural fears associated with the vulnerability of the girl reader. During the nineteenth century, the young woman was positioned "as a touchstone against which to place fiction with undesirably explicit sexual content" (Flint 13). She represents a limit to the democracy of the book as she is invoked in order to censor and limit access to particular texts (Kendrick). Thus, she has been crucial to the categorisation of some material as obscene, indecent or pornographic. Although nomination of the young woman as an especially impressionable reader has become less explicit during the last few decades, an examination of the books banned or challenged within American schools and libraries demonstrates an ongoing tendency to ban books for young readers that contest the codes and conventions of heteronormativity (ALA). One of the interesting features of this list is the predominance of children's and young adult fictions. Most of them are challenged on the grounds of being sexually explicit. Although the gender of the presumed reader is not specified in the list, an

examination of the content of the texts shows an imbalance in that representations of male homosexual activity are opposed whereas any female sexual activity amongst adolescents seems to cause antagonism. A number of books on the 2008 list were challenged on the grounds that they depicted male homosexual relationships. These include *The Kite Runner* (Husseini) which describes the rape of a young boy by a group of older boys, and *And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson & Parnell), a picture book about a baby penguin reared by two male penguins. However, those titles on the list addressed to girl readers such as the *Gossip Girl* series (von Ziegesar) and a series by Laura Myracle are challenged on the grounds of heterosexual activity. Judy Blume's *Forever* has been a perennial on the banned books list since its publication in 1975 because it tells the story of teenage girl's first sexual relationship without condemnation. Despite an apparent shift of focus amongst the censors from the girl reader to the boy reader who might be tempted into homosexuality, her moral guardians continue to exclude her from any text allowing for the expression of pleasurable teenage sexuality. While such mild mannered books are contested, the young reader is able to access the same dark hearted texts as her parents through public libraries, bookshops and friend to friend loans. Furthermore, the girl's capacity to access gore is also evident through the popularity of teen horror films such as *Scream*, *Prom Night* or *Resident Evil* as well as through popular writers of horror such as King. This is a generation of girls who know that they must be the final girl if they are to face down danger (Clover).

Reasons for public sensitivity about the confluence of girls, sex and violence are many and varied. It may be that the exclusion of girls from texts featuring sex and violence preserves this domain as a male only club. As such, violent and pornographic texts sustain the illusion that men have the phallus as evidenced by their violent and sexual possession of women. Jane Ussher remarks on the sharing of pornography amongst men as a means of demonstrating masculinity. Presumably the reverse is true for women: a woman sharing explicitly sexual texts with other women may be considered as less feminine than her more secretive sister. Nonetheless, access to such material became far more democratic as a consequence of the so-called sexual revolution of the second half of the twentieth century, and the new technology of video became available in the same historical period allowing for the consumption of taboo film material within the domestic space of the home. Both of these events have caused a great deal of cultural panic

about the effects of pornographic and violent texts on the integrity of the family and the innocence of childhood. For feminism, female pleasure continues to animate controversies about sexuality and censorship. Personally, I find it impossible to adopt an absolute position on these issues because my body and mind enact the same cultural conflict when I am faced with erotic, pornographic or violent texts. Stimulated by danger, my body engages with the text and rebels against my mind which thinks it should not react. Sometimes my body responds to textual scenes that would repel me in material form—I think. I experience excitement, revulsion, shame and confusion as I read, view or imagine. Nonetheless, I love to read the dark side. These are secrets I rarely share, but I am a woman of my times and my younger sisters may be less restrained.

As raunchy girls shake their booties and enhance their breasts, feminists such as Ariel Levi warn of a hypersexualised world in which young women objectify themselves and others, yet claim empowerment from acts of public sexual display. At the start of the twenty first century, girls stand accused by the popular press of excessive drinking, fighting and fucking. In the UK, the term 'ladettes' has been adopted to refer to girls who trespass into the stereotypical masculine behaviours of drinking, swearing, smoking, fighting and fucking around. Australia applies the term 'bogan' to lads and ladettes alike in a rare display of non-gendering, but the press has still focussed on female bogan behaviour in particular. Wherever she appears and whatever she is called, the girl who acts like a boy disturbs the social law: boys will be boys and girls will be girls (Jackson). When the girl engages with behaviours or representations of sex and violence, she raises fears that she will either be too feminine to survive, or she will survive as a masculine subject. In any case, the unbecoming young woman is seen as perverse. If she identifies with the victim of violence or object of sexual desire, she risks occupying the position of the feminine associated masochist. If she identifies with the perpetrator of violence or the active partner in sex, then she risks occupying the position of the masculine associated sadist. Perversity is a gendered condition in the popular imagination.

There are three distinct ways of employing the term perverse, and I will distinguish between, and use, all three. Until now, I have been employing the term 'perverse' in its popular sense to indicate someone who turns away from customary practices towards behaviours considered bizarre, repulsive or depraved. This application

implies a moral judgement. However, psychoanalysis proposes a polymorphously perverse infant whose body and pleasures become organised and eroticised through the signifying touch of others. When the infant becomes a subject, her erotic pleasures are channelled through the movement of her desires and sanctioned by the law, but her initiation at birth into an unmediated world of pleasurable and painful sensation lingers as the Real. Indeed, if subjects did not pursue residual scraps of the *jouissance* of the Real then all sexual engagement would be for merely reproductive purposes. As Freud suggested, all sexual activity not intended for reproduction is perverse (Fink, Perversion). In this sense, subjects are always already perverse. Consequently, subjects may enjoy their perversity both in recalling the polymorphous pleasures of infancy and in pursuing non-normative sexual desires. Thus, this second characterisation of perversion does not invoke the moral judgement inherent in the idea that perverse acts are degenerate and taboo.

The third meaning attached to the term perverse refers to a Lacanian clinical structure. Like neuroticism and psychosis, perversion describes a structure emanating from the Father's intervention between the infant and the Mother. When confronted with the 'No!' of the Father, there are three positions the proto subject can adopt. If she is neurotic she will deny difference, if she is psychotic she will foreclose difference, but if he is perverse he will disavow difference. I have changed pronouns in describing the position of the pervert because Lacan nominates "the male sex the weak sex in the case of perversion" (*Ecrits* 320). According to Fink, "in psychoanalytic terms, perversion is virtually an exclusively male diagnosis" (Perversion 46). Obviously, these claims effect any consideration of the dangers of perversion for the girl reader of a perverted text. Even the popular association of the feminine and the masochistic is nullified in this model. Nonetheless, it is important to understand the clinical structure of perversion to account for the odd female exception to the general rule. Moreover, any refutation of the perverse effects of reading requires an understanding of perversion.

In disavowal, the subject knows that the other is different and lacking, but he refuses to accept this knowledge. In other words, he refuses to give up on *jouissance* in the Name of the Father in return for Symbolic rewards. Instead, he attempts to establish himself as "the object that fills the hole in the mother" (Fink, Perversion 49). The infant recognises that the mother is lacking. Consequently, he

experiences the alienation that prevents him from becoming psychotic and experiencing invasion by outside objects, but he renounces this knowledge in favour of conflating himself with the phallus that will satisfy the demand of the mother. As such, he does not acquiesce to the position of the desiring subject, but instead he seeks to be the *objet (a)* of the mother. To move away from the idea of an embodied biological mother, this means that the pervert will position himself socially as the provider of pleasure and realiser of desires. The pervert takes pleasure in situating himself as the instrument of the Other's *jouissance* (Evans). In effect, the perverted subject accepts *jouissance* as a law rather than submitting to the social law that keeps *jouissance* at a safe distance. This position results from a failure of symbolisation on behalf of the perverted subject. To be fully subjectivised requires the subject to repress the signifiers of the desire of, and for, the Other into the unconscious establishing a network of associated signifiers that threaten to recall the pain of separation from, and the fear of being consumed by, the Other. The subject achieves this defence by using symbols to construct a fantasy of the denial of difference that depends on such myths as "true love", "career fulfilment", "perfect harmony" and so on (Feher-Gurewich). Because the pervert disavows rather than denying difference, he does not fully enter the Symbolic and does not have the tools to construct the necessary fantasy of completion. Consequently, he repeatedly invokes the law through transgression to prove that the Other has the phallus and does not lack, but in doing so he exposes this very lack or limit of the law. Because the moral or cultural law seems to be decreed from outside the subject, "it is experienced . . . as *an expression of the Other's desire*" (Fink, *Lacanian Subject* 56). Thus, the pervert complies with the law as excessive and obscene through the enjoyment available in laying down the law or passing judgement rather than believing the law to be fair and impartial. Again and again, he will turn to this *jouissance* of the Other to establish a law, but he will be unable to submit to the Other and to fully enter into the Symbolic pact that divides the subject and excises him from access to full *jouissance*.

My task in this chapter is to investigate the types of perversion inscribed in the texts, and the possibility of textual perversions infecting the girl reader. This will require a consideration of the texts as representing the perversity which indicates a turning away from accepted moral behaviours, the perversity enjoyed by the infantile body and pursued by many adults, and clinical perversity as formalised by

Lacan. Thus, I have chosen two texts that focus on representations of perverted behaviour with female characters in the positions both of victim and perpetrator. Despite being differentiated by genre, style and intent, *Carrie* and *An Evil Life* both offer the girl an opportunity to experience the delicious fear and dread enjoyed by the horrified reading subject.

Stephen King's novels are enormously popular across a broad demographic of the reading public and are frequently mentioned as favourites by young readers. As always, it is impossible to establish the numbers of readers, but *Carrie* is nominated by a number of contributors to a dedicated message board as the first Stephen King novel they read (StephenKing.com). On this website, fans remark on a generalised fandom for King's work without privileging particular novels. In terms of the age, the number of young men and women reading King can be inferred from their status as junior members on the message board. Similarly, many of the user names suggest female readers. Further recognition of King's popularity amongst young female readers can be found in a number of texts examining adolescent reading practices (Cherland, Chandler). However, my choice of *Carrie* is not only based on King's popularity with the reading girl, but also on the central character: a teenage girl who takes violent and bloody revenge on an entire community.

As with many of King's character, the titular Carrie is driven to perversity by an amalgam of socio-emotional and supernatural causes. Carrie's kinaesthetic powers are activated by circumstances emerging from social relationships amongst her family and her peers. These relationships are warped and distorted, and they expel Carrie from the normative femininity that she desires. From the beginning, this narrative focuses on the perverse. After a brief report from a fictional newspaper describing a rain of stones over Carrie's house when she was three, the story commences "at the subconscious level where the savage things grow" (3). It is Carrie's peers that initiate the savagery when Carrie experiences her first period in the school showers. She has never been informed about the menstrual cycle, and her shock is exacerbated when the other girls tease her callously and viciously. Carrie lives alone with her mother who is a religious fanatic. She has physically and emotionally abused Carrie in the name of religion by kicking her and locking her in cupboards as well as isolating her from others. To Momma, menstruation is a curse visited upon women that can be avoided by living a life without sin, so, logically,

Carrie must have committed a sin and must be punished. These events arouse the telekinetic powers that Carrie has repressed since she brought the rain of stones down on her mother's house. However, one of the girls suffers genuine remorse over her persecution of Carrie in the showers. To ameliorate her shame, Sue Snell arranges for her boyfriend to escort Carrie to the school ball. Carrie accepts and defies her mother using the threat of her telekinetic power to overcome her mother's opposition. Wearing an elegant dress and accompanied by the gentlemanly Tommy Ross, the couple win the title of Prom King and Queen. Unfortunately though, not all the girls from the shower room scene are as altruistic as Sue Snell.

Chris Hargensen has been banned from the prom for her behaviour in the shower room, and her refusal to attend the resulting detention. In revenge, she rigs the voting at the ball so that it favours Carrie and Tommy, and organises her boyfriend to place buckets of pig's blood over the King and Queens' thrones. When Carrie is crowned Queen, Chris tips the buckets of blood over her, and the crowd laugh hysterically. Until this point, Carrie has desired, attempted and assumed the normative feminine position, and she achieves the epitome of normative American girlhood: the Prom Queen. The blood and laughter humiliate her just as she is about to accede to her desire and to be feted as a normal girl. Instead, she accedes to her perversity and defies the laws of the feminine, the laws of the social and the laws of physics. Neither social nor physical laws are sufficient to stay her all consuming fury. Her anger consumes her peers, her community and her mother, but it is her mother who destroys Carrie both actually and figuratively.

Carrie's mother imposes all sorts of restrictions on Carrie based on an extreme interpretation of the Bible. Much of the mother's religious fervour is concentrated on the sin of female sexuality. Margaret White accepts the traditional Christian view that Eve as Woman is responsible for introducing the world to sin for which she is punished through menstruation and childbirth. She has internalised this view of female sexuality so thoroughly that she believes a pure woman will never menstruate, so she does not educate Carrie about her female body and its sexual and reproductive capacity. On learning that her daughter is menstruating, Margaret White kicks Carrie and demands they pray together, "for our woman-weak wicked sinning souls" (53). Ultimately, the mother is to blame for her daughter's problem,

pain and revenge. Because she is enthralled with the Biblical Woman, she turns away from the normative feminine punishing her own desires and refusing her daughter's desires. As such, she is the phallic mother who embodies the Law and its obscene supplement: the pleasure available in the excessive punishment of the self and others. In this sense, Margaret White is an exemplary perverse mother disciplining the feminine in her daughter and herself. She has raised Carrie to associate the feminine with the Woman as Eve the sinner, the body, the blood and the bestial (Dijkstra).

It is this manifestation of the Woman that Carrie's peers reject in the introductory shower scene. An omnipotent narrator describes Carrie's emotions, thoughts and appearance with a particular insistence on her physicality. From the perspective of the other girls, Carrie is likened to a "frog" (4), "sacrificial goat" (5), "a patient ox" (6), and a "hog in the slaughtering pen" (9) linking her with the bestial, yet it is the same girls who abandon civility when they attack Carrie. In fact, the animal references also refer to qualities in Carrie that remain hidden beneath her silent and stoic appearance. They foreshadow her later transformation from frog to princess before she is turned into a blood sacrifice. Both the animal status of the body and its fluid, porous characteristics are paramount in the description of Carrie. This is not a hermetically sealed perfect body. This body is a leaking bag of unpleasant fluids. The narrative gaze lingers on the "pimples on her neck and back and buttocks, her wet hair completely without colour ... her face with dispirited soggiess" (4) and, of course, "the blood running down her leg" (5). Her classmates recall her "urinating in the bushes" (8), and "showing sweat stains under the arms of her blouses" (9). Carrie White literally exceeds the limits of her body reminding us of our own leaky, animal vessels.

The girl reader is positioned to regard Carrie with the same ambivalence as Sue Snell, a popular young woman who joins in the "ultimate shit-on, gross-out, put-down" (9). This ambivalence is crucial to narrative coherence in establishing the extent of the suffering endured by Carrie, and the extent of the remorse felt by Sue Snell. However, it also introduces the normative feminine through Sue Snell. She provides a moral compass for the reader in a narrative structured around perverse female characters in the form of Carrie, her mother and her tormentor, Chris Hargensen. In contrast to Carrie who desires but is excluded from heteronormative

femininity, Chris Hargensen deviates away from this position despite her privilege in terms of looks, wealth and popularity. In the sense of refusing the feminine, Chris is the most perverse character in *Carrie*. She instigates the shower scene abuse of Carrie and organises the pigs' blood mayhem at the ball. In the first case, Chris is motivated by nothing except the pleasure of humiliating Carrie because her appearance and demeanour exclude her from the girlish norm. In the second, Chris retaliates against Carrie who has deposed her as Queen. For Chris, femininity is organised hierarchically by privileging girls whose appearance and behaviour comply with her criteria. As with all definitive structures, this hierarchy requires exclusions, and Carrie serves this function as the antipathy of the feminine. Apparently, Chris Hargensen sustains the normative feminine, but she acts with cruelty and takes obscene pleasure in laying down the Law. In this, she resembles Margaret White in that she exceeds the Law by ascribing to one of the forms of the mythical Woman. For Chris Hargensen, the Woman is imperious, glamorous and unassailable.

Both Chris Hargensen and Margaret White are betrayed by their erotic desires in their search to take up the position of the Woman. When Margaret White engages in sex before marriage, she fails to embody the purity of the holy virgin who is the biblical template for womanly perfection. Even within marriage, she and her husband try to establish an asexual edenic pact, but he cannot maintain this self-imposed celibacy. When he rapes her, Margaret White is appalled by his violation, but she is even more horrified at her own pleasure, " *I liked it o all that dirty fucking and his hands ALL OVER ME!* " (206). Margaret White succumbs to compensatory pleasures of sex despite herself thwarting her attempts to represent the exceptional undivided, virginal Woman. She denies the ensuing pregnancy to herself and others, and rears her daughter as if she will remain innocent of adult sexual attributes and actions both psychologically and physically. If Margaret cannot represent the virginal woman then her daughter must fulfil this promise. Making Carrie the object of her desire, Margaret condemns all feminine sexual attributes and connotations. She knows about sexual difference but she disavows this knowledge exemplifying the perverse. Instead of directing her daughter towards normative femininity, she maintains a fantasy of a non-sexual Woman: Carrie. Yet it is her own normal desires that undo Margaret White's perverse belief in the sexless Woman.

Similarly, Chris Hargensen's desires work against her social aspirations to be the Woman. In this version of the myth of Womanhood, an individual can be the Queen selected from other feminine subjects as the epitome of wealth, beauty and power. This Woman is spectacularly sexual, but she selects and directs her desiring others. Chris's deployment of her sexuality entails an appearance that Sue Snell describes as "a dirty old man's dream" (104). She believes that she can use and control those who are attracted by her sexual allure. That is, Chris assumes the role of the Woman until her normal feminine desire propels her towards the stereotypic bad boy, Billy Nolan, because she is a divided and lacking subject. In an attempt to complete herself, she involves herself with her apparent opposite. Sue Snell "didn't know what a rich, Popular girl like Chris saw in Nolan, who was like some strange time traveller from the 1950s with his greased hair, zipper-bejewelled leather jacket, and manifold-bubbling Chevrolet road machine" (72). What Chris Hargensen sees in Billy Nolan is dirt, filth and physicality: all the characteristics that are absent from the world of her wealthy lawyer father. In response to the grease stains he leaves on her clothes when he touches her, she invites Billy to "Feel me all over. Get me dirty" (130). Like Margaret White, Chris aspires to be the Woman, but she is betrayed by her erotic desires. Her choice of boyfriends and her vengeful actions are perverse in the popular sense; her turning away from the normative feminine position is equally perverse; her acceptance of the *jouissance* of violence rather than submitting to the social law also marks her as clinically perverse.

So far, so good. The perverse characters are the villainesses of the piece, but is Carrie also a perverse character? Despite her all-consuming rage, Carrie yearns for the normative feminine. Denied access to the feminine by her mother and rejected by her peers, Carrie longs to be normal. Regardless of the abnormality of her telekinetic powers, she intends to use her power so that her mother cannot keep her from normal pleasures such as the school ball. Carrie White does not foreclose or disavow difference. Indeed, she experiences separation and alienation. Her mother might open her crocodile mouth, but Carrie's strange gift has operated as a prop to prevent her from being swallowed whole by her crocodile mother. Carrie White is all too aware that she lacks, her mother lacks and her peers lack. She makes no attempt to embody any of the manifestations of the Woman. Rather, she enjoys her feminine appearance and the attentions of Tommy and other class members at the ball, but she is not deluded about Tommy's motive. Carrie White

knows that she is neither a holy innocent nor a sexual magnet, and she is happy to assume a normal femininity until this position is defiled by the pig's blood. At this point, Carrie can no longer contain her leaky body. Her outrage is so powerful that it floods and burns everything around her. She defies the laws of physics, destroys the town and invades everyone's minds. Not only does the mysterious otherness of telekinesis invade her and destroy her as a Symbolic subject, it also transgresses the external boundary between self and other. Nonetheless, the narrative secures the Symbolic. This monstrous Carrie who devastates the community that has excluded her is made by that community's exclusion. Her perverse actions are the product of her social context rather than an effect of her psychic structure. Carrie White is not clinically perverse, nor does she deviate from the feminine pathway. Even her telekinesis is explained as a genetic inheritance rather than a psychic effect. In the end, Carrie's problem is that she just cannot contain herself. She becomes Real: differences are erased between Carrie and the objects that surround her; between her pleasure and her pain at the damage she inflicts; between her hatred and love for the primal mother. She is flooded and on fire herself as her body and mind are consumed by *jouissance*.

Despite her efforts, Carrie is unable to assume the feminine position. Of the central female characters, only Sue Snell accomplishes this task. Carrie tries but fails, and Chris Hargensen and Margaret White eschew the ordinary feminine for the extraordinary and impossible Woman. Sue Snell is popular, attractive and intelligent, but she is also realistic, mature and ethical. Sufficiently social to be as repulsed as her classmates by the sight of Carrie bleeding in the shower, Sue Snell considers and regrets her words and actions. Sufficiently sexual to engage in sexual activity with her likeable boyfriend, she recognises the lack of fulfilment inherent in adolescent fumbings. Sufficiently normal to assume the feminine position, she identifies the lack in the Other and her own not-all status. In a lengthy contemplation of her future role in the domestic, she demonstrates a clear sighted understanding of the limitations and disappointments inherent in the domestic feminine:

The word she was avoiding was expressed *To Conform*, in the infinitive, and it conjured up miserable images of hair in rollers, long afternoons in front of an ironing board in front of the soap operas while hubby was off busting heavies in an anonymous Office; of joining the PTA and then the country

club when their income moved into five figures; of pills in circular yellow cases without number to insure against having to move out of the misses' size before it became absolutely necessary and against the intrusion of repulsive little strangers who shat in their pants and screamed for help at two in the morning; of fighting with desperate decorum to keep the niggers out of Kleen Korner's, standing shoulder to shoulder with Teri Smith (Miss Potato blossom of 1975) and Vicki Jones (Vice President of the Women's League), armed with signs and petitions and sweet, slightly desperate smiles (46).

In narrative terms, Sue Snell represents the Symbolically secure subject and she survives. Importantly, her survival is contingent on her recognition of the flimsy social fabric covering the small American town. She identifies the lies and illusions inherent in social structures, yet she continues to sustain and pursue identity within these structures. In many ways, Sue Snell epitomises the feminine position as she recognises her own lack, the lack of the social Other, and the masquerade of Womanliness. As such, she is a threat to the community who wish to sustain the façade of orderliness and control leading the inquiry into the events to direct suspicion towards Sue Snell. A woman who exposes lack rather than masquerading as the phallus is a woman who threatens the system by speaking a truth.

The problems of femininity are inscribed at every level in *Carrie*. The four central female characters dominate the narrative whilst male characters are marginal and powerless. Apparently a normal community, authority figures such as the policeman, the lawyer and headmaster are conventionally masculine, but their power is severely curtailed when confronted with Carrie's feminine rage. The small town seems firmly in the hands of its masters and law keepers as demonstrated by the local drunk who presents himself to be locked up for the night whenever he fears that he might assault another citizen. Transgressors such as Billy Nolan and his mates threaten the conservative norms, but they are somewhat old fashioned and inept in their illustration of bad boy culture. Bearing signifiers of the 1950s, their illegal activities are directed by Chris Hargensen. Even when Billy rapes Chris, she retaliates and scores his back with her nails. Finally, Chris leads Billy to his death. Neither her bad boy lover, nor her authoritative father can save Chris just as neither the policeman nor the headmaster can save the school and town from Carrie's all consuming rage. Despite their assumption of authority, the town's façade

of normality is fractured by an invasion of the monstrous Other in feminine form. *Carrie* is a story about the difficulty of securing a place in the normative feminine, and the cost to society of this struggle.

Yet again, the girl reads her own narrative in gross and distorted form. She stands in the shower room as both the disgusted and the disgusting female body. Loathing the betrayals of her own leaky body, the reading girl knows the humiliation of pimples, fat and snot. Above all, she must contend with menstruation as a monthly reminder that her body is not hermetically sealed, and this narrative originates in the messy moment when the girl becomes a woman and can no longer trust her body. Attempts to recuperate menstruation as a natural process are doomed as long as girls still fear the red stain that advertises their status to the world and exposes them to ridicule and disgust. The contemporary girl is armed with her secretive tampons and painkillers to enable her to publically deny her bloodstained reality and to avoid being shunned due to her unclean condition. Nonetheless, we are familiar as women with the dread of exposing the origin and detritus of birth: menstrual blood. *Carrie* is a blood drenched novel absorbing the reader in menstruation, generation, power and taboo. Although menstrual blood is a Symbolic substance, its association with the primal birth scene leads to a potent reminder of the Real. Consequently, the substance, symptoms and representations of menstruation become over determined. Margaret White summarises the christian myth of female reproductivity as both cause and symptom of feminine monstrosity:

‘And Eve was weak and loosed the raven on the world,’ momma continued, ‘and the raven was called Sin, and the first Sin was Intercourse. And the Lord visited Eve with A Curse, and the Curse was the Curse of Blood. And Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden and into the World and Eve found that her belly had grown big with child’ (53).

Blood, fecundity and femininity provide the grounds for horror in this novel, and female potency offers the threat: “First the blood, then the power” (146). It is menstruation that awakens Carrie’s telekinetic abilities just as it signals the reproductive power of the female body reaffirming a long standing myth of the connection between the pubescent female body and supernatural events. There is a strong cultural association aligning the adolescent female body with a capacity for saintly miracles and devilish deeds illustrating the potency attributed to her reproductive body and its primary signifier. At the core of female subjectivity is

"Blood, fresh blood. Blood was always at the root of it, and only blood could expiate it" (146), because everyone is born of woman and menstruation recalls this primal scene. *Carrie* ends as it begins affirming the physicality of the female body with the final sentence marked by the flow of blood as Sue Snell "felt the slow course of dark menstrual blood down her thighs" (231).

It is not difficult to locate appeal to the girl reader of this intensely visceral narrative of female subjectivisation as progenitor and as representative of the Woman who does not exist. Her Imaginary identifications with the girls in the novel are secured through the similarities between the appearances and actions of the textual girls and the reading girl. Symbolically, the narrative is her biography. On entering the Symbolic, the child relinquishes the pleasures of unrestrained bodily expression and learns to control the tears, mucus, urine and faeces produced by her body. When she menstruates, she loses mastery of the body she had learnt to control. Then menstruation returns the girl to her Real condition overlaid with Imaginary and Symbolic meanings most of which refer the girl to the myth of the Woman. The all too Real blood leaks out of the gash as if castration had occurred leaving a bloody wound in the place of the penis, and the girl confronts her own failings as body and as a subject. No longer can she pretend to be a hermetically sealed, fully differentiated, individual master of her own Imaginary body, and she must hide this shameful state from others. The triumphantly coherent body image that she assumed in the Imaginary is breached and defiled. She is directly addressed by her impotence since she does not have the phallus: she is irrevocably not-all. Furthermore, the expulsion of blood announces her future colonisation by another through her participation in the primal scene of birth. In birth, the separation of binary opposites that make sense of language and of law collapse: self and other inhabit the same body, inside becomes outside. Through its own bloody substance and its association with birth, menstruation is redolent with Real meaning, so culture shuns the menstruating girl. In contemporary western societies, she is not expelled from society, but she must not confront others with her bleeding body. The girl reader is likely to identify simultaneously with Carrie's humiliation in the shower and the disgust of the other girls.

Yet, menstrual blood also signifies the girl's power as the omnipotent Mother. Although her periods may cause her pain and embarrassment, they also herald her

entry to adulthood. As such, she can succeed her own mother as the Imaginary phallic ruler of the infant's world. Since the girl child must repress her fantasies of this Imaginary Mother and differentiate herself from the mother's body in order to become a subject, such a confrontation with her own similarity to her mother can be unsettling. For Carrie, this means she must confront and defy Margaret White. Carrie is required to call on impossible forces to accomplish this task, but she prevails: Carrie does go to the ball. For the reading girl, this victory over the Mother is sweet, but she must pay the same cost as Carrie in deposing the Imaginary all powerful Mother. An attack on the fantasy Mother often incorporates an attack on the embodied mother figure, and the girl must struggle with her ambivalence and conflict about the displacement she must accomplish. Like Carrie, she may mourn the loss of the Mother she destroys. However, the situation is ameliorated for the girl reader of *Carrie* by Sue Snell whose embodied mother remains at a sufficient distance for Sue to differentiate without destroying her own mother. Sue Snell's mother accepts her decisions and goes out on the night of the ball to keep out of Sue's way. The girl reader can identify her own ambivalence about the maternal subject with both Carrie's rage at Margaret White and Sue Snell's co-existence with her properly distanced mother. Furthermore, the narrative concludes with Sue Snell's menstrual blood signifying that Sue is not pregnant. The 'show' of blood indicates that no other occupies the girl's body signalling her avoidance of the maternal—for at least the moment. The girl reader will identify with the relief related to the arrival of a period because she fears personifying the maternal stereotype of the single, teenage mum. Somehow the girl reader must struggle with these powerful and contradictory feelings and meanings about menstruation and pregnancy, and *Carrie* provides opportunities to revel in the power of her body to reproduce, and to be sickened by the monstrous defilement of her body.

Not only does her blood indicate the girl's female condition, it also identifies her as a sexual subject capable of transgression and in need of discipline to keep her in her domestic space. As always, female sexuality disturbs the cultural peace. The Mother is not the only representation of the Woman. Because she cannot be totalised, the mythical Woman has many faces in an attempt to insert her in a stable category. Paradoxically, this cultural yearning for definition proliferates images of Woman as no single image can unify the inherent instability of feminine identity. Womanliness is always fragmented into a myriad of opposing and contradictory images. When the

girl reads, she can identify with girl characters who struggle with totalising representations of the Woman. In *Carrie*, the problem of feminine sexuality is central to the narrative. Through Margaret White's religiosity, the reader confronts the pervasive myth of Woman as sexually voracious and immoral. In this version of the story of Woman, she continues to be responsible for the temptation and downfall of man. As such, she must be disciplined and controlled. Because this Woman is aligned with Margaret White, the girl reader can join Carrie in rejecting both the myth, and the mother's attempt to discipline her daughter's sexual behaviour. This does not mean that the narrative endorses unrestrained female sexual adventure. Chris Hargensen represents the overly sexualised Woman in a form that the girl reader might more readily apply to her own social life. According to the text, Chris Hargensen dresses inappropriately, is competitive with other girls, does not discriminate in her choice of Billy Nolan as a lover, and actively pursues phallic *jouissance*. Despite its radical tendencies in foregrounding menstruation, the narrative reproduces cultural anxieties when a female character occupies the masculine active and competitive position regarding sexual behaviour. However, the narrative stance does not prevent the girl reader from taking pleasure in the dirty sex engaged in by Chris Hargensen whilst still aligning herself morally with Carrie White and Sue Snell. After all, Carrie White and Sue Snell both desire sexual attention, but they recognise the limits of phallic *jouissance*. The girl reader is unlikely to identify with Chris Hargensen for more than a fleeting erotic moment because the character is reduced to a bad girl stereotype and opposed to Carrie and Sue.

Carrie is intensely focused on female adolescence and the difficulties it presents for girls who are recognised as fertile, sexually available and potent. They are characterised as dangerous and endangered, and they are enticed into identifying with the many images of the Woman. Given that the Woman is a symptom of masculinity, her image presents the female subject with mythical forms of femininity based on patriarchal fears and fantasies. The adolescent girl must engage with all of this contradictory and impossible discourse of femininity as well as making sense of her biologically Real body. *Carrie's* violent reworking of the reading girl's own story offers her multiple Symbolic, Imaginary and Real pleasures, but reading horrible pleasures unnerves the adults held responsible for ensuring propriety in the young woman. Both Meredith Cherland and Kelly Chandler discuss parental attitudes to

Stephen King novels. Parents in Meredith Cherland's study of a small group of adolescent girl readers in the United States were concerned about their daughters reading King novels even though their own bookshelves were frequently the source of their daughter's attraction to King novels. On the other hand, Kelly Chandler found that many parents recommend King novels to their adolescent children. Contradictory attitudes to King are not unusual. His many constant readers value his novels, but critics dismiss his work on the grounds of content and style.

Despite finding that sharing novels by King with their parents functioned to produce positive attitudes to reading in her adolescent subjects, Kelly Chandler concludes by reiterating these familiar fears. She is concerned that parents do not discuss violent and sexually explicit content with their children, "At a crucial time in her own maturation, Melissa had no adult guidance in working through a text that discussed sexuality in ways that are taboo in mainstream society" (237). Meredith Cherland is even more worried. She argues that the girls in her study,

were encouraging their girlfriends – and, in turn, being encouraged themselves – to move further along a continuum of horror stories that began with female characters who could understand and control what threatened them, and ended, with victims who were horribly abused and then finally obliterated (188).

For Cherland, horror arouses pleasurable sexual responses in the girl readers in association with the threat of violence. She concludes that the girl readers are irrevocably interpellated into patriarchal discourses denying female agency through reading horror. Although Cherland mentions *Carrie* and *Flowers in the Attic* as exemplary of the "female monster-protagonist" narrative, she does not examine the pleasures exemplified in this mode despite recognising that the female monster inverts the role of nurturer and carer usually allotted to female subjects. Regarding King specifically, she is concerned that "In Stephen King novels, the horror was not always eliminated, nor was it always fully understood" (183). The concerns expressed by Cherland designate the girl reader as victim of the text: she is not mature enough to resist the dominant meanings, or to tolerate uncertainty. Ultimately, she can only be victimised by the book.

The criticisms levelled at King by theorists of adolescent reading reiterate many of the claims of critics working with horror and gothic genres. The horror genre as a

whole attracts censure from many sources for its violent misogyny, but such views depend on a rigid code assigning the feminine to a victim position and the masculine to a hero or monster position. Furthermore, the same rigid code is applied to the audience who are assumed to identify only with images of their own gender (Clover). Some theorists emphasise King's focus on the anxieties of masculinity to the detriment and or exclusion of feminine power (Davenport). However, *Carrie* belies such easy categorisation. As Carol Clover observes, Carrie White is the monster-heroine as well as the victim. Indeed, the narrative depends on Carrie's transformation from victim to heroine to monster. King acknowledges "*Carrie* is largely about how women find their own channels of power, and what men fear about women and women's sexuality" (171). Both King and Carol Clover relate the story to its historical moment in the midst of second wave feminist activism and liberation, and it can be read as a representation of masculine fears about the female castrated body and female reproductive power. The girl reader can learn much about the fears of her father, brother and lovers, and she can also revel in this power. To quote King again, Carrie White is "also Woman, feeling her powers for the first time and, like Samson, pulling down the temple on everyone in sight at the end of the book" (172). Carrie White is defeated finally by her own mother, not by masculine power or force. Given the failure of masculine authority in this text, it seems unlikely that the girl reader will identify herself or Carrie as a victim of patriarchy. Still, commentators working on adolescent reading, and parents of adolescents remain concerned that reading King will pervert rather than pleasure the reader.

Kelly Chandler articulates another concern based on the reading habits of the parents of her group of King readers, "none of these parents, in whose lives reading appeared to play a key role, reported continuing to explore authors and genres they were exposed to in school" (238). Presumably, the authors and genres privileged in school are categorised as having a higher aesthetic value than King. Again, King is frequently denigrated as a hack writer with no stylistic skill (Davenport), yet the narrative structure of *Carrie* is more complex than many valorised young adult fiction novels. Rather than maintaining single perspective, the narrative point of view is fluid speaking from the perspectives of Carrie and Margaret White, Chris Hargensen, Sue Snell, and Billy Nolan amongst other less prominent characters. Indeed, it can be distinguished from the domestic gothic by the intensely social

narrative gaze. This text is not just about the effects of family on female subjectivisation, it is about societal effects hence the high school setting. In other words, the novel is profoundly concerned with the Symbolic Other of law and language. In Stephen King's small town America, strange events rupture the network of moral imperatives that sustain the civil contract. The Real emerges from the ordinary and threatens the illusory cohesion of the Symbolic. The inquiry into the night of the school dance attempts to reimpose Symbolic authority by denying all evidence of the supernatural and placing suspicion on Sue Snell. This denial serves to illustrate the lack in the Symbolic. Ultimately, rational Symbolic discourses cannot account for the Real events. Once again Sue Snell, who has already seen through the lies that sustain the discourse of femininity, recognises and challenges the logic of the enquiry. Ultimately, Sue Snell leaves town. As with her critique of the domestic feminine, Sue Snell perceives the lack in the Symbolic. In identifying herself with Sue Snell, the girl reader looks at the scene from the perspective of a fully subjectivised young woman who can employ the Symbolic to expose its failings. Amongst the many characters and perspectives offered in *Carrie*, the girl has the option of identifying with rage and rationality, impropriety and propriety, body and mind.

This social polyphony is further elaborated by the insertion of a number of fictional intertexts all of which are referenced as if substantiating the story as truth. They all offer explanations and accounts of the night of the high school dance, and they include newspaper reports; an article from *Esquire* 'Carrie: The Black Dawn of T.K.'; an extract from the enquiry into the disaster *Black Prom: The White Commission Report*; Sue Snell's retrospective account *My Name is Sue Snell*; *Ogilvie's Dictionary of Psychic Phenomenom*; *The Shadow Exploded: Documented Facts and Specific Conclusions Derived from the Case of Carietta White* by David R. Congress (and quoting an anonymous Harvard professor); and 'Telekinesis: Analysis and Aftermath' (*Science Yearbook*, 1981) by Dean D. L. McGuffin. Some of these accounts provide information otherwise not available to the reader, but some are not relevant to the narrative direction as indicated by the name McGuffin. This text claims that telekinesis is the consequence of an inherited mutant gene and playfully offers a scientific explanation countering the Margaret White's accusations of witchcraft and devilry. All in all, the narrative is expanded, disrupted and mocked by these devices demonstrating a less reverential view of its own status. In comparison

with many works of young adult fiction, *Carrie* has a narrative sophistication and complexity that affords the Symbolic pleasure of the play of language.

All in all, there is no indication that the reading girl could be perverted by reading *Carrie*, but there are true crime texts that cause even greater anxiety than horror novels in the public imagination. The true crime genre permeates all modern media: newspapers, television, film, magazines and books. Despite an ongoing cultural anxiety about the consumption of true crime which seeks to reinscribe the phenomenon as a contemporary aberration, murder has been on the marketplace since the text took to the streets in the form of ballads and theatre. The tone of diverse texts produced in the genre varies between sensational and serious, scientific and fanciful. True crime biographies such as *An Evil Love: The Life of Frederick West* battle to distinguish themselves from pulp fiction generally asserting the public need to understand as a motivating, mitigating and distinguishing attribute of the text. Geoffrey Wansell states in "A Personal Preface" to *An Evil Love* that "to study the roots of evil is to make a start in preventing its spread" (x). He explains that he wrote the book at the invitation of the Official Solicitor to the Supreme Court in order to provide some financial security for the Wests' younger children. Frederick West is nominated as "the face of the devil" (xiv) and the author invokes the lord's prayer, "Deliver us from evil" (xix) to protect himself from memories and nightmares incurred through his examination of Fred West's life. Yet, despite such claims and the insistence of the moral but moderate narrative voice, *An Evil Love* shares certain generic conventions with its more shameful horror siblings. These conventions include a reconstruction of the perpetrator's history, a litany of crimes, a determined and heroic police woman (Detective Constable Hazel Savage), and an examination of the police investigation. As with other true crime novels, this text contains photographs of the criminal, his family, the victims, and the scenes of the crimes. (Incidentally, the photographs contribute nothing to Geoffrey Wansell's stated project, but they do function as a generic marker, as evidence of the factual status of the text, and as an added lure for the reader's identification.) My examination of the book focuses on these textual features rather than context. In other words, I am not interested in the history of the Wests as embodied social beings, but as characters in a book.

My attention was drawn to this book when engaging my voyeuristic desire to look at the book in the girl reader's hands. The girl in question was sat across from me on the train, and she was flicking back and forth between picture and paragraph of *An Evil Love*. When I mentioned this encounter to a friend, she confided that she was worried about her teenage daughter who had read the book three times. Finally, the mother threw the book out fearing her daughter's intense engagement with such perverse material. The mother's response typifies our societal ambivalence about the genre, the crimes and the girl. Despite the position I have adopted in this thesis, I would probably react similarly if a book about the Wests entranced my own daughter. Neither my friend nor myself are unusual in our squeamishness. True crime writing is rarely interested in the burglar or the brawler, its gaze is fixed on the most aberrant of criminals: the serial killer and female murderer. Because true crime relates the story of an embodied murderous subject, the reader appears to be brought into intimate proximity with the murderer. Whereas fiction declares and guarantees its basis in fantasy and imagination, true crime depends on its status as factual and credible.

An Evil Love presents the story of Fred and Rosemary West, their families of origin, their children and the young women they killed. A focus on family tends to be a shared feature of true crime writing (Sweeney). In order to account for the killer's deviance, the authors tend to search for clues in their childhood especially the family of origin. *An Evil Love* complies absolutely with this formula, and the childhoods of Fred and Rosemary West reveal them both as incest victims, but these are not the only families in question since Fred and Rosemary establish their own family and their children become their victims. Furthermore, sex, torture and murder occur within the family home where the bodies are buried. This family home is littered with victims. Fred and Rosemary are themselves childhood victims and Rosemary could easily have become a victim of Fred's had she not assumed for herself a more complementary role. As with other murderous couples such as James Brady and Myra Hindley or David and Catherine Byrne, part of the public fascination concerns the perverse coupling and the role of the feminine in this aberrant familial structure. It is worth noting the gothic elements in this particular narrative: the house of horrors, the ordinary masking the awful, the family as the cause and context of evil. True crime shares its focus and terrain with gothic novels exposing familial horrors and disturbing the feminine domestic, but true crime incorporates

the broader social world in its gaze in a similar style to both detective and horror novels. The Wests are represented as a family who interact with a community through work, school, neighbours, lodgers and sexual clients and contacts. True crime is a genre that renders social and familial worlds unsafe. It makes dangerous strangers, acquaintances and family.

Although Geoffrey Wansell is careful to avoid the prurient by employing a measured and rational narrative voice, nonetheless his quest to illuminate evil means cataloguing the various sexual acts and appetites of the Wests. These include prostitution, voyeurism, female to female sex, group sex, the occult, bondage, sado-masochism, rape, incest, child sex abuse, torture, dismemberment and murder. This text reports an excess of physical transgressions. Despite the author's cautious avoidance of unsubstantiated and fanciful speculations, neither he nor the legal authorities can quantify the crimes. The West's son, Rosemary West's defence lawyer, and West himself refer to even more murders than those detected leading Wansell to describe West as "a man who may have killed many, many more women than the darkest imagination could conceive" (493). So excessive are the Wests' crimes that they cannot be contained within the text, and imagination must be invoked where facts fail. Nor is the excess always criminal. To further complicate any consideration of the effects on the reader, some of the transgressive sex acts are victimless in that they engaged the consent of all parties. Moreover, some of the victims are initially willing participants in the sex games. Given that the young women who are used by the Wests are around the same age as the young woman reader, they provide the most obvious point of identification. However, Rosemary West offers a more frightening same sex identification, and cross gender identification with Fred is not impossible.

Assuming identification with the young female victims for the moment, moral conservatives have nothing to fear, as the effects of reading will participate in a disciplining of the young woman into heteronormative femininity. The narrative voice utters Symbolic warnings, and invokes fear to urge the girl to control herself. The text dissuades her from actively seeking sexual thrills and dangerous liaisons, from accepting lifts from strange men, from standing at a bus stop. In other words, it will keep her off the streets. And just in case she has missed this point, the narrator is keen to make it explicit: "If there were ever an argument against any

young woman, no matter how strong or sensible, hitchhiking in any circumstances whatever, it is the life of Frederick West. Evil can come in the least frightening packages" (193). From a feminist perspective, it is this imperative that demands the girl recognise her inherent vulnerability, which is disturbing. How can women and girls reclaim the night or the streets if we are told that we are never strong enough or sensible enough to survive? After all, not all of the young women who engaged in sexual relationships with the Wests became victims, not all of the young women on the streets of Gloucestershire were picked up by the Wests and, generally, the home is still a more dangerous place for women than the streets. The lives of the Wests' children who had nowhere else to go attest to the dangers of the nuclear family as do the childhood experiences Fred and Rosemary.

Certainly, *An Evil Love* can be read as a cautionary tale directed at young women, but this does not account for those guilty pleasures that attract the reader to the text. Are these the same perverse pleasures as those enjoyed by the Wests? Is the young woman identifying with the perpetrators? If so, is she being enticed, groomed in modern paranoid parlance, to participate in similar scenarios? Does the text tempt perverse desires? To a degree, the text does titillate and excite the undertow of desires hidden in our psyche, and the girl may thrill to the descriptions of polymorphously perverse acts.

The West family is represented as profoundly incestuous with Fred preying on his sisters and his daughters, and both Fred and Rosemary sexually abused by their parents. In Fred's case, this means the most taboo of all sexual couplings nominated as the original "evil love" by the text: mother and son (36). Apparently, Fred had an ongoing sexual relationship with his mother from the age of twelve that "was almost certainly matched by some sort of sexual relationship with his father" (35). This scenario places Fred in the position of the Lacanian pervert as he is charged with providing pleasure for the Other as Mother whose difference and lack are disavowed. Furthermore, Fred West's father is portrayed as "obsessed with sex" (35) by his son, and he is represented as observing no sexual boundaries separating child from adult, family from non family, male from female, or animal from human. This unbound behaviour presents the perversion in the popular sense of excess and aberrance, and familial perversity is offered as a Symbolic reason for Fred's later crimes. Fred is described as having been "groomed" by his parents illustrating the

contradiction in the text's thesis that Fred West is both innocent victim of his upbringing and inherently evil perpetrator. There is no one in this scenario to attract the reading girl, and the sex between man and beast and mother and son is likely to repel any identifications. Nonetheless, the girl will probably identify at the Symbolic level. She will identify with the narrator's disgust and accept the modern dictum that preserving normal family rules and taboos protects children.

So, again, what pleasure is there for the young woman reader? Despite the abnormal family relations, Fred is described as "the blue-eyed young man with a gypsy's face"—not an unattractive image of a teenage boy. Furthermore,

He wanted sexual intercourse, and he did not want to wait for it. There was no courtship, no affection in his mind when it came to any consideration of sex. It was a matter of sexual desire, to be satisfied, extinguished, and then explored again (36).

Although meant to repel, this account of sexual desire untrammelled by cultural restrictions might appeal to the girl reader. She could identify with the desire to be sexually active and limitless as opposed to the imperative that she should seek romance rather than sex, permanence rather than a quicky, and love rather than desire. However, this identification would almost certainly be fleeting and uneasy because the girl knows where Fred West's desire will lead.

Uncomfortable identifications present a problem for the girl reader and for her observer in a text like *An Evil Love*. Some girl readers will avoid and others will abandon the text because feelings of disgust and unease overwhelm all other responses. Those who do proceed are unlikely to frame their responses in terms of pleasures because the pleasures of horror are unspeakable. Megan Sweeney claims that true crime texts "produce powerful affective intensities and disturbances (desire, pleasure, fear, fascination, disgust, horror, envy and shame)" (2). Intense emotion constitutes one of the pleasures of reading *An Evil Life*, but some of this emotional response is based on identifications, and the victims provide the most obvious point of identification. However, it may not be entirely accurate to claim victim status for all the young women who cross paths with West prior to his murderous activities despite the narrator accentuating the lies and duplicity involved in the young Fred's seduction technique. After all, they too may have wanted sex without consequences just as the girl reader might fantasise about or enact similar

desires despite Symbolic insistence that sex requires love and commitment. More disturbing is the potential for identification with the murdered victims. On the whole, they are young women of the age, or not much older than the reader. Their photographs confirm their youth, normality and attractiveness as do the brief descriptions of each girl such as this:

Ann McFall was almost seventeen years of age, five feet, two inches in height, with straight, dark brown hair almost long enough for her to sit on. A slight, vulnerable but attractive girl (79).

Some of the girls were blonde, and others dark; some came from difficult circumstances, but others did not; some had been involved in petty crime, and others were university students or graduates; some were murdered, and some lived to tell the tale. This diversity of backgrounds and appearances allows for a similar diversity of reader identification. Through identifications with this extensive cast of young women, the girl can imagine the sexually exotic encounters that incorporate straight and lesbian sex, multiple partners, multiple orifices, prostitution, pornography, sex toys, bondage, exhibitionism and voyeurism. The reading girl may well extend her sexual vocabulary through reading such a book, but this does not mean that she will enact or accept any or all of these options. She may educate, excite and disgust herself, but this does not make her a victim. The book cannot groom her or incite her to act perversely, but it can suggest some interesting erotic options.

More frighteningly, though not more threateningly, the girl might identify with the Wests for brief moments. In particular, she might take pleasure in the sexual appetite attributed to Rosemary West. Rosemary West is represented as actively and prolifically enjoying sex with men and women. This is an unusual representation of female sexuality. Like Fred, her childhood positions her both as victim, perpetrator and seducer. She grew up with a violent father who abused her sexually just as she sexually abused her younger brothers. From the age of thirteen, she engages in casual sexual relationships, and she is raped twice during her fifteenth year. Again, the narrative is both sympathetic and disparaging. Rosemary becomes involved with Fred when she is only sixteen and by the time she is eighteen she has a child and is engaged in prostitution. Apparently, she has also assisted in the murder of her step-daughter and Fred's first wife though the details of the murders are always obscured by the multiple versions of events offered by Fred in police

interviews. Similarly to the murdered girls, Rosemary West is described as “an attractive young woman. With shoulder-length dark hair and wide set brown eyes, she was slender but full-bosomed, with the look of a startled fawn” (184). Once her childhood has been accounted for, the focus is exclusively on her sexual proclivities and violence. Again, most girl readers will be deterred from any identification with the monstrous figure of a sadistic murderer, but she may be aroused by Rosemary’s sexual appetite as illustrated in passages such as this:

She took increasing pleasure in demonstrating to the camera and her husband’s watching eye, her capacity to derive sexual excitement from inserting into her vagina the largest vibrators and dildos, as well as a cumbers and pint beer glasses. She would then urinate over a towel, or into the glass, and pour the urine over her naked body (360).

The narrative tone in this description strikes me as faintly ludicrous with its mixture of household objects, pain and sex, but it does feature the performance of an assertive young woman for the pleasure of others and herself. Such representations are rare in the books available to the girl reader, and she may well take pleasure in the scene. Beyond physical arousal, the excessive sex and violence in this novel invokes the body in pieces. Detailed descriptions of bondage, torture and dismemberment inevitably emphasise body parts rather than coherent individuals. As such, the text reads pornographically despite its good intentions.

If I were to queer my reading of this text, I would recognise that it allows me to momentarily peep behind the veil of heteronormativity and spy upon the polymorphous perversity which constitutes all being, collapses all binaries and exceeds all categories. Most queer theorists do not maintain such a liberatory role for reading, but there are versions that promote the capacity of the queer reader to enter all and any identification to experience sameness rather than difference from others (Sedgwick). Through mobile identification, the queer reader can erase difference and become one with all. However, this presents a further problem. It aligns Frederick and Rosemary West with the queer project and this returns us to a rejection of the very pleasures we invoke. It extends the queer theory position to one which, rather than celebrating heterogeneity, erases all difference and suffocates the subject in a pre-Oedipal blanket of sameness. There is no other and she does not lack – there is only plenitude and abundance. In such a move, we also escape death, in that we do not confront the difference between perverse pleasures

that annihilate the other without her consent, and perverse pleasures that are acted upon by consenting adults. I would suggest that any contractual consent is an aspect of the Symbolic law. It is a rational, conscious engagement between two or more people that allows them to play with a certain limit. And it is the recognition of this limit that distinguishes the acts of the Wests from the fantasies of the reader.

Beyond this limit, lies pure *jouissance* – that which is beyond and prohibited by pleasure. *Jouissance* offers unbearable and excessive sensation and suffering in which pain and pleasure lose all distinction. As such, it illuminates “the path towards death” (S17). Pure *jouissance* is not subject to lack and it countenances no other. It is that from which we are separated when we enter language, culture and the law, when we realise that we are positioned by our differences, when we recognise that the other is lacking, when we become subjects. But perversely, some subjects disavow these differences. Unlike the psychotic, the perverse subject knows that difference exists but refuses to accept this knowledge. He acts as if he can fill the lack in the other, as if he can fill them with *jouissance*, as if he were the instrument of the other’s pleasure. In this respect, Fred West is represented in this text as an exemplary pervert in the clinical sense: “In his perverted but still rational vocabulary, he was doing his victims ‘a favour’ by subjecting them to sexual bondage, ‘cause it was what they wanted’” (509). The perverted psychic structure does not seek to satisfy the subject’s needs, but to produce *jouissance* for the other. It need not engage directly sexualised acts: the man who cleans the house obsessively for his wife’s pleasure is equally as perverse as the man who lets himself be beaten for her pleasure. In this sense, perversion has nothing to do with any distinction between the sexually queer and the normative.

So how does the reader distinguish between her own desires and those of the Wests? Through that very function that initiates the fears of critical feminist theory and moral conservatives alike: identification. In his most thorough explication of perversion, Lacan considers the iconic pervert, the Marquis de Sade, and his readers:

We know well how the images of the self may frustrate our propulsion into that space. Don’t we have something to learn about the laws of this space from the man who enters it with his

atrocious discourse, given the imaginary capture by the image of one's fellow man functions as a lure there (Seminar VII 197)

Lacan is clearly stating that the representations of atrocious acts function to teach most of us that *jouissance* is deadly – even though these representations do not, and cannot represent *jouissance* which cannot by its nature be symbolised. Like all images, they are Imaginary misrepresentations, but we are lured into the atrocious and deadly space through identification with the “image of one's fellow man”. This Imaginary identification teaches the reader that *jouissance* is deadly because her flirtation with excess and aberrance excites her, but soon it becomes as deadly boring as any narrative that merely re enacts the same scenario. *An Evil Love* repeats each torturous and murderous event listing the sticky tape used as a gag, the ropes used to bind, the dismembered bodies, and the missing bones. This repetition dulls the imagination and kills desire. One source of my own guilt and nausea is that I cease to be able to distinguish victims; I cease to be excited let alone appalled at the repetitious acts.

In the end we need not fear for the young woman reading this book. Her desire will serve to protect her against the fatal attraction of pure *jouissance*. For as Lacan says,

In the end, any imaginary or indeed real relationship to the research appropriate to perverse desire only suggests the incapacity of natural desire, of the natural desire of the senses, to go very far in this direction. On this path, this desire quickly gives up, is the first to give up. (Seminar VII 232)

Rather than pervert the girl, *An Evil Love* determines her heteronormativity through entertaining a world without limits, and exposing this world as mundane and banal in its daily repetitions. Indeed, texts such as *An Evil Love* are dangerous because they might secure the girl reader in her overly determined position as normal wife and mother ensuring the safety of her children, and remaining the property of one man.

Though both *Carrie* and *An Evil Love* can arouse the girl reader to horror and fascination, as mechanisms of subjectivisation they differ in degrees. As with all narratives, they are webs of Symbolic meaning offering Imaginary identifications to captivate the reader. For the girl reader, they provide aberrant and excessive forms of femininity. She can enjoy this perversity as she shivers with the retrogressive

pleasure of the Real insisting through the primal scenes, fragmented bodies and breached boundaries; she can enjoy representations of active sexual and enraged women; she can obey the imperative of the laws of the social Other and distinguish herself from perversity. All of these pleasures are available to the girl reader of horror, but these monstrous narratives diverge in their Symbolic resolutions. *An Evil Love* might keep the girl at home whereas *Carrie* invites the girl to consider her womanly problems and imagine radical solutions.

Chapter Seven

Reading Secrets

I have no secrets to betray, no conclusions to reach, no point to prove. In a sense the reading girl remains hidden between the pages of her book. My intention was never to reveal a definitive girl reader, but to unsettle certain assumptions about her identifications and their effects on her gendered subjectivity. From the outset, my purpose has been to speculate about the pleasures available to the girl subject of reading. In opposition to many commentators, I have appreciated the reading of popular fictions that are generally dismissed on the grounds of content and style. The girl of this thesis is encouraged to be promiscuous in her reading taste directed by her desires rather than her custodians. Of course, my position is informed by utopian desires which I hope I have ameliorated by recognising that the text can neither liberate nor imprison; it can only reproduce subjects. On the whole, reading contributes to all the representations entwined in the Symbolic system of law and society, but this system lacks and cannot totalise its subjects. Everywhere there are fissures where meaning cannot be made, and the non-signifiable and inchoate Real that underpins the Symbolic is obliquely apprehended. These fissures occur in the whole and each of its parts including all works of fiction, even the generically popular. Herein lie both the strange and the tame pleasures of reading between the Symbolic, Imaginary and Real realms that constitute the girl, her book and her world.

I had my own reading secrets, and I kept them for decades. Mostly, they concerned sex. For me, reading and sexual awakening are inextricably linked. I cannot remember the title of a historical novel that I read when I was about twelve, but I know that the knight caressed the lady's breast. I read and re-read the short paragraph where this event was described with my eyes, my mind and my body. In the same year, I experienced my first orgasm as I read the blatant (for the time) sex scenes between Pussy Galore and James Bond. Bond girls might present a thoroughly hackneyed perspective of the feminine, but they are active, unmarried and brazenly wanton. I did not identify with Miss Money Penny waiting patiently at

home. Finally, I settled on Anya Seton's *Katherine* as my personal sex guide. Luckily, I moderated the masochism endured by Katherine before she is rewarded by marriage to her lover by reading the lively but virginal heroines of Georgette Heyer's Regency novels. Aaah, the joys of swashbuckling girls in tights. Even though my best friend later became my accomplice in reading sex, I never owned up to that first Bond induced hot, melting, breathless orgasm until I began to write this thesis. In discussions with other women about my work, I exposed my reading secrets and found out that I was not alone. Reading sex was a private but shared adolescent pleasure enabling pre-pubescent and adolescent girls a modicum of phallic jouissance.

My Imaginary engagement with Katherine did not lead me to endure a loveless marriage or to become a rich man's mistress, but I have continued to enjoy historical romance and its bodice ripping delights. I have never engaged in swordplay, but I have imagined joyful adventures disguised as a boy culminating in marriage to a man both handsome and rich. I have identified with boys and men, heroes and villains, heroines and villainesses, detectives and murderers, gays and lesbians, prostitutes and drug addicts, good girls and bad. Nonetheless, I am a heterosexual and monogamous wife and mother who neither indulges in violence nor solves crimes, and none of my self-confessed improper readers have been driven to excess and perversity. Our reading pleasures extend beyond and belie our lived experiences. Neither we, nor the girl readers we were, can be reduced to our identifications through any immediate and direct equivalence.

Nonetheless, the girl reader's reading identifications are involved in her subjectivisation as a woman. Achieving and maintaining feminine subjectivity presents the girl with an irresolvable problem. To become Woman, she must occupy a position that is both ambiguous and overly regulated. The Woman is always reified or vilified, victimised or glorified, elevated or denigrated. As such, the feminine subject invokes notions of instability and inscrutability. Paradoxically, she is impenetrable even though she is represented as excessively penetrable. Historically, the feminine subject has a permeable body and soul. Her body signals its porous state through menstruation, penetrative intercourse, pregnancy, child birth and lactation, and this association of femininity with fluid and breached bodies functions as a trope for her psychic and social constitution. The female subject leaks in every

sense of the word, and she reminds all subjects that the glorious unified body of modern man is an Imaginary illusion. Furthermore, she is the universal signifier of lack because she does not have the phallus. She does not have the penis with which the phallus is conflated, nor does she have the power that the phallus signifies. Again, she is a reminder that all human subjects and systems lack. The mythical Woman is both the ground upon which masculinity is built, and the irritant that reminds him of his shaky foundations. This Woman informs the discourse of domestic femininity, and concerns the reading girl. She concerns the reading girl because the girl is figured through societal hopes and fears attached to the Woman. The cultural pressure is intense for the girl to become a contained, domestic and feminine subject: the right kind of Woman. Should she be subjectivised as masculine or aberrantly feminine, the girl may not undertake her reproductive role. In this case, she threatens patriarchal power through refusing to be a token of exchange, to serve and protect a husband, to produce an heir.

At first glance, feminism appears to have reconfigured these imperatives and expanded the repertoire of behaviours available to the girl. Certainly, the forms of femininity available to the twenty first century girl are substantially more active and independent than those imposed on her predecessors, but this may have the effect of intensifying the cultural struggle to reproduce Symbolic systems of power and control. Writer and mother, Peggy Orenstein, comments on the rise of the princess in a recent article. She addresses the marketing of princesses and pink to very young girls by major corporations such as Disney and Mattel, and the "relentless resegregation of childhood" through commodities. Despite, or perhaps because of, the achievements of feminism in changing the conditions of western women's lives, the girl is contested territory. As such, determined efforts are made to regulate her behaviour as the Symbolic Other of law and language conspire to conceal lack, and to reproduce culture. However, the girl does not always reflect her commodities in the simple and direct manner intended. Many a girl has maimed and tortured her barbie doll. Similarly, novels are bought and supplied to the girl, but she might take unintended pleasure in her reading.

The modern urge towards universal literacy deployed the argument that reading appropriate texts contributed to the formation of a rational mother and wife during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but notions of the feminine subject as

overly sympathetic underpinned fears that she might lack the distance to make proper judgements about characters. Her impressionability renders her susceptible to colonisation by corrupting influences through her identifications with improper subjects. The investment in monitoring the girl's reading is high because she is the future woman. Furthermore, she is viewed as volatile and instable through medical, psychological, criminal and educational discourses. Unlike the innocent child, she is desirable and desiring; unlike the adult woman, she is unformed and malleable. Despite all the transformations in the determinations of femininity, the volatility and vulnerability of the girl continue to feature as signifiers of her adolescent status. Consequently, her identifications are subject to examination and management. At the same time, the girl looks for herself amongst the proliferation of images of girls and women presented by the Other of culture and language. Looking at representations of subjects in the book, she can take pleasure across the binaries of good and bad, boy and girl, submissive and dominant, conventional and unconventional, normative and deviant.

In order to exemplify this argument, I have examined texts from within specific categories of popular fiction available to the girl. Choosing categories is necessarily limiting. For instance, I have ignored fantasy despite its observable popularity amongst girls. My choice of categories has been based on their productivity for my topic. I considered texts within the young adult fiction category because they address the reading girl directly from family, school, library and bookshop shelves. Young adult fiction is itself a site of struggle as claims are made for and against the types of content that are identified as appropriate for the adolescent subject. In this context, appropriateness refers to the suitability of the text in assisting the maturational process of the reader. Because the adolescent is produced through theories of developmental psychology, she is positioned as a transitional subject separating the child from the woman. Reading is understood as technology which can either impede or facilitate the development of the adolescent girl into a good woman. Because of their participation in this maturational and civilising process, young adult fictions are constantly under surveillance to monitor any sex and violence in their content. This does not mean that young adult fiction avoids such topics. Rather, sex and violence are deployed as cautionary, but they offer the girl insights into a world of various illicit behaviours and abnormal states of mind. In

and of itself, this is pleasurable and informative for the girl reader as well as cautionary and subversive.

Moving from books specifically aimed at the adolescent reader, I examined the sensational texts of melodramatic and gothic fictions. I chose this genre because it both establishes and disturbs the discourse of domesticity. The texts I considered interrogate support and unsettle notions of the nuclear family with particular emphasis on mothers in their monstrous and inadequate forms. In each, a girl is imprisoned in the nuclear family. This provides the reading girl with an opportunity to identify her own trapped life with those of the protagonists. Through this identification she can learn about distance and intimacy, innocence and knowledge, sameness and difference, self and other. In these narratives, danger lies in too much intimacy and innocence because these qualities prevent the girl from establishing her own desires. The incestuous sister and brother relationships in these novels caution the girl about the false security of similarity, and the dangers of refusing to enter the system of exchange. Although the position of women as tokens of exchange is foundational to patriarchy, sensational narratives of family and incest suggest that the girl must paradoxically enter this system in order to establish a modicum of independence. Reading fictions of the incestuous family offers the reading girl a disturbing site where she can explore the limits of the feminine position and misrecognise the monstrosity of the mother.

Finally, I turn to horror and true crime as texts marked by sex and violence. In both horror and true crime, the family are located within other social structures such as schools, legal institutions, and communities. Here, the girl engages with the transgressive and excessive scenarios of aberrant sex, bloody murder and supernatural power. Importantly, bodily taboos are broken in these genres, and the bleeding body reveals its interior secrets to the outside world. Through perverse acts, the body is revealed as so much meat, shit, piss, snot, bile, blood and bone. Despite pornographically focusing the reading girl's gaze on the fragmented female body, she also sees the subject exposed. She might recognise her own bleeding body that might be invaded by a parasitic other for which it will produce food from its own substance. Considered this way, the incidence of girls reading crime and horror is not as surprising as stereotypic perspectives about gender differentiation would suggest.

My goal in examining each of the selected texts has been to apply Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts to produce a reading of the conservative and transgressive pleasures obtainable by the reading girl. These pleasures may be psychologically regressive and ideologically transgressive. Indeed, these terms can be interchanged as the text and the girl align in unpredictable combinations. For instance, the only female characters in a text might be murder victims, but the girl can still thrill to the whisper of the Real recalled by their violated bodies. As bodies are broken, the membrane of skin separating inside from outside, and self from other, is ruptured and difference is not absolute. As bodies fragment, the girl may retrospectively look awry and glimpse behind her own illusory coherence (Žižek). In these moments, her pleasures are regressive in that they refer to a pre-verbal condition, but they are transgressive in that they explore the limits of normal human perversity. This same polymorphous perversity that underpins subjectivity also incorporates the erotic in any or all sexual combinations. The reading girl is a queer girl not because she defeats difference—because she enjoys difference. She identifies with different characters and assumes different positions.

The girl is searching the social world to identify herself, and distinguish herself from, narratives of feminine subjectivity. The social Other provides a repository of preordained cultural representations including fictional characters that reinforce the laws of gender differentiation. These representations elide the frightening knowledge that there is no sexual relation and no complete woman. Instead, the discourse of femininity with its insistence on romance and domesticity demands that female subjects assume the mask of femininity. The girl reader is an apprentice woman who desires to be the desire of the Other as is the case with any other normal subject. This desire will propel her to positions that are acknowledged and valued by society accounting for her precarious but inevitable interpellation. However, this subjection cannot be total because neither the book, the girl, the Woman nor the Other can be totalised—all lack something. Furthermore, the girl exceeds any easy delineation, and she can read fictions marking her excessive nature.

Subjected to the law of the father and associated with the primordial mother, the girl will never assume full subjectivity. Despite their investment in autonomy, neither will the masculine subject, but this hinders rather than helps the girl who

remains his Other. Given that full subjectivity is a modern masculine preoccupation and illusion, the girl struggles with her not-all status and the reification and denigration of the Woman. Through identification, she seeks positions that will offer her the regard of the social Other, but these positions are not necessarily conservative. Feminism is a discourse in and of the Other as are the manifestoes related youth movements such as Riot Grrrl. Books do not guarantee that the girl will become normative heterosexual woman, nor can books secure her resistance. However, the reading girl can use the book as an instrument of subjectivisation and learn to relate to herself and her conditions as a subject. At best, she can learn to recognise and declare the limitations of femininity and masculinity, but she cannot exist outside of sexual division.

The psychoanalytic account of the subject tends towards the tragic with a permanently alienated protagonist yearning for an Imaginary connection, but I am not pessimistic about the reading girl. Although I want to avoid an easy utopianism whereby the girl is liberated by her book, I recognise that books figure in her subjectivisation and assist her to form an understanding of the conditions of her formation. Although the law of the father and the patriarchal system it engenders persists despite feminist interventions, conditions for women have changed within this system due to feminism, secularisation and democratisation. Again, reading has played a role in these reformations, and reading will continue to interact with other forms of narrativisation to reproduce and modify the discourse of femininity. However, the engagement between any girl and her book remains secret to the observer and to the girl herself. The unconscious also reads, but the reader and her others are forever split from the truths of unconscious knowledge. Because of these obscure truths, we will misread and misrecognise our own pleasures. The reading girl cannot reveal the truth about her pleasures, and the reading theorist can only surmise about her secret enjoyment. She may enjoy the modicum of orgasmic, phallic *jouissance* attainable by the subject, but she may also experience fleeting moments of Symbolic dissolution in the Other *jouissance* where the limits of the Symbolic Other are found to be lacking. Not that she could or should articulate this encounter, but her incomplete status allows for opening. The reading girl's openness to identifications can never be determined.

Notes

1. Later in his work, Lacan changed his practice of capitalising the words Symbolic, Imaginary and Real. I have chosen to retain the practice of capitalization because this thesis addresses reading theorists rather than Lacanian scholars, and capitalisation distinguishes the Lacanian application of these words from their everyday use.
2. The Borromean knot is the topographical model of the psychic components of subjectivity developed by Lacan. This figure shows the Symbolic, Imaginary and Real psychic states as intersecting rings surrounding the *objet (a)*, the cause of desire, which occludes the whole at the centre of being.
3. For Lacan, the Other with a capital O refers to the radical alterity mobilising subjectivisation. Hence the Other can apply to the unconscious, the language and law that construct the social world through which the subject is produced discursively, and the feminine as the Other which the masculine excludes in order to define itself. Whenever I capitalise Other in this thesis, I will indicate which of these meanings applies. When not capitalized, 'others' will refer to anyone or thing other than the subject in question.
4. Again, the capitalisation of the Woman refers to the topographical and logical model developed by Lacan that shows how the feminine subject is not a member of set with a foundational, defined Woman. Rather, feminine subjects are not fully accounted for within society and the law. When referring to individual women as embodied female subjects, I do not use a capital W.
5. The French terms *jouissance* and *objet (a)* have been retained, as there are no adequate English translations. Throughout this thesis, these terms are italicised to indicate their specific psychoanalytic meanings.

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