

**Teen Gothic:
Sex, Death and Autonomy in Young Adult Gothic Literature**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
Doctor of Philosophy

English Studies
University of Stirling

May 2013

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Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge Prof. Glennis Byron's help and advice in the production of this dissertation.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all critical and other sources (literary and electronic) have been specifically and properly acknowledged, as and when they occur in the body of my text.

Signed

Date

Introduction:

Teen Gothic

Adolescence – that tricky time when children have not yet reached adulthood – is a time of much disturbance, change and growth. Faced with a body that changes, stretches and grows in all directions, as does the mind, the adolescent finds that they are not who they once were, and that their concerns are not what they once were. According to David Punter, the nature of adolescence is integral to Gothic writing; for him, adolescence can be seen as a time when there is a fantasised inversion of boundaries:

‘where what is inside finds itself outside (acne, menstrual blood, rage) and what we think should be visibly outside (heroic dreams, attractiveness, sexual organs) remain resolutely inside and hidden’ (Punter 1998, 6).

However, this is to ‘Gothicise’ adolescents - to view adolescents themselves as Gothic beings – rather than to understand what the true nature of their concerns and fears really are.

This thesis intends to investigate, therefore, those fears and concerns as they are represented through the medium of Gothic texts written for adolescents. I propose to examine what happens to the Gothic mode in the gap between young children’s literature and adult fiction and will look at, through the Gothic lens, Young Adult literature which explores the teenager’s relationships with issues such as sex, death and autonomy. As the Gothic is ‘erotic at root’ (Punter 1996, 191) and often focused on the centrality of sexuality, I explore the nature of ‘changing bodies’ and consider

the adolescent's burgeoning sexuality and desire for romantic relationships, arguing that the depiction of sexuality in Teen Gothic fiction supplies teenagers with a 'missing discourse of desire' that allows them to reappropriate their desire from institutional discourse. However, the Gothic is not just about sex, and I also examine adolescent engagement with the concept of death and demonstrate the ways in which Teen Gothic fiction engages with the concept of noncorporeal continuation; this creates uncertainties about the exact nature of the boundary between life and death and I argue that the ambiguity of the adolescent's status – no longer a child and not yet an adult – is reflected in their ambiguous relationship with death. Finally, I go on to study how issues of adolescent power and autonomy are represented in Teen Gothic fiction; here I focus exclusively on futuristic dystopian fiction, arguing that these novels contain themes that challenge and reformulate ideas about power and identity.

Different societies treat their adolescents in different ways, and, as John Neubauer observes, '[i]t can never be proven definitively that the adolescent experience is the same everywhere' (Neubauer 1992, 4). This thesis is therefore concerned with the concept of adolescence as it pertains to the Western world in general, and the English-speaking Western world in particular. Whilst I draw on literary, sociological, psychoanalytical and cultural studies from North American and European-wide research to support the arguments in my thesis, the specific Young Adult texts under consideration here are drawn from the USA and the UK. In Chapter One I examine Annette Curtis Klause's *The Silver Kiss* (1999) and *Blood and Chocolate* (2007); Vivian Vande Velde's *Companions of the Night* (2002);

Mary Downing Hahn's *Look for Me by Moonlight* (2007); and Patricia Windsor's *The Bleeding* (1997). In Chapter Two the texts studied are Stephenie Meyer's vampire tetralogy: *Twilight* (2006), *New Moon* (2007), *Eclipse* (2008) and *Breaking Dawn* (2008); B.R. Collins' *A Trick of the Dark* (2009); Laura Whitcomb's *A Certain Slant of Light* (2005); Gary Soto's *The Afterlife* (2003); and Carrie Ryan's zombie trilogy: *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* (2009), *The Dead Tossed Waves* (2010) and *The Dark and Hollow Places* (2011). In my third and final chapter I explore Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008); Michael Grant's *Gone* (2009); and Patrick Ness' *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008).

Firstly, in this introduction, I am going to define Young Adult literature and outline its history, then I will talk about the background of adolescents in the Gothic, before moving on to a literature review; after this I will explain my criteria in selecting the texts which I have chosen to concentrate on in my thesis, before finishing with a synopsis of each of my chapters.

Young Adult Literature

Young Adult literature (or YA literature/fiction) generally refers to texts that are aimed at an audience from about the age of twelve or thirteen years to eighteen or nineteen and mainly includes books whose 'themes and writing strategies suggest that their audience is at the upper end of the teenage¹ years'.² In general, Robyn McCallum observes:

¹ I therefore use the terms 'teenager' and 'adolescent' interchangeably.

² That is to say, although the themes and writing strategies of most YA literature would appear to suggest an older teenage audience (fifteen to nineteen), publishers and authors alike target an audience from about the age of twelve onwards, knowing that younger teenagers enjoy the feeling of vicarious participation in reading about the experiences of older teenagers, fictional or otherwise.

such texts are informed by the values and assumptions about adolescence that are dominant in the culture at the time of the texts' production, but the genre can also be loosely defined by its central concerns and interests, characteristic subject matter, narrative strategies and genres. (McCallum 2006, 214)

Although McCallum claims that there are some examples of mid-to-late-nineteenth-century fiction aimed at adolescents,³ it has only really been since the latter part of the twentieth century that the production of YA literature has become widespread,⁴ and fiction written specifically for adolescents is therefore a relatively recent cultural development.

The proliferation of twentieth-century YA fiction goes hand in hand with the socio-cultural construct of adolescence itself. According to Roberta Seelinger Trites, adolescence as a social concept did not gain widespread attention until the publication of G. Stanley Hall's⁵ *Adolescence* in 1905:

Following Hall's advice, adults sponsored organized social activities (for example Scouting) for middle-class teenagers, and the concept of adolescence influenced school administrators to grapple with the large numbers of teenagers who were entering high school because industrialization had decreased their economic value on farms. (Trites 2000, 8)

³ For example McCallum cites the adventure stories of Jules Verne, G.A. Henty, R.L. Stevenson and R.M. Ballantyne. In addition the mid-nineteenth century saw the appearance of youth magazines, most particularly boys' journals, and popular school stories. However, as we will see, it is not really possible to categorise these fictions as YA literature, as the social construct of adolescence had not yet been recognised. Indeed, I would argue that, with the exception of Jules Verne, these decidedly patriarchal British boys' adventure stories are more concerned with Empire than adolescence. For a brief but comprehensive understanding of the history, themes and genres of YA literature, see McCallum (2006). For a fuller study of all these topics see *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, Eds. Alleen Pace Nilsen & Kenneth L. Donelson.

⁴ *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, first published in 1951, is generally thought to be the first modern YA novel, and has had a determining influence on YA fiction ever since. 'Originally intended for an adult audience, it was quickly appropriated by a teenage audience ... It includes marginally taboo language and subject matter; it is written in the first-person vernacular, using the voice and language of a teenage boy who feels alienated from adult society and his peers; and the tone is frank and confessional. These are all features that have become standard conventions of the genre' (McCallum 2006, 216).

⁵ Granville Stanley Hall (1844 – 1924) was a pioneering American psychologist and educator. His interests focused on childhood development and evolutionary theory.

Adolescence as we recognise it today, she continues, did not become 'institutionalized in America until the twentieth century, so it stands to reason that books marketed specifically to this demographic arose as a product of the twentieth century' (8-9).⁶ Additionally:

teenagers' increased economic resources and social autonomy in the robust economic years following World War II further increased their market power, making book publishing for older youths an even more attractive industry than it had ever been before. (9)

Literature specifically aimed at, and marketed to, adolescents therefore proliferated throughout the Western world only after World War II had changed the respective countries' economies, nearly forty years after Hall began to call attention 'to adolescence as a psychological phenomenon' (9).

McCallum also points out that the increased production of YA literature is related to changing social and economic conditions: 'The lifting of the school-leaving age, steady increase in high school retention rates, and so on, are factors that have extended the period of ... adolescence, and hence have expanded the market' (McCallum 2006, 216). However, she also states that because adolescence is a relatively recent cultural development it is therefore a 'shifting social category that is defined and determined by the kinds of meanings and values that contemporary society invests in it' (216). The way in which the adolescent experience is represented, she asserts, is mainly determined by the cultural context in which texts are produced and 'by the ways in which adolescence is understood in this context':

⁶ Although Trites refers to America, this socio-cultural construct of adolescence pertains to the wider Western world which follows the same pattern of industrialisation and economic growth. For more on the 'historicization' of YA literature, see Trites.

Literature for young people is culturally bound through its concerns with specific cultural and social formations. However, this does not mean that books simply reflect culture. Literature for young people also shapes and to some extent produces the culture by determining what issues are deemed to be relevant to young people and by representing what it means to be a young adult in contemporary society. (216-217)

It is precisely because adolescence is a 'shifting social category', therefore, and because of the argument that YA literature 'represent[s] what it means to be a young adult in contemporary society' that I have chosen to study contemporary⁷ YA Gothic fiction; I take a socio-cultural approach in my analysis of the texts, and read them in conjunction with the recent social-psychological research in the area of adolescent development.

According to McCallum, the dominant mode of writing for young adults is 'realism', and critical discussions typically focus on the 'so-called problem novel' which emerged in the 1960s and has continued ever since under various guises:⁸

Such novels are usually realist in mode, and purport to focus on the "real" personal, family, and social problems and issues that are thought to affect young people. They typically deal with marginally taboo subject matter – sex, pregnancy, drug abuse, homosexuality, and so on – and usually deal with these issues in a manner that is instructive. (McCallum 2006, 216)

For 'instructive' we may just as easily read 'didactic', and it is my argument throughout this thesis that whilst these 'realist' texts do, in McCallum's words 'shape' and 'produce' adolescent culture by 'determining what issues are deemed to be relevant' to adolescents, conversely they do not

⁷ Texts written from 1990 onwards.

⁸ For example, McCallum also identifies the 'new realist' novel for adolescents which emerged in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Typified by the fictions of Robert Cormier, Melvin Burgess and John Marsden, the new realist novel, like the problem novel, 'deals with taboo subject matter, but also includes a socially critical and political dimension that is often pessimistic and cynical' (McCallum 2006, 216).

necessarily represent what it really ‘means to be a young adult in contemporary society’.

McCallum concludes her essay on YA literature by pointing out that the genre of YA fiction ‘is a particular kind of discursive practice that is culturally situated and that constructs an implied audience position inscribed with the values and assumptions of the culture in which it is produced and received’ (McCallum 2006, 219). This rather echoes Trites’ assessment of YA literature as fiction in which the teenage protagonist must ‘learn about the forces that have made them what they are’ and ‘within which they must function, including family; school; the church; [and] government’ (Trites 2000, 3). Both these critics hold that YA fiction constructs implied reader positions:

that is, they offer their readers positions from which to negotiate the meanings that a text offers, and, by implication, to negotiate the processes of maturation in which they themselves are enmeshed. Fiction for young adults is, in general, informed by the values and assumptions about adolescence that are dominant in the culture at the time of its production: cultural assumptions about what adolescence is or should be, *what adolescents are like or should be like*’ (McCallum 2006, 219, emphasis my own)

Whilst this argument certainly holds true for ‘realist’ fiction, in which the tone is ‘instructive’ at best and ‘didactic’ at its most wearisome, it fails to take into account any analysis of YA fantasy fiction which, as McCallum notes in an almost throwaway comment, ‘is also a popular genre for young people’(216). I find, in keeping with McCallum, that ‘the focus for critical discussions of YA fiction tends to be more on realism’,⁹ and it is the aim of

⁹ ‘One reason for this’, she posits, ‘perhaps is that the audience age of “young adult” fantasies is more blurred than that of realist young adult texts’ (McCallum 2006, 216). However she does not elaborate on this point further. Indeed, McCallum covers fantasy writing in a mere three sentences.

my thesis to redress this imbalance through the study of contemporary Gothic texts produced for adolescents. For McCallum:

[y]oung adult fantasies often deal with personal and social issues that are similar to those of realist fiction, and they use similar plot structures and techniques. But the one-step remove of the fantasy mode can render the familiar and ordinary, strange and extraordinary, providing readers with an alternative viewpoint. (216)

This is an important point lightly made, for the ‘alternative viewpoint’ which fantasy fiction bestows upon the adolescent crucially allows them to escape the didactic and instructive nature of ‘realist’ texts. I argue that Teen Gothic¹⁰ fiction forestalls the determination of issues ‘deemed to be relevant’ to adolescents, and, by opening up an alternative window through which to view the world, allows adolescents to explore and decide for themselves what it really ‘means to be a young adult in contemporary society’.

Historicizing the Genre

Teenagers have figured in the Gothic since its inception. After all, Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, generally regarded as the first Gothic novel, features the adolescents Matilda, Conrad, Isabella and Theodore. Catherine Spooner also points out that the Gothic ‘has always had a strong link with adolescence’ (Spooner 2006, 88):

[T]he heroines of early Gothic novels by Ann Radcliffe and her contemporaries were almost invariably young women on the verge of adulthood, their threatened virginity the driving force of the plot. Even when, as in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), the villain shows rather more interest in the heroine’s property than her person, her virginal status underlines her economic value as marriageable commodity in herself and as legal executor of her inherited estates until the time they should pass to her husband. Constantly on guard against her

¹⁰ I use the terms ‘Teen Gothic’ and ‘YA Gothic’ interchangeably.

potential violation, Radcliffe's Emily St Aubert occupies a liminal zone between the Rousseau-esque innocence of childhood and the sexual maturity of marriage. (88-89)

However, as we have seen, the cultural concept of the adolescent did not really come into being until the mid-twentieth century and, as Spooner states, 'we should be cautious of applying a twentieth-century concept to pre-twentieth century texts [for] ideas about what constitutes childhood are always culturally and historically specific' (88). Moreover, these are novels including, or about, adolescents, not fiction written specifically for them, and this is an important distinction to make.

Indeed, although Spooner's chapter on 'Teen Demons' in *Contemporary Gothic* offers an informative examination of the Gothic 'as the teenage genre of choice, an antidote to anodyne boy bands and pre-manufactured girl power' (29), and explains its appeal to teenagers, its focus is largely on various representations of the teenager 'in' the Gothic mode, rather than on Gothic fictions aimed at them. She points out that in the contemporary Gothic, teenagers are more likely to be the demons than the victims, and one only has to think of the pre-pubescent Regan in William Blatty's *The Exorcist* and the eponymous teenager in Stephen King's *Carrie* - two young girls who are demonised in fictions which are, to use Biskind's phrase, 'drenched in menstrual panic' (Biskind 1999, 217) - to agree with this. Again, however, these are adult fictions about adolescents, rather than fiction written for adolescents, and it can be argued that the fears with which they are concerned are adult fears of adolescent power and sexuality (specifically female), rather than any latent fears or adolescent angst that teenagers themselves may have. My thesis, therefore, seeks to examine

contemporary Gothic texts purposefully written for the adolescent which both express and address specific teenage fears and concerns; fears and concerns which cannot find an outlet in didactic mainstream 'realist' fiction.

Literature Review

In light of the absence of serious criticism of the Gothic in teenage fiction, one of the main texts involved in my study is *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (2000) by Roberta Seelinger Trites. Trites researched and wrote this book in response to what she perceived as a similar dearth of criticism in the field of 'realist' adolescent literature. *Disturbing the Universe* is an exploration of power and repression in adolescent literature; employing Post-Modernism, Feminism, Marxism, Queer Theory and Foucault, Trites explores the ways in which teenage protagonists negotiate the levels of power that exist in the social institutions in which adolescents function. Although her work is mainly addressed to 'realist' fiction and/or the 'problem novel', and does not touch on the Gothic, I both use and refute her arguments in their relation to YA Gothic fiction; as such the arguments that Trites puts forward in *Disturbing the Universe* offer a useful starting point from which to discuss YA fiction.

Another influential study in the general area of adolescent literature is Kathryn James' *Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature* (2009). Knowledge about carnality and its limits provides the agenda for much of the fiction written for adolescent readers

today, yet there exists little critical engagement with the ways in which it has been represented in the Young Adult novel in either discursive, ideological or rhetorical forms. James' work is a pioneering study that addresses these methodological and contextual gaps. Drawing on a range of theoretical perspectives, James shows how representations of death in Young Adult literature are invariably associated with issues of sexuality, gender and power, and James also acknowledges Trites' influence. Although James' work includes close readings of (mainly Australian, for she is an Australian academic) historical literature, fantasy fictions, and realistic novels, it also includes texts from genres including Gothic, horror, and post-disaster. James reveals not only how cultural discourses influence, and are influenced by, literary works, but how relevant the study of death is to adolescent fiction.

The lack of theoretically oriented literary criticism aimed at analysing adolescent literature spurred a special issue of the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* in 1996. This is edited by Roberta Seelinger Trites, who points out that although there are children's literature studies which include major works grounded in feminism, semiotics, Marxism, narrative theory, reader-response theory, deconstruction, as well as hybrids utilising several of these approaches, relatively few critics have employed these theories to investigate adolescent texts. Amongst articles of interest are Caroline Hunt's 'Young Adult Literature Evades the Theorists', where Hunt identifies some of the post-structural theorists who have analysed texts written for young adults, and she offers an overview of the major issues and publications that inform the study of adolescent literature. Virginia Schaefer

Carroll explores the possibility of feminist revision in her article 'Re-Reading the Romance', and Adrienne Kertzer's essay 'Reclaiming Her Maternal Pre-Text: Little Red Riding Hood's Mother and Three Young Adult Novels', is another exploration into more recent feminist strategies, Kertzer also focuses on the recovery, voice and agency in Young Adult novels written by female authors. Patricia Head examines the postmodern strategies in 'Robert Cormier and the Postmodernist Possibilities of Young Adult Fiction', and finally, Anna Lawrence-Pietroni is concerned with how the adolescent reader is positioned in Young Adult literature in her article 'The Fluidity of Adolescent Literature'. Although these articles do not address the Gothic, they have nevertheless proven valuable as they have a shared regard for post-structural literary criticism and a belief in the 'possibilities' of adolescent literature, a term Trites appropriates from both Head's and Lawrence-Pietroni's essays, for they both respond, she says, to Jacqueline Rose's concept of the 'impossibility' of children's literature¹¹ to explore the possibilities that adolescent literature leaves open.

Robyn McCallum's *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity* (1999) is an important study for viewing adolescent literature through dialogism. It is also a good introduction to Bakhtin for scholars of children's and adolescent fiction. *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction* examines the representation of selfhood in adolescent and children's fiction, using a Bakhtinian approach to subjectivity, language, and narrative. The ideological frames within which identities are formed are inextricably bound up with ideas about

¹¹ See Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1992).

subjectivity, ideas which pervade and underpin adolescent fictions. Although the humanist subject has been systematically interrogated by recent philosophy and criticism, the question which lies at the heart of fiction for young people is not whether a coherent self exists but what kind of self it is and what are the conditions of its coming into being. *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction* has a double focus: first, the images of selfhood that the fictions offer their readers, especially the interactions between selfhood, social and cultural forces, ideologies, and other selves; and second, the strategies used to structure narrative and to represent subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

The last two decades have seen enormous growth in the critical study of the Gothic as a whole; however the area of children's Gothic has attracted more attention than YA Gothic fiction. Anna Jackson, Karen Coats and Roderick McGillis have produced an edited collection of critical articles on this genre in *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders* (2008). Marketed as the first book-length study on the Gothic as a mode within the genre of children's literature, this edition seeks to understand its history, lists its themes, and theorises its presence and importance in children's literature.

Whilst critics have now started to produce work on the nature of the Gothic in children's literature, as above, little academic writing has been done in the area of Gothic literature aimed at adolescents. Such analysis, where it exists, often takes the form of popular criticism rather than rigorous analysis, for example Deborah Wilson Overstreet's *Not Your Mother's Vampire: Vampires in Young Adult Fiction* (2006). Overstreet's work offers

a brief introduction to vampire scholarship, and does examine Young Adult fiction and how vampires fit into both the contemporary and classic vampire canon; however, it does not progress to in-depth analysis and focuses, instead, on presenting a mere topology of such literature.¹²

Included in Overstreet's work, however, is a chapter dedicated to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the successful and popular American television series which aired from 1997 until 2003, in which the teenage Buffy is figured as 'the reversal of an image from traditional horror: a fragile-looking young woman walks into a dark place, is attacked – and then turns and destroys her attacker' (Wilcox & Lavery 2002, xvii). *Buffy* is certainly notable for attracting the interest of scholars of popular culture as a subset of popular culture studies. Indeed, there has been such an explosion of academic interest in the TV series that Overstreet provides the reader with a four-page list of scholarly and not-so-scholarly books, journals and articles on *Buffy*.¹³ Whilst many of these publications again take the form of popular criticism, there are some which undertake a rigorous analysis of the *Buffy* phenomenon,¹⁴ such as Rhonda Wilcox and David Lavery's *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (2002). Wilcox and Lavery posit that *Buffy* not only challenges the forces of gender stereotyping but engages many other social forces and deserves careful analysis from that perspective. The supernatural elements in the series stand as metaphors for personal anxieties associated with adolescence and

¹² Overstreet's work was published prior to the upsurge of interest in Stephenie Meyer's commercially successful *Twilight* novels.

¹³ For full details, see Overstreet.

¹⁴ Most notable for being a TV series, *Buffy* is therefore not included in my own thesis. I mention it in order to highlight the beginnings of serious academic study into YA Gothic and therefore keep the discussion on it brief.

young adulthood they maintain, as opposed to 'realist' television series which 'claim redeeming social value by focussing episodes on unmediated social topics such as AIDS or alcoholism'. By contrast, in the world of

Buffy:

the problems that teenagers face become literal monsters. A mother really can take over her daughter's life ('The Witch'); a strict stepfather-to-be is indeed a heartless machine ('Ted'); a young lesbian fears that her nature is demonic ('Goodbye Iowa' and 'Family'); a girl who has sex with even the nicest-seeming guy may discover that he afterward becomes a monster ('Innocence'). (Wilcox & Lavery 2002, xix)

Here, at least, we have the beginnings of serious analysis and criticism of the Gothic in teenage fiction, and Wilcox and Lavery's exploration of the metaphors of the supernatural elements and examination of the personal anxieties associated with adolescence is an approach that I take myself. The problem is, of course, that this work, and all the other scholarship on *Buffy*, is, by definition, limited to *Buffy* and therefore offers a very skewed idea of what YA Gothic is. This is due, in large part, to the predominance of criticism on certain areas, for example Buffy as a 'kick-ass' vampire slayer fits in very well with the ideas of postfeminists who write on her so frequently. Buffy's relationships, first with Angel, a vampire with a soul, and subsequently Spike, another romantic and passionate vampire, have also provided scholars with another area of criticism that is now increasing in popularity: the analysis of 'dark romance' novels which explores texts where the protagonist falls in love with a vampire, faery, demon, angel,

werewolf etc.¹⁵ Yet again, this is to limit the topic and has little to do with other fictions that teenagers are reading or what YA Gothic might be.

Much the same criticism can therefore be made of the current plethora of critical works on Stephenie Meyer's wildly successful *Twilight* saga; whilst some of it is rigorously academic, much of it is, again, popular criticism, and is, of course, all focused exclusively on Meyer's work. Marketed in the same way as the fiction itself, with the by now ubiquitous black, red, and white covers that denote Gothic texts,¹⁶ a numerous selection of book titles offering a critical exploration of Meyer's novels is now available covering the same topics, by and large, and appearing so physically homogeneous that the reader really has to wonder why there is so much of it and why it all looks the same. A cynic might suggest that where there is money in *Twilight*, then there is money in *Twilight* criticism - for both the author and the publisher.

A recent search for volumes of criticism on *Twilight* revealed the following titles: *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality*; *Twilight and History*; *The Twilight Phenomenon: Forbidden Fruit or Thirst Quenching Fantasy?*; *Touched by A Vampire: Discovering the Hidden Messages in the Twilight Saga*; *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise*; *Seduced by Twilight: The Allure and Contradictory Messages of the Popular Saga*; *Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on the Pop Culture Phenomenon* and, finally, *Theorizing Twilight: Essays on What's at Stake in a Post-Vampire World*, and that is before we even begin to take into consideration any books I may

¹⁵ This is a genre of fiction that is hugely prolific in both the adult and adolescent market.

¹⁶ As is Wilcox & Lavery's text on *Buffy*.

have missed, all the other journals and articles that have been published on the subject, as well as the unpublished collected works that are in the pipeline. The list is indeed extensive.

Of the books I mention here, *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality* (2009), edited by Rebecca Housel and Jeremy Wisniewski, is one of the first books to look at the philosophy behind the *Twilight* series; it explores the philosophical dilemmas posed in the series, and seeks to answer them by drawing on the wisdom of notable philosophers. *Twilight and History* (2010), by Nancy Reagin, marketed as an 'essential companion for every *Twilight* fan' is less scholarly, but provides young adult readers with historical contexts for various characters in the series. Both *The Twilight Phenomenon: Forbidden Fruit or Thirst Quenching Fantasy?* (2009) by Kurt and Olivia Bruner, and *Touched by a Vampire: Discovering the Hidden Messages in the Twilight Saga* (2009) by Beth Felker Jones, approach the novels from a religious standpoint and are targeted at older readers. *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise* (2010), edited by Melissa Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, is a scholarly volume and examines the phenomenon of *Twilight* from diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives, focussing on the cultural, social, and economic aspects of the series and the recurrent messages about youth, gender roles, romance and sexuality. *Seduced by Twilight: The Allure and Contradictory Messages of the Popular Saga* (2011), by Natalie Wilson, examines the 'pop culture' phenomenon of *Twilight* and counters some of the simplistic reactions to the saga in both the media and

some feminist scholarship. Wilson explores both the conservative and subversive aspects of the text and considers what she sees are the contradictory messages at work in both *Twilight* and the wider cultural imagination, rooting her analysis in socio-historical contexts. *Theorizing Twilight: Essays on What's at Stake in a Post-Vampire World* (2011), edited by Maggie Park and Natalie Wilson, is another collection of scholarly and critical analyses concerning the world of *Twilight*; the essays are divided into three sections, the first covers the pop cultural aspects surrounding *Twilight*, the second focuses on traditional literary criticism and analysis, and the third concentrates on the social and anthropological aspects of the texts. Amusingly, and somewhat naively, the publisher claims this to be 'one of the first thorough analyses of the saga', despite its being published in late 2011 and many other 'thorough' analyses having been published since 2009. *Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on a Pop Culture* (2011), edited by Giselle Liza Anatol, is yet another collection of scholarly essays on *Twilight* which aims to interpret its underlying themes, and the essays therein bring together a broad range of perspectives on the *Twilight* series from gender issues, to the genre of Gothic fiction, to environmental concerns.

Both *Buffy* and *Twilight*, due to their commercial success, then, have engendered a huge amount of scholarly criticism, but this appears to be where criticism on YA Gothic begins and ends. Both fictions depict their respective heroines as having relationships with supernatural beings: Buffy with Angel then Spike, and *Twilight's* Bella Swan with the vampire Edward Cullen and tentatively with the werewolf Jacob Black; both girls are

therefore shown to 'overstep the Gothic barrier that distinguishes natural humanity from supernatural monstrosity' (Veldman-Genz 2011, 46) and this has given rise to the increase of criticism in the area of 'dark romance'. Buffy Summers is also depicted as being a far cry from Radcliffe's early Gothic heroines, who were stereotypically impressionable and victimised young women, and the *Buffy* series 'rescript[s] the tale of women's victimization and vulnerability that has traditionally been inscribed on the Gothic female body' (Veldman-Genz 2011, 45) subsequently making Buffy a postfeminist poster-girl. And, whilst much has been made of the fact that Bella Swan, on the other hand, is no action-adventure heroine at the beginning of the *Twilight* saga, but rather a common 'everygirl', she certainly is a 'supergirl' by the series' end after her own transformation; indeed, despite being a vampire herself, Bella becomes every inch the 'kick-ass' vampire-slaying heroine that Buffy is when she is forced to defend her family against the threat of the Volturi. Bella and Buffy are therefore both ultimately depicted as über-heroines who exaggerate fantasies of empowerment. There is also 'conventionalization and tolerance toward the monstrous' (Veldman-Genz 2011, 52) in *Twilight* and *Buffy*; whilst both girls have 'overstepped the Gothic barrier' by having relationships with the male monstrous Other, conversely their 'monstrous male counterparts ... cross over into the "human" category' (51). Indeed in *Buffy* and *Twilight*, 'the traditional Gothic threat of male predation is diffused to such a degree that the monster – the vampires and werewolves populating these plots – becomes a feasible, if not entirely domesticated, romantic lead' (52) and

sometimes it begins to become difficult to understand what is exactly 'Gothic' about these texts.

This overabundance of criticism on *Buffy* and *Twilight*, which appears to concentrate on the certain areas highlighted is, I feel, short-sighted. By jumping on the commercial bandwagon critics are missing the opportunity to study, more widely, other areas of YA Gothic fiction. I am not suggesting that *Buffy* and *Twilight* are not worthy of study: their commercial success means that they most certainly are, and I include my own analysis of *Twilight* in this thesis; my argument is that they are not the only things that adolescents are reading (and watching), yet they are continually studied and critiqued at the expense of the many other Teen Gothic texts that are out there which are subsequently excluded from serious scholarship. As I write, the hysteria about *Buffy* is beginning to wane, and, in time, so too will the frenzy surrounding *Twilight*. The resultant paucity of analysis on the many other types of Teen Gothic texts that are circulating at the moment therefore leaves room for a more serious piece of work on the nature of Gothic fiction for young adults as a whole, not only in relation to the figure of the vampire, but also that of the werewolf, zombie and ghost, as well as other associated genres such as the post-apocalyptic novel, and that is what I aim to achieve here. An analysis of these texts will demonstrate that Teen Gothic does not begin and end with dark romance, but addresses a far wider range of contemporary concerns for today's adolescents.

Textual Choices

My analysis of Teen Gothic texts takes a socio-cultural approach, and reads the chosen texts in light of the 'alternative viewpoint' which McCallum claims fantasy fiction can afford the teenage reader. In order to keep this a contemporary study, as explained above, I have chosen texts published since 1990. Because the recent emphasis on *Buffy*, *Twilight* and dark romance has limited both the definition and the discussion of Teen Gothic, I have selected texts from the far wider, prolific, yet little examined, range of Teen Gothic texts that exists today, and I have attempted to keep my choices as varied as possible in order to highlight the diversity of the genre.

Such a wide-ranging study as this necessitates extensive reading before making a final cut of texts to be studied in detail; after monitoring sales figures, bookshop displays and online retail sites, as well as consulting online reader and author forums, in excess of two hundred Teen Gothic texts were read before making my final choice. After identifying common themes, the final selection was made on the basis that they were the texts that best exemplified, in the most interesting way, the arguments I make in each of my chapters. I have included examples from best-selling series fiction, as well as stand-alone novels that I consider worthy of serious analysis. As the dark romance elements of *Buffy* and *Twilight* appeal to a predominantly female audience, I have been careful to include texts that also appeal to a male readership, with the exception of my first chapter in which I explore representations of sexual desire. Because Teen Gothic novels dealing with this subject are generally written for, and about,

teenage girls, the novels explored in Chapter One are therefore all aimed at the female market. In my second chapter which explores representations of death in Teen Gothic fiction, three of the five texts¹⁷ studied may be construed as being aimed at a female audience to the exclusion of a male one because of the predominance of the romantic storyline; of the remaining two, B.R. Collins' *A Trick of the Dark* has equal appeal to both males and females, it concerns a brother and sister and is a dual-narrative: Zach's account is written in the first-person, and his sister's account is written in the third-person; and although Gary Soto's *Afterlife* is directly aimed at boys, with a male first-person narrator, it would just as easily appeal to a female reader. The three texts explored in my third chapter are all post-apocalyptic adventure stories, which I use to examine the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Patrick Ness' *Chaos Walking* trilogy and Michael Grant's *Gone* series are directly targeted at the male market, they feature male protagonists and their emphasis is on violence and adventure, although they both feature some romantic elements. Whilst one may readily assume that Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* trilogy is a 'girl's' book, because of its emphasis on the love triangle between Katniss, Peeta and Gale, its emphasis on violence and adventure sees it, too, featured in any 'best books for teenage boys' list¹⁸ that one may wish to search.

Chapter Outlines

¹⁷ In regard to series fiction, I consider, and refer to, all the books in any given series as one 'text'.

¹⁸ See, for example, 'Best Books for Teen Boys' at www.goodreads.com (17 Dec 2012). This list includes Ness, Grant and Collins, and interestingly Collins is ranked highest. Searches of other sites and lists reveal a similar pattern, with all these fictions being featured.

In Chapter One I study representations of sexual desire in Teen Gothic literature. I argue that whilst Foucault famously identifies four 'domains' which 'formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex' (Foucault 1998,103), he fails to recognise the twentieth-century emergence of another sexual domain: that of the teenager.

Firstly I examine the current discourse of teenage sexuality, and show that it is primarily produced by adults and emerges mainly through the rhetoric of sex education, the content of teenage magazines and the subject matter of 'realist' teen fiction. I show that all these media still persist in portraying young adult males as users and controllers of sex, and depict teenage girls as having to cope with boys' desire to use them sexually, rather than emphasising their own desire, pleasure and subjectivity; this results in what social-psychologist Michelle Fine has termed 'the missing discourse of desire'.

Next I explore how sexuality works in Teen Gothic, arguing that Gothic figures such as vampires and werewolves allow the teenager the fantasy of desire. I find that the 'fantasy of desire' which these texts offer is directly opposed to the didactic nature of 'realist' texts which, whilst acknowledging that teenagers are sexual beings, appear to offer the teenager a rather authoritative, clinical and frightening schooling on the 'dangers' of sex, and subsequently reinforce 'the dynamic of authority within adolescent literature that reminds adolescents of their place within the power structure' (Trites 2000, 116). I argue that the depiction of sexuality in Teen Gothic fiction supplies teenagers with a 'missing discourse of desire' and allows them to reappropriate their desire from institutional discourse.

Chapter Two explores what death means for the teenager and argues that, in contrast to mainstream 'realist' texts for adolescents, representations of death in Teen Gothic fiction turn away from the universality, non-functionality and irreversibility of death that is presented in such 'realist' fiction. I argue that although Teen Gothic fiction represents a fantasy world, it still addresses and symbolises real issues that adolescents have when it comes to thinking about life and death, and I show that the ambiguity of their status in the world – placed between childhood and adulthood – is reflected in their ambiguous relationship with death.

I begin by discussing the recent thanatological literature that suggests that there are aspects of an adolescent's conception of death that distinguish it from both the child's and adult's conception of death. Then I explore various representations of death in Teen Gothic fiction: the vampire, zombie and ghost, and show that in addition to questioning the universality, non-functionality and irreversibility of death, these texts also engage with the concept of noncorporeal continuation which creates uncertainties about the exact nature of the boundary between life and death.

I conclude that Teen Gothic fiction does not simply depict teenagers who believe that they are immortal, or can necessarily cheat death in any way, but that it does show teenagers who better understand their own agency and the discourse surrounding death; it presents the reader with protagonists who question, and are not repressed by, institutional discourse. I argue that these texts therefore portray adolescents who do not accept that they are 'Being-towards-death' and who do not accept any

curtailment of their power; consequently these are adolescents who do not accept institutionally prescribed limitations.

One of the most important elements of the transition from adolescence to adulthood is the development of autonomy, and in my final chapter I investigate how issues of power and autonomy are represented in Teen Gothic fiction. I concentrate exclusively on futuristic dystopian fiction in this chapter as it carries out important work by 'challenging and reformulating ideas about power and identity' (Bradford *et al.* 2008, 2). I argue that these novels offer the adolescent a new kind of *Bildungsroman* that is, yet again, far removed from the institutionalised didacticism at play in 'realist' fiction.

I begin by considering the ways in which adolescents are constrained by the existing power structures, and show how the aim of 'realist' fiction is to 'shape' and 'mold' teenagers and make them 'learn their place in the power structure' (Trites 2000, x). Next I examine the current literature on the development of adolescent autonomy, with particular emphasis on the area of emotional autonomy. Recent research in this area has moved away from theories that emphasise the importance of *detachment from* the parent and now stresses the importance of *attachment to* the parent for the autonomously developing adolescent. This is important to my study as I show that in Teen Gothic fiction we are not necessarily presented with the clichéd view of teenagers rebelling against demonised parents in order to achieve power and autonomy, a topic that forms much of the ballast of 'realist' fiction; conversely, I argue that these texts actually address the adolescent's latent and little acknowledged fear

of abandonment. The texts all show protagonists who have been suddenly severed from their families - arguably the people best equipped to guide them to adulthood - and who are subsequently thrown into dangerous survival situations. Whilst the protagonists are shown to overcome their loss, and gain an increasing sense of self and autonomy in the process, this is not achieved in a vacuum, and the texts emphasise the importance of the protagonists forming new relational ties and undertaking greater social commitment.

I maintain that this feeling of connection with significant others, coupled with an emerging sense of self and autonomy, is shown to be accompanied by an equally increasing awareness of the protagonist's own personal power. Unlike Trites who asserts that in mainstream YA fiction the protagonist is shown to 'grow into an acceptance of their environment' (Trites 2000, 19), I find that in Teen Gothic fiction the reverse holds true: ultimately all the protagonists are shown to take control of their own destinies and change their environment.

It is the aim of this thesis, therefore, to demonstrate that Teen Gothic fiction is a far more empowering genre than mainstream realist fiction.

Chapter One

'Hovering Between Animal and Angel':

Sexual Desire in Teen Gothic Literature

In his *History of Sexuality: Volume One*, Foucault claims that sexuality is 'an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population,' and he identifies four domains 'which, beginning in the eighteenth century, formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex' (Foucault 1998, 103); namely: a hysterization of women's bodies; a pedagogization of children's sex; a socialization of procreative behaviour; and a psychiatrization of perverse pleasure.¹⁹ However, by the mid-twentieth century another sexual 'domain' had emerged, which Foucault fails to recognise: that of the teenager, which has become at least as important as that of the child.

This chapter is going to examine the current discourse on teenage sexuality, before going on to look at how sexuality works in Teen Gothic.²⁰ Gothic figures such as vampires and werewolves are used in Teen Gothic fiction to allow the teenager the fantasy of desire, and although the use of Gothic figures in these texts enables a transgression of sexual boundaries, at the same time the texts generally work towards restoring them too, but

¹⁹ For full explication, see Foucault (1998).

²⁰ Teen Gothic novels dealing with sexuality and desire are generally written for, and about, young adolescent females.

through choice rather than didacticism. I will show that whilst both vampires and werewolves are identifiable metaphors of sexual desire, they also function in different ways: specifically the vampire is more expressively linked to aggressive sexuality and the werewolf, conversely, is associated with anxieties about the body and bodily changes, particularly as regards the adolescent female body. I will examine the nature of adolescent desire and argue that, rather than viewing the Gothic as an aberrant intrusion into their lives from some peripheral 'dark force',²¹ the adolescent actually courts their 'dark side', the 'fragments of darkness that we each carry within us' (Foucault 1998, 69), and acknowledges it as their own. Rosemary Jackson states that:

[F]antasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss. (R. Jackson 1998, 3)

Contemporary young adolescents are not culturally constrained by sex; quite the opposite, in fact, they are bombarded with it from every angle, they are schooled in it and lectured on it, and they have a whole genre of Young Adult literature dedicated to it; they are so liberated by it that they are, in effect, repressed by it; what it appears that they now lack is choice and the opportunity to explore the nature of their own particular desire at their own behest. Teen Gothic novels which deal with sexuality are

²¹ Foucault maintains that Victorian society, while reticent on the subject of sexuality, actually produced it as a concept. He argues against the claim that Victorians repressed sex, and states instead that they manufactured it. Society, Foucault asserts, did not refuse to confront sex, but, rather, talked about it incessantly and 'set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex' (69), and, because of this, sex became suspicious and something to be feared. Furthermore, Foucault contends that power operates not through the repression of sex, but through the discursive power of sexuality, and he argues that this Victorian concept of sexuality still influences us today. For Foucault, sex has become 'a point of weakness where evil portents reach through us; the fragment of darkness that we each carry within us; a general signification, a universal secret, an omnipresent cause, a fear that never ends' (69).

literatures of desire that seek to explore both this absence of choice and loss of opportunity to express individual desire through the normative narratives of sexuality.

The Discourse of Teenage Sexuality

The discourse of teenage sexuality is primarily produced by adults, and emerges mainly through sex education rhetoric, the content of teenage magazines, or teen fiction. All these media, however, still tend to portray young adult males as users and controllers of sex, and depict teenage girls as having to cope with boys' desire to use them sexually, rather than emphasising their own desire, pleasure and subjectivity.²² Current ideals of healthy sexuality for teenage girls, proposed by feminist theorists and researchers, emphasise this notion of desire, pleasure and subjectivity, and 'appear to be a response to three historically problematic areas for women and girls: objectification; abuse and victimisation; and stereotypes of female passivity' (Lamb 2009, 294). However, an examination of current discourse reveals that we are still a long way off from the effective production of such a 'healthy sexuality'.

The Rhetoric of Sex Education: 'The Missing Discourse of Desire'

The notion of a 'healthy sexuality' for girls was first put forward in 'The Missing Discourse of Desire', Michelle Fine's 1988 study into sex

²² The word *desire* is used to describe sexually embodied feelings and to suggest girls are similar to boys in wanting sex; *subjectivity* contrasts with objectification and is used to describe girls' ownership of their desire; and *pleasure* (often used synonymously with desire) generally indicates that girls, like boys, can feel and want pleasure in sex; see Lamb (2009).

education provision in schools.²³ Fine found that there was, in fact, an ‘anti-sex rhetoric’ surrounding sex education that did little to enhance the development of sexual responsibility, and, importantly, subjectivity, in adolescents.²⁴ She makes an argument for ‘sexuality education’ that would promote the full development of a ‘sexual self’ as well as sex education in its broadest sense. Sexuality abounds in high schools, she states, it is ‘in the halls, classrooms, bathrooms, lunchrooms and the library’ (Fine 1988, 31), yet educators have:

rejected the task of sexual dialogue and critique, or what has been called ‘sexuality education’. Within today’s standard sex education curricula and many public school classrooms, we find: (1) the authorized suppression of a discourse of female sexual desire; (2) the promotion of a discourse of female sexual victimization; and (3) the explicit privileging of married heterosexuality over other practices of sexuality. One finds an unacknowledged social ambivalence about female sexuality which ideologically separates the female sexual agent, or subject, from her counterpart, the female sexual victim. The adolescent woman ... is constructed as the latter. Educated primarily as the potential victim of male sexuality, she represents no subject in her own right. Young women continue to be taught to fear and defend in isolation from exploring desire, and in this context there is little possibility of their developing a critique of gender or sexual arrangements. (30)

Ironically, Fine writes that ‘schools have historically been the site for identifying, civilizing, and containing that which is considered uncontrollable’ (31), thereby unwittingly designating the school as a Gothic site. Rather than thinking about madwomen in attics, we are now forced to consider children, adolescents in particular, as Gothic beings to be ‘civilised’, ‘contained’ and ‘controlled’ within the confines of the school building.

²³ Fittingly entitled ‘Sexuality, Schooling and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire’, this study is informed by a year of research of numerous current sex education curricula in New York City sex education classrooms. The analysis ‘examines the desires, fears, and fantasies which give structure and shape to silences and voices concerning sex education’; see Fine (1988).

²⁴ Fine argues that schools, by positioning young women primarily as potential victims of male sexual aggression, seriously compromise both young women and men’s development of sexual subjectivities.

Fine posits that the prevailing discourse of female sexuality in schools includes 'sexuality as victimization', and 'sexuality as individual morality'.²⁵ 'Sexuality as victimization' is where female adolescent sexuality is portrayed as 'a moment of victimization in which the dangers of heterosexuality for adolescent women ... are prominent. While sex may not be depicted as inherently violent, young women ... learn of their vulnerability to potential male predators' (31). In order to avoid 'being victimized', the girls learn to 'protect' or 'defend' themselves against disease, pregnancy and 'being used'. The language used in teaching 'sexuality as victimization' represents 'females as actual and potential victims of male desire' (32), and places female subjectivity outside the dominant discourse. 'Sexuality as individual morality', on the other hand, introduces 'explicit notions of sexual subjectivity for women'. However, this discourse 'values women's sexual decision making as long as the decisions made are for premarital abstinence' (32), and is therefore judgmental and moralistic: 'Sexuality in this discourse is posed as a test of self-control; individual restraint triumphs over social temptation. Pleasure and desire for women as sexual subjects remain largely in the shadows, obscured from adolescent eyes' (33).

²⁵ Fine also identifies 'sexuality as violence'; less prevalent than the other two, it is a radically conservative discourse that equates adolescent heterosexuality with violence. It calls for the elimination of sex education in the public sphere and urges a reliance on the family to dictate appropriate 'values, mores and behaviours'. Proponents of this discourse see sex education courses on sex, abuse, STDs, AIDS, etc as all being designed to terrorise children. A further side of this argument views heterosexuality as essentially violent and coercive. 'Sexuality as violence presumes that there is a causal relationship between official silence about sexuality and a decrease in sexual activity – therefore, by not teaching about sexuality, adolescent sexual behaviour will not occur' (31). Unsurprisingly, empirical evidence does not support this argument. Sex-negative attitudes and contraceptive use are negatively correlated (Fisher, Byrne & White, 1983); whilst sex-negative attitudes do not discourage sexual activity, they do discourage responsible use of contraception since accepting responsibility would be seen to legitimate 'bad' behaviour.

For Fine, a final discourse, a 'discourse of desire', 'remains a whisper', and '[t]he naming of desire, pleasure, or sexual entitlement, particularly for females, barely exists in the formal agenda of public schooling on sexuality' (33). On the other hand, Fine did uncover some evidence of school educators taking:

personal and professional risks to create materials and foster classroom environments which speak fully to the sexual subjectivities of young women and men. Some operate within the privacy of their classrooms, subverting the official curriculum and engaging students in critical discussion. Others advocate publicly for enriched curricula and training. (34)

Sadly, and conversely, some progressive educators have even advocated *not* agitating for change, in order to be allowed to continue teaching 'sexuality education' subversively without their methods being scrutinised, proscribed and prescribed. So, it appears that female desire can be addressed subversively, but 'in the typical sex education classroom, silence, and therefore distortion, surrounds female desire' (34). Instead of being educated, teenage girls' sexuality is being suppressed and silenced under the surveillance of schools.

This silencing of a discourse on female sexual subjectivity echoes the writing of Cixous²⁶ and Irigaray,²⁷ French feminists who famously argued that when the dominant language and ways of viewing are masculine, then the articulation of a feminine voice, body and sexuality will always be impossible to hear.²⁸ Fine maintains that the silencing of a discourse of female desire essentially constricts what is called 'sexuality'

²⁶ See Hélène Cixous, 'Castration or Decapitation' (1981).

²⁷ See Luce Irigaray, 'When Our Lips Speak Together' (1980).

²⁸ Feminists such as Cixous and Irigaray hold that female desire and pleasure, under the hegemony of 'The Law of the Father', can only be articulated and expressed in the language charted by men.

and only allows girls 'one primary decision – to say yes or no – to a question not necessarily their own'. She contends that '[a] discourse of desire in which young women have a voice would be informed and generated out of their own socially constructed sexual meanings' (34).

Although Fine defines this discourse of desire, she does not articulate it,²⁹ and, likewise, Sharon Thompson, who collected adolescent girls' narratives about sexuality, also discovered that female desire is often missing or irrelevant to the terms of the girls' sexual relationships.³⁰ Deborah Tolman attempts to explore and articulate this discourse of desire in her 1994 study, 'Doing Desire: Adolescent Girls' Struggles for/with Sexuality'.³¹ However, she too found that, despite real gains in feminism, girls are still averted from the possibility of empowerment through their sexual desire and pleasure by the cultural contexts that make their sexuality problematic and dangerous. Although she found that the majority of girls said that they definitely experienced sexual desire and expressed it as relational and embodied, what typified their responses was 'a sense of struggle':

[T]he question of 'doing desire' – that is, what to do when they felt sexual desire – was not straightforward for any of them. While speaking of the power of their embodied feelings, the girls ... described the difficulties that their sexual feelings posed, being aware of both the potential for pleasure and the threat of danger that their desire holds for them. (Tolman 1994, 328)

²⁹ Arguably it cannot be articulated until female desire is no longer shrouded in silence and girls are encouraged to speak.

³⁰ Thompson gathered 400 accounts concerning young adolescent females' experiences of romance, sexuality, pregnancy and contraception in which 'desire' is often absent or unexpressed. She reports that the minority of girls who spoke of sexual pleasure expressed more sexual agency than girls whose experiences were lacking in pleasure; see Thompson (1984 & 1990).

³¹ In this report, based on the author's large study of adolescent girls' experiences of sexual desire, Tolman focuses on the ways in which girls of different sexual orientations describe their experiences of sexuality and their responses to their own sexual desire; see Tolman (1994).

Although the struggle took 'different shapes for different girls', Tolman states that: 'Because any woman whose sexuality is not directly circumscribed by heterosexual, monogamous marriage is rendered deviant in our society, all adolescent girls bear suspicion regarding their sexuality, which sexual preference highlights' (328). All of the girls who said they felt sexual desire 'expressed conflict when describing their responses to their sexual feelings'. This conflict arose between their 'embodied sexual feelings' and 'their perceptions of how those feelings are, in one way or another, anathema or problematic within the social and relational context of their lives' (338). Tolman maintains that although their experience of sexual desire may have been strong and pleasurable, the girls were not found to speak of the power of desire, but rather they frequently spoke of how their desire could get them into trouble:

These girls are beginning to voice the internalized oppression of their women's bodies; they knew and spoke about, in explicit or more indirect ways, the pressure they felt to silence their desire, to dissociate from those bodies in which they inescapably live. (338)

By damping desire with silence the girls actively remove themselves from discomfort and danger; but although curbing desire and controlling their bodies is a reasonable way to stay 'physically, socially and emotionally safe', it also reinforces that girls are losing sight of the reality that:

an inequitable social system, and not a necessary situation, renders women's sexual desire a source of danger, rather than one of pleasure and power in their lives. In 'not knowing' desire, girls ... are at risk of not knowing that there is nothing wrong with having sexual feelings and responding to them in ways that bring joy and agency. (339)

The inequities of the social system also inform the discourse of teenage sexuality in all other media, and we now move out of the classroom to

examine how sexuality is produced through the wider content of teenage magazines.

Teen Magazines: 'Training Grounds for Tradition'

We have already seen, in Michelle Fine's study, that educators have 'rejected the task of sexual dialogue and critique' (Fine 1988, 30), and therefore it is left to peer influence and the popular media to fill in the gaps. Magazines are an easily accessible form of media for girls to obtain information about sexuality, and, indeed, teenagers rank the media just behind their peers and parents as sources of such information.³²

According to Garner *et al.*, '[m]agazines constitute part of the media stories that shape both society's sense of culture and our sense of self in culture' (Garner *et al.* 1998, 59).³³ As part of this acculturation process, they state, teen magazines 'work to shape women into enthusiastic consumers who pump money into capitalistic enterprises' (60). Accepting as a fact that the acculturation of readers into consumers is their underlying function, Garner *et al.* carried out a study of the narratives of sexuality in teen magazines, asking the question: 'What messages do the highly popular teen magazines carry for young women about social and cultural norms for sex and sexual relationships?' (61). They conclude that these magazines are, in fact, 'training grounds for tradition'. Although the

³² See Strasburger's chapter, 'Adolescent Sexuality and the Media' in *Adolescents and the Media: Medical and Psychological Impact* (1995).

³³ 'Narrative Analysis of Sexual Etiquette in Teenage Magazines': Expanding on existing research on women's magazines, this study by Garner *et al.* examines the sexual etiquette developed in advice columns in magazines popular among teenage girls, finding that over 20 years the advice has changed very little. 'Young women are still being taught to subordinate self for others and to be contained'; see Garner *et al.* (1998).

magazines feature pictures of glossy-looking teenage models who appear confident and in control, implying ‘agency [and] the ability to do as they please’ (61), these images belie the messages carried in the magazines:

The slight body of research available on teenage girls’ magazines suggest that they construct a traditional, advertiser-influenced style of female sexuality, which features pleasing men through enhancing beauty and sexual availability. (61)

Although various studies of teenage magazines addressed issues of sexuality, sexuality was not their main focus, and Garner *et al.* therefore focused their study specifically on the overt sexual or relationship advice given to adolescent girls in regular columns over a twenty-year period.³⁴ In 1974 they found that only a few magazines included in their study³⁵ ‘directly and openly addressed the issue of sexual activity and sexuality through such topics as sex and the single scene, infidelity, pregnancy and abortion, venereal disease, “his body” ...’. By 1984 all magazines ‘more openly addressed male-female sexuality and sexual relations ... carry[ing] articles on teen pregnancy and masturbation, abortion and sexual double standards’. And by 1994 the magazines were all addressing such topics as ‘erotic dreams with lesbians, satisfying sex with an older man ... sex with cousins, sexual abuse,’ and so forth. In short, Garner *et al.* reported a ‘shift in the range and explicitness of topics relating to sexuality’ (64). What they did not perceive, however, was ‘any significant change over time ... in how women’s sexuality was framed’ (65). Because of this they decided to treat their material in a paradigmatic rather than syntagmatic way.³⁶

³⁴ 1974-1994.

³⁵ Garner *et al.* surveyed five magazines: *YM*, *Teen*, *Seventeen*, *Glamour* and *Mademoiselle*.

³⁶ Paradigmatic relates to the stressing of content-based categories, and syntagmatic to the stressing of change over time; see Garner *et al.*

The researchers identified three areas of interest, or ‘themes’, to explore in the framing of women’s sexuality, two of which are of importance here: ‘Character Themes’ and ‘Action Themes’.³⁷ ‘Character Themes’ relates to the ‘actors’ in sexual narratives. Garner *et al.* (drawing on Finders³⁸) put forward that teen magazines ‘help young women identify the nature of their new adult community, as well as the other actors’. Two ‘actors’ are presented in this sexual drama, the boy and the girl.³⁹ The boy is predominantly characterised as the ‘user’ of sex, and the girl is characterised as ‘the negotiator of [her] own use’. Girls in teen magazines ‘were assumed to be, quite simply, in the process of ‘becoming’. Girls were never right just as they were’ (65). Citing Gilligan, Lyons and Hanmer’s 1990 study,⁴⁰ Garner *et al.* argue that ‘many girls submerge their individuality and sense of identity in favour of becoming what someone else wants them to be ... [Their] analysis revealed that teen magazines encouraged girls to become what significant others, in particular, guys, wanted them to be’ (66). This, it seems, is actively promoted in the sexual narratives of magazines:

Health and relationship advice columns, supplemented and complemented by fictional stories and features on sexual issues, encouraged young women to become sexual objects whose lives

³⁷ The third area, ‘Setting Themes’, concerns the settings in which sexual activity takes place, these settings were rarely named. Teenagers’ sexual activity took place whenever possible, and wherever they could find a private place. Garner *et al.* found that the scene of the story is not of primary importance, but that ‘[r]educing adolescent uncertainty about the basic nature of sex is’. For further explication see Garner *et al.*, page 65.

³⁸ Finders’ 1997 text, *Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior High*, provides a study of adolescent girls in high school. Finders focuses on what the girls read and write, not only school-sanctioned activities, but also ‘hidden literacies’: signing yearbooks, writing notes, reading teen magazines.

³⁹ Teen magazines still predominantly feature heterosexual narratives of sexuality.

⁴⁰ *Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School: An exploration of the themes in female adolescent psychological development*, the work relates to a longitudinal study involving a series of interviews with students at a day and boarding school for girls; see Gilligan, Lyons and Hanmer (1990).

were not complete unless sexually connected with a man. Girls could earn a man, first by recognizing traditional interests ('affection' and 'company') ... and, second, through the changing of self as they negotiated their way through sexual encounters and relationships. Young women achieved the latter by being better informed than guys about male and female physiology and psychology; by attracting guys through good-looking hair, beautiful clothes, and thin bodies; and by developing sex and relationship skills. (66)

By contrast, boys in teenage magazines simply 'are'. Boys need to know 'only themselves and, because they 'are', they need not worry about 'becoming' men or achieving power or status; they already have it' (67).⁴¹

Sexual narratives in teen magazines 'clarified the elements of sexual advice and told the reader which elements were the most important' (68). The narratives all presumed that young girl readers were sexually active and stressed what kind of person a girl should be within the sexual community. Three 'Action Themes' emerged from this analysis: 'Woman as sex object', 'Women as sex therapists' and 'Women as communication teachers'. Although the magazines' narratives did encourage girls to be self-reliant and not to allow themselves to be walked-over, and whilst they did promote independence and emotional strength, these messages did not seem to be connected to their own sexuality:

Instead, the predominant themes included presenting oneself as sexually desirable (not desiring), developing the skills of sexual therapy (designed to enhance men's sexual pleasure and performance), and becoming a communication teacher (to help guys become better relational partners). (68)

The focus of a girl's sexuality in teen magazines is therefore not on her own pleasure. Implicit in the narratives is the message that a girl's main aim is

⁴¹ Garner *et al.* found that, over the twenty year period, boys were constantly shown to lack relationship skills and were unable to express themselves, 'verbally or emotionally'. Boys' sexuality was presented as 'animalistic and self-centred' and the sexual advice given to girls became 'more explicit and graphic'. Regrettably, these 'male ways of being' were not shown as unattractive, and young women were encouraged to 'study' boys' behaviour, qualities and characteristics 'to survive within the community' (68).

to 'please her man' through developing a working (and resolutely heterosexual) relationship.⁴²

Contemporary teenage magazines remain a long way off from presenting modern, up-to-date images of women, images that could possibly augment their own sense of sexual worth.⁴³ Quite the reverse is true; these magazines ring out the same themes 'sounded for years in women's magazines and home economics textbooks – how to meet successfully the needs and desires of men' (74), and this vision of women:

as sex objects, sex therapists, and interpersonal communication teachers rather than friends, partners, lovers and mothers, promotes the subordination of self for others and encourages young women to become contained. (75)

Garner *et al.* are not alone in their conclusion. Laura Carpenter's 1998 study of sexual narratives in *Seventeen* magazine over a twenty-year period made similar findings.⁴⁴ Carpenter states that whilst the variety of sexual scripts over the period expanded to recognise 'female desire, ambivalence about sexuality, homosexuality, masturbation, oral sex, and even recreational sexual activity', the editors did, however, resolve

⁴² Also implicit in these narratives is that girls must lose weight, learn sexual techniques, wear make-up, and dress sexily. If a girl's 'real world' does not fit in with this narrative, then she is encouraged toward self-analysis. This all serves the magazines' main purpose of selling advertising. As some magazines in the study found out, editorial content that puts women first does not prosper with advertisers; see Garner *et al.*, p.74.

⁴³ It must be noted that a counter-argument has been made by Angela McRobbie who takes a more optimistic view; she finds that there are degrees of change within the genre-bound format, and states that there is now an energy and vitality in older girls' magazines which promote openness to the world rather than a retreat from it. McRobbie argues that the content of these magazines has shifted away from feminine passivity and has been replaced with a much more assertive female subjectivity. This has been aided, she states, by the disappearance of romance and the inclusion of a 'sprinkling of feminist ideas' (McRobbie 1999, 50). Others, including myself, find it hard to share McRobbie's optimism however. Indeed, Stevi Jackson challenges McRobbie directly; whilst she agrees in part with McRobbie that girls are better served by these magazines than they were in the past, Jackson still finds them problematic: 'The problem', she says, 'is not that girls are exposed to too much sex, or too explicit sex, but the limited, male oriented ways in which sexuality is discussed' (Jackson 1996, 60).

⁴⁴ 'From Girls Into Women: Scripts for Sexuality and Romance in *Seventeen* Magazine, 1974-1994', see Carpenter (1998).

'controversies in ways that reinforced dominant gender and social norms' (Carpenter 1998, 158).

Cultural scenarios,⁴⁵ Carpenter claims, can be shaped by, amongst others, the creators of sex education curricula, proselytizers of sexual morality and writers of teen magazines' advice columns. In the case of the latter, new scenarios may provide readers with 'fuel for challenging dominant norms and even for creating and disseminating new ones. At the same time, however, the manner in which new scripts are presented may work to forestall such challenges and changes' (159).

Whilst Carpenter agrees with feminist scholars that popular media 'reflect and perpetuate young women's social subordination', she parts company with their argument that these media can 'also offer them opportunities for pleasure and resistance', finding that their provisions for resistance and pleasure are 'limited and limiting':

For instance, because the primary goal of teen magazines is to make profits through advertising consumer goods, they may reinforce the socialization of girls as consumers, especially as consumers of fashion and beauty products. (160)

Carpenter claims that editors and owners of magazines maintain they are simply responding to readers' desires and needs, but, she states, their decisions form an implied message about readers' requirements. The editorial content of teen magazines 'focuses almost exclusively on fashion, beauty, entertainment and romance, with material about sexuality becoming more common after about 1980' (160). Also, she continues, as most magazines feature similar content, adolescent girls' media choices are

⁴⁵ Cultural scenarios are a form of sexual narrative, or 'script', that tell individuals with whom, when, where, how and why to do sexual things; see Carpenter, p.158.

limited. However, the popularity of these magazines intimates that they are fulfilling at least some of their readers' needs and desires, and in them teenage girls may find a variety of perspectives on sexual predicaments that can differ from those endorsed by parents and educators.

Nevertheless, magazines cannot be considered as neutral purveyors of information, or, indeed, liberal forums for the exchange of information; they need to attract large audiences, and sales figures and selling advertisements are their main concern:

To accomplish this, they must not only provide content designed to appeal to a wide variety of potential readers but also take precautions not to alienate advertisers, readers, or the parents who financially underwrite many readers' purchases. ... [E]ditors appear to solve this institutional dilemma by offering a variety of cultural scenarios about sexuality, but resolving them in ways that remain consistent with dominant social norms. (160) ⁴⁶

Carpenter analysed the sexual narratives contained in *Seventeen* in relation to Fine's categorisation of discourse on teen female sexuality. Throughout the period studied she found a decreasing discourse of victimization and an increasing discourse of desire.⁴⁷ Narratives about sexual victimization had not only decreased, but were now more likely to concentrate on warning girls about isolated errors of judgement rather than advising them of dangers inherent in all aspects of sexuality. Narratives recognising the sexual desires of female adolescent readers not only became more prominent, but 'also beg[a]n to refer to fulfilling desire more

⁴⁶ Editorial conventions allow writers to present conflicting messages within an article and resolve them by the article's end: 'In the questions-and-answer sequences of advice columns, for instance, readers' questions typically concern a particular sexual script or the need to choose among several competing scripts. When columnists respond, they generally outline the advantages and disadvantages of the scripts in question, sometimes introduce additional scripts, and often conclude by explicitly or implicitly guiding the reader to a particular alternative'(Carpenter 1998, 160).

⁴⁷ The discourse of sexuality as violence, which posits virtually all sexuality as a form of violence, did not appear, and the discourse of sexuality as individual morality remained about as common as before.

immediately' (163). Editors, however, whilst acknowledging actions based on desire, still did not encourage active sexuality.

Carpenter finds that *Seventeen's* editors:

direct readers to particular scripts and subject positions by disregarding some sexual scripts (e.g. cunnilingus), by denigrating other scripts (e.g. homosexuality), and by resolving discrepancies among scripts in relatively conservative ways (e.g. promoting protection over pleasure). Although they have occasionally presented new alternatives, editors have typically favoured traditional scripts and subject positions. (166)

Carpenter allows that editors are increasingly acknowledging adolescent girls' sexual desire and agency and validating their understandings of sexuality. She agrees that sexual narratives in which readers are encouraged to see themselves as sexual agents can only be positive and may help them to resist gender and sexual subordination. However, she does sound a note of caution:

At the same time, the potential effects of these new scripts are limited, especially as editors continue to depict dominant sexual scripts as preferable to available alternatives. Restricting sexual options may be a way of protecting the vulnerable – women, teens, or both – from danger ... however, it may also constitute a manoeuvre to protect society from women's sexuality and power. (167)

In Search of Authentic Embodied Sexuality

At the top of this discussion I claimed that we are still a long way off from the effective production of a 'healthy sexuality', and an examination of the various discourses of sexuality aimed at teenagers has upheld this. Sex education rhetoric fails to provide teenage girls with a discourse of desire, and despite claiming to fill this breach, teenage magazines fail likewise.

Sharon Lamb ironically suggests that various media are producing

'pornified-empowered' girls who are not acting authentically, their sexuality is not 'embodied' and 'embodiment ... is necessary for a fully agentic sexuality' (Lamb 2009, 301). Lamb considers the sexual empowerment of these girls to be:

grounded in a stereotype of empowerment ... that is beholden to marketed ideas of what's 'hot' and 'sexy'. Even if she were to be feeling sexual feelings in her body ... theorists would most likely argue that it is still not embodied for to perform 'sexy' means to take the perspective of the male looking on. (301)

There are two possible explanations why this pleasure-seeking does not count as 'agentive teen sexuality': the first posits that a girl's choices are understood to be influenced by the rewards her community gives her for it;⁴⁸ and the second conjectures that she has developed a false kind of subjectivity.⁴⁹

Applied to the teen girl, she believes she is autonomous, choosing to be the kind of object that has been defined as sexy by an all-male highly marketed media-influenced audience ... but this choice is restricted by discourse and traditional ideologies of what it means to be heterosexual, sexual, and sexy for a woman. (301)

If teenage girls are viewed as being ruled by patriarchy, the marketplace, or dominant ideologies, then society is easily able to 'dismiss girls and women as politically relevant actors'. One way of addressing this difficulty, states Lamb, is to hold out 'sexual authenticity against a performative sexuality'. The word 'authentic' is used by theorists⁵⁰ to denote a form of sexuality that is agentic and embodied: 'When an authentic girl becomes sexual she

⁴⁸ According to Lamb, the system a girl is rewarded by is patriarchy or a specific male-privileged system that rewards girls and women who perform a sexuality pleasing to them.

⁴⁹ This theory (propounded by Althusser) is where individuals might believe they are acting autonomously but ideological discourse has recruited them as representatives. For further explication, see Lamb, p.301.

⁵⁰ For a list of theorists and further in-depth discussion on the theory of 'authentic embodied sexuality', see Lamb, p.301.

doesn't self-sexualize because self-sexualization is a performance⁵¹ ... Instead, she looks within and gets to know her own desires, separate from the marketplace' (301). This feeling of self-worth has been described as 'self-efficacy' by Impett *et al.*⁵² who use it to depict embodied responsible girls in touch with their own feelings.

According to Lamb, then, a healthy sexuality must:

combat objectification, victimisation, and the stereotype of passivity. [The adolescent] ought to learn about, understand, and identify desires, feel sexual feelings in her genitals, use full reasoning ability in making choices, be uninfluenced by romance narratives and beauty ideals from TV, books, or movies, pursue her own pleasure as much or even more than her partner's, and exist always as a subject and never as an object. (299)

Whilst this is all rather idealistic, and would necessitate girls living in a vacuum, we can concede Lamb's point. However, adolescents do not live in a void, and will continue to be influenced by the sexual narratives around them.

Sex in Adolescent Novels: Ideology v Metaphor

A third written forum for teenagers to read and learn about adolescent sexuality comes in the form of the 'Teen' or 'YA' novel. Whilst the aim of much literature written for children is to assert both the child's sense of self and their personal power,⁵³ novels written for teenagers challenge the protagonists to learn for themselves about the social forces that have made them what they are:

⁵¹ Performance is differentiated from authenticity.

⁵² 'To Be Seen and Not Heard: Femininity, Ideology and Adolescent Girls' Sexual Health'; see Impett *et al* (2006).

⁵³ In books for younger children, much of the narrative focuses on a single child who learns to feel more secure in the precincts of his or her immediate surroundings, usually portrayed by family and home; see Trites, Chapter 1.

They learn to negotiate the levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions within which they must function, including family; school; the church; government; social constructions of sexuality, gender, race, class; and cultural mores surrounding death. (Trites 2000, 3)

Sexual desire in the majority of Teen Gothic novels is generally depicted metaphorically and this is in stark contrast to the raft of 'realist' Young Adult fiction that is available for teenagers detailing sex and sexual relationships explicitly, and reading, as Trites would have it, as 'self-help manual[s] to help teenagers learn more about sex' (Trites 2000, 88).⁵⁴ These texts, she contends, demonstrate Foucault's principle that Western cultures at once liberate and repress sexuality.⁵⁵ They attempt to liberate teenage sexuality by conveying that sexual curiosity is natural, and then undercut this message 'with a series of messages framed by institutional discourses that imply teenagers should not have sex or else should feel guilty if they do' (88):

Teenage characters in YA novels agonize about almost every aspect of human sexuality: decisions about whether to have sex, issues of sexual orientation, issues of birth control and responsibility, unwanted pregnancies, masturbation, orgasms, nocturnal emissions, sexually transmitted diseases, pornography and prostitution. The occasional teenage protagonist even quits agonizing about sexuality long enough to enjoy sex, but such characters seem more the exception than the rule. (84)

The result of this didactic approach, argues Trites, is that teenage fiction is often used as an ideological tool to suppress teenagers' sexual desire, and

⁵⁴ I follow Trites' lead by citing the work of YA Author Judy Blume in this respect. Blume's novels for teenagers were among the first to tackle menstruation (*Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (1998)), masturbation (*Deenie* (2001), *Then Again, Maybe I Won't* (2011)) and teen sex (*Forever* 2005)). Although written around thirty years ago, these books have never been out of print. A glance at the YA realist romance section (as opposed to fantasy romance section) of any bookshop or online retailer reveals an extensive list of titles covering the same topics.

⁵⁵ According to Foucault, Western cultures have separated sexuality from sex as a way to regulate it, with ideas about sexuality depending on notions of deviance to define what is allegedly, mainstream or normal; see Foucault (1998).

it portrays sexuality more often than not in terms of displeasure rather than pleasure. No matter how reassuring these novels attempt to be to the teenage reader, they are written, she says, according to cultural norms that tend to define teenage sexuality in terms of deviancy, and this is done in an attempt to control; therein lies the paradox: 'reassur[ing] teenagers that their actions are normal still start[s] from the assumption that someone thinks their actions are not' (88). Much Young Adult literature then, to paraphrase Foucault, makes a science of sex⁵⁶ which is devoted to the analysis and control of desire rather than the increase of pleasure. How dull for the reader.

Enter the vampire. Unfettered from the restraints of overtly didactic 'realist' fiction, the figure of the vampire liberates the teenager from the fairly frightening and mysterious 'mechanics' of sex, and simplifies matters: 'sex without sex'. Rather than reading novels implicitly loaded with Foucault's 'science of sex', which seem devoted to analysing, tediously, the negative results and consequences of inevitably giving in to teenage desire (and perhaps equating that desire with anxiety and fear),⁵⁷ the figure of the vampire allows the teenage reader to back up a little and to explore and enjoy the nature of that desire itself. This, I would argue, explains the undying appeal of the vampire for the adolescent. The vampire's desire refuses to be controlled, and adolescents view the

⁵⁶ Foucault states that modern Western culture has developed a *scientia sexualis* (science of sexuality) which is more intent on personalised control than sexual pleasure; he contrasts this with Eastern culture which has created a sophisticated and impersonal *ars erotica* (erotic art), which is a knowledge of sensual pleasure; see Foucault (1998).

⁵⁷ As Fine states: 'The adolescent woman herself assumes a dual consciousness – at once taken with the excitement of actual/anticipated sexuality and consumed with anxiety and worry' (Fine 1988, 35).

vampire, in the same way that they view themselves, as an ambiguous, subliminal figure.

The oft-quoted 'every age embraces the vampire it needs' (Auerbach 1995, 145) can be read in two ways; not only does each era create its own vampire, but each age group does so too. A creature of everlasting fascination to young and old alike, bearing the weight of endless metaphor, the vampire has, however, a particular resonance with the young adolescent. 'Hovering between animal and angel' (Auerbach 1995, 131), the adolescent, as any parent will attest, identifies with the repulsive, yet attractive, nature of the vampire.

In general terms,⁵⁸ the vampire has moved on from his⁵⁹ late-nineteenth-century incarnation as a monstrous and evil figure constructed to define, through opposition, the existence of 'good', and has now been supplanted by his twentieth-century manifestation, a divided and somewhat tortured figure, whose actions are a result of his physical condition rather than a conflict between good and evil: the adolescent in a nutshell. Since vampires have become more sympathetic, more human and less 'other', they are now more likely to 'offer a site of identification than a metaphor for what must be abjected, and with the movement from the metaphorical to the metonymical, the vampire increasingly serves to facilitate social commentary on the human world' (Punter & Byron 2004, 271).

⁵⁸ For a comprehensive history of the vampire in literature since the eighteenth century, see Auerbach (1995).

⁵⁹ Given their predominantly female readership, the vampire protagonist in Young Adult vampire novels is almost exclusively male. This continuing heteronormative assumption in YA vampire literature is surprising when one considers how many gay and/or bisexual vampires there are in contemporary adult vampire fiction, beginning with Anne Rice's 'polymorphously sensual' (Overstreet 2006, 21) vampires Lestat, Louis and Armand.

Commonly construed as a metaphor for sex, the vampire's kiss retains this promise, and threat, for the adolescent; although the vampire is most often written as a sexualised predator, it is, in fact, his very sexual nature that most appeals to young adolescents. For the majority of these readers sex is something that has not happened yet, but is something they spend a long time thinking about. Through the figure of the vampire, and the sensual encounters depicted with him, the young adult reader can explore 'sex without sex. It has all the trappings of sex, all the feeling of a sensual experience, but none of the real sex. Except, perhaps, in the mind of the reader' (DeMarco 1997, 27).

Werewolves, like vampires, are also borderline creatures:

shape shifters in the domestic world, figures of the abject who remind us of our animal natures, that which we both loathe and have to acknowledge while we restrain it. The werewolf myth explores or reveals hidden animal selves, deriving from fears that we and those we know and love might not be as we expect, may harbour beneath civilised and loving exteriors some basic, monstrous, uncivilised, bestial behaviours. (Wisker 2005, 209)

For the teenage reader the werewolf, like the vampire, functions as an ambiguous and metaphorical manifestation of their sexual fears and desires; the werewolf represents both a dread of invasion and infection, at the same time as it functions as an expression of inner desire.

Traditionally, werewolves function to show the repressed 'beast inside the man' who has to be destroyed 'because he represents (and it is always a he) a threat too great to civilisation' (Wisker 2005, 211). However, the werewolf has also 'moved on' from 'his' monstrous construction;⁶⁰ he is no

⁶⁰ Late twentieth-century adaptations of the werewolf myth question what we take as normal and civilised, and focus on our terror of the uncanny. For an outline of the trajectory of the one-thousand-year-old werewolf mythology, see Wisker (2005).

longer always regarded as cursed, is increasingly considered more alluring than monstrous, and is no longer exclusively male.

Werewolf novels that are written for adolescent boys tend to be aimed at the younger end of the market (twelve to thirteen year-olds). The texts emphasise the importance of 'the pack', and deal with both boys and girls, however, the main focus is still on the experience of the young male werewolf. These texts equate the werewolf metamorphosis with the onset of puberty and the flooding of the young boy's body with testosterone. Although they deal with the discovery of the 'beast within', and examine the nature of the urges, drives and needs that they now have, they do so lightly and do not address full-blown sexual desire, focussing instead on fighting and hunting. These books are rarely Gothic in nature, and are, instead, concerned with rites of transition and the need for young boys to have adults guide them into manhood. The hierarchical and societal structure of the wolf pack lends itself well to this purpose.⁶¹

When werewolf texts are written for the female market, they certainly do deal with sexual desire and can take one of two paths: the female protagonist is attracted to a male werewolf; or, more interestingly, the female protagonist is, or becomes, a werewolf herself. Although packaged⁶² and marketed as Gothic texts, with taglines such as 'a chilling

⁶¹ See, for example, R.L. LaFevre's *Werewolf Rising* (2006), in which the protagonist, Luc, comes to terms with his changing self. Aimed at the younger end of the market, there is no sex.

⁶² Bookshelves in the teenage section of any bookstore are awash with the ubiquitous black, red, and white covers that denote Gothic texts; however, this marketing/packaging tool has been hijacked by publishers of fantasy romance. Reader beware.

love story',⁶³ the former tend to be no more than fantasy romances⁶⁴ containing few Gothic elements; indeed, in the main, the werewolf in any of these novels appears to be somewhat tame and de-clawed. The latter category, however, grabs the Gothic with both hands, and shows the female teenage werewolf appropriating the predatory, dominant, devouring and sexual nature of the male werewolf and acknowledging it as her own. As the 'beast within' erupts, the female protagonist recognises, with a thrilling fierceness, that sexual/bestial part of herself which, not being socially acceptable, she has had to struggle to keep repressed.

Choices

For teenagers sitting on the cusp of adulthood, sex is, like both the vampire and the werewolf, alluring yet dangerous. If we allow that the Gothic presents us with two possibilities, the transcendence of social objectification through desire, or the monstrous consequences of pursuing our passions, then the Gothic figure in any of these Young Adult novels can be seen to offer the adolescent a choice: the possibility of subversion and transgression, or the 'safety of conformity' (Jackson, Coats & McGillis 2008, 13). Whilst most protagonists are shown to reach the safe path by the novel's end, along the way they have, at least, resolved some of the inconsistencies which were plaguing them from within; they have explored

⁶³ This is the tagline from Maggie Stiefvater's, *Shiver* (2009), a gentle 'werewolf romance' that contains minimal threat, and none whatsoever from the main werewolf himself. Sex, when it occurs, is literal, sweet, consensual and understated. Indeed, 'shiver' and 'chilling' both seem to refer, literally and uninspiringly, to the fact that werewolf transformation in this text is brought about in wintertime when the temperature drops below a certain level.

⁶⁴ As such, they are the equivalent of the 'soft' and unthreatening vampire 'fantasy romances' that are available, in excess, to teenage readers, and equally lacking in bite.

the nature of their sexual desire in conjunction with the other problems that they invariably face, and have delved into their dark side.

The teenage protagonist in any Young Adult vampire novel is frequently struggling to find her place in the world, is inevitably portrayed as being marginalised from the mainstream in some way, and is facing a problem, usually familial, that she feels she cannot surmount. The novels tend to trace the movement from the disintegration of the family unit to the sexual awakening of the protagonist by the vampire; death is often faced along the way, and the novels generally culminate with the protagonist establishing an identity independent from her parents. Many, if not all, vampires are themselves marginal creatures, reflecting the marginal nature of the teenage protagonist, and the figure of the vampire 'presents a mirror, even if a dark mirror, to the adolescent and shows them that all the problems they may face can be resolved' (DeMarco 1997, 28).

One of the most striking depictions of the vampire as an outsider is that of Simon in Annette Curtis Klause's *The Silver Kiss* who 'flow[s] from shadow to shadow, between trees and bushes, as if a shadow himself' (Klause 1999, 15). Simon is a somewhat feral, orphaned, and isolated 300-year-old teenage vampire, living on the streets and subsisting on birds and rats when he has to. He is able to exercise some control (just) and need not always kill when he feeds on humans – but sometimes he does. Simon is a beautiful and seductive vampire in the Byronic⁶⁵ mould: he looks like 'an angel in a Renaissance painting' (32), is 'tall and slim', has 'lean,

⁶⁵ Vampires in the early nineteenth century were 'singular friends' who flourished through their intimate intercourse with humans, to whom they were dangerously close; Byron's glamorous Augustus Darvell and Polidori's seductive Lord Ruthven are prime examples. See Auerbach, for further elucidation.

powerful muscles' and a 'finely sculpted face' (96). Echoes of this description can be found in any Young Adult vampire novel: male teenage vampires are always beautiful, always seductive; their irresistible glamour forcefully exerts a pull on the female heroine, who is attracted despite her better judgement. Whereas in the past vampires and angels would have been represented as polar opposites, vampires are now commonly conflated with angels in modern vampire fiction, particularly so in the case of Young Adult fiction; their angelic beauty inspires awe in the heroine and more and more often the vampire is represented as some sort of saviour. Contemporary vampires and angels share superhuman nature and intelligence; however, angels, like vampires, are ambiguous figures: for every lovely, bright and innocent being, there is a fallen⁶⁶ and rebellious spirit: a Lucifer.

Zoë, Klause's heroine in *The Silver Kiss*, feels shut out of her family; her mother is dying of cancer and because of this her father has little time for her (both parents mistakenly believe they are sheltering Zoë from the realities of death); added to this her best friend Lorraine is moving away. Zoë is, quite literally, wasting away from sadness:

Zoë the Bird they called her at school. She had always been thin, but now her bones seemed hollow. Her wrists and joints were bruised with shadows. She was almost as thin as her mother, wasting away with cancer in the hospital. (Klause 1999, 2)

When Simon first sees Zoë he thinks she is 'beautiful, dark like the night, but thin, as if one of his brethren had already claimed her' (14); later he refers to her again as beautiful and '[p]ale as the milk of death, thin and

⁶⁶ Angels, they say in the publishing business, are the new vampires, and there is now, of course, a fast-growing 'fantasy romance' (or 'dark romance') genre involving fallen angels. There is both an adult and a teenage market; Becca Fitzpatrick's *Hush Hush* (2009), and Lauren Kate's *Fallen* (2009) are prime examples of texts aimed at the teenage market.

sharp like pain' (19). Zoë is associated with death throughout *The Silver Kiss*: the text repeatedly hints at anorexia (155, 185, 186), and Zoë actively courts death when she knowingly walks down a dark alleyway where a previous murder has taken place: 'Death had been here...What if she were jumped? Would that be enough? Would death let her mother go? Only one Sutcliff needed, regardless of age or gender?' (77). Zoë is conflicted by death: on the one hand she not only accepts death's inevitability, but invites it for herself prematurely through her anorexic tendencies and her willingness to put herself, repeatedly, into potentially dangerous situations; on the other hand she wants to deny death's inevitability for her mother, irrationally hoping that she can barter her own life for her mother's, and tenderly writing poems entitled 'Spells against Death' (75). At odds with death, Zoë is surely a far more compelling, and sad, example of the living dead than any vampire.⁶⁷

It is when she is in this conflicted state that Zoë meets Simon in a dark and deserted local park. Simon tries to charm her; however Zoë, unlike his other victims, does not succumb to his soft tones and mesmerising influence. Their charged exchange has undoubted sexual undertones:

"I don't know what you're after," she said, "but you can look for it somewhere else." She turned and walked firmly away.

"It strikes me," he called after her in a voice now with an edge to it, "that girls who sit alone in parks at night are the ones after something." (32)

What is not quite clear is whether Zoë, at this point, is looking for sex or death. Interestingly, it is after Zoë's heated exchange with Simon that she

⁶⁷ Even Zoë's name points to this conflict; the name Zoë is Greek for 'life'.

regains her appetite: 'Her anger carried her home before she knew it. Strangely, it had made her hungry. She ate better than she had in weeks' (32). This stirring of both Zoë's literal and metaphorical (sexual) hunger echoes that of Simon's.

From the outset Simon is written as a predatory stalker; intrigued that Zoë 'snapped' his mesmerising moon-weave 'with anger' (34), his interest and his appetite are aroused, and both are described in rather threatening, sexual terms: he follows her home, circling her house and peering in like a 'peeping Tom' (34); he marks his territory 'like a wolf' (35) by urinating on her doorstep; 'I know where you live, he th[inks]' (35).

When Simon reflects upon past victims who have submitted to his 'charms', these scenes are also described in sexualised terms:

They usually came to him when his eyes softened with the moon, when he crushed his voice like velvet. They let him caress them. They tipped their heads back and drowned in the stars, while he stroked exposed throat and wallowed in conquest. Sometimes he let them go and allowed them to think it a dream. He left before they broke the spell of his eyes, to sit blinking and head-shaking in cold predawn wind. Sometimes the dark hunger awoke too strong to hold. He clenched them tight, sank fangs deep into yielding neck, and fed on the thick, hot soup of their life. He was lost in the throbbing ecstasy song of blood pumping, life spurting, until blood, horror, and life ebbed, and he abandoned the limp remnants to seek dark sleep. (34)

This extract is worth quoting at length in order to note the movement from slow, sensual seduction to what amounts to frenzied, sexualised brutality; 'sometimes' Simon is merciful, 'sometimes' he is not ... we are never quite sure about Simon. One could argue that this passage is as didactic as any to be found in a 'realist' text, maintaining that its message to the teenager is, after all, that uncontrolled sex is dangerous. However, Simon is

depicted as a romanticised vampire, and the passage starts with emphasis on tenderness and intimacy: he seduces with his 'softened eyes' and his 'voice like velvet', he 'stroke[s]' and 'caress[es]' beneath the 'moon' and the 'stars'; even with its lapse into brutality the passage remains erotically charged: the 'ecstasy' of the 'throbbing', 'pumping' and 'spurting' more exciting than horrific. Yes, Simon is dangerous, but he is also desirous and desired: Zoë (and, by implication, the teenage reader) is attracted to him even though she thinks he is dangerous. Later on, when she knows he is dangerous, she is still attracted to him.

Several more encounters follow, and the pair begin to form a strange bond through their mutual isolation. Despite perceiving Simon to be dangerous, Zoë still invites him into her home (a conventional vampire necessity for Simon), and, in choosing to open the door to him, she opens the door to her adult self. Simon tells her the story of how both he and his six-year-old brother, Christopher, were turned into vampires. It is Christopher who is responsible for the killings in the town; he kills gratuitously and sadistically and, importantly, 'killed his own mother [and Simon's] in the filthiest way' (101).

Christopher is certainly the villain of the piece; absolutely evil, he lures women with his act of helplessness and kills them viciously, feeding on their fear as well as their blood; he 'enjoys the kill' (125). Ever killing the compassionate mother figure, his feeding is described in terms of a suckling babe: he moves his chin 'with a rhythmic push as if milking her'; he 'slurp[s] and gulp[s]' (85). Christopher exemplifies Auerbach's contention that, 'with their mask of innocence, children are the most successful

vampires of all' (Auerbach 1995, 47). She sees child-vampires as a perfect example of the 'ideological erosion of paternalism': they do not need to be taken care of and told who they are. 'In however antisocial a manner, child-vampires fe[e]d themselves' (191). Created pre-adolescence, Christopher's needs are not compromised by sexual desire as Simon's are; his feeding and killing are therefore not described in erotic terms, but rather through the language of greed: the 'gluttony' of his 'milking', 'slurping' and 'gulping' nourishes his basic hunger, and his hunger for power is gratified by his victim's fear: the powerless infant, formerly dependent upon the mother, is thus made powerful. He is the destroyer of the mother, and, by extension, the destroyer of the family unit; he lives a life of antisocial independence and isolation.

Simon and Zoë, however, are tired of their lonely existences; both mourn the past and imminent deaths of their respective mothers and the dissolution of their family life. Already drawn to the dangerous, 'bad-boy' nature of Simon, Zoë is now even more attracted to him by the connection formed through their mutual grief. They are both, in effect, motherless, and share a common enemy in Christopher as the 'destroyer' of the mother, both literally and figuratively. Conveniently for Simon, the sad tale of his mother's death works to seduce Zoë more than any of his attempts to mesmerise her have; her feelings for him change from anger and fear to 'compassion' (109), and she realises that 'he need[s] her' (101). Taking his chance, Simon kisses her and feeds from her. Despite her crying and struggling for a second, he carries on, believing he will not harm her: 'I won't hurt you, he thought. Little bird, little dear. I won't hurt you' (127).

Lest we forget, Simon has a history of killing 'little birds'. Although Simon certainly tries to fight against his nature, and insists that he 'can control it' (125), he is always painted ambiguously. As his 'silver kiss' progresses his willpower falters: 'I must stop now, he thought. But I can't stop'.

Eventually he does, telling Zoë, 'I can stop if I want' (127). As Zoë has rather enjoyed the 'kiss', he reaches for her once more, senses 'throbbing', again telling himself, 'I can stop' (127); Zoë is quite literally saved by the bell when the telephone rings, bringing matters to a close. This vampire's desire does, indeed, refuse to be controlled, and throughout the novel Simon appears to be prevented from killing not through exercising self-control, but because he is interrupted. However, Zoë has willingly opened the door to Simon, and taken him into her arms, Zoë's desire is as unquenchable as Simon's, and his lack of self-control finds its reflection in her.

The issue of Simon's self-control notwithstanding, he has truly fallen for Zoë; he has 'waited centuries' (167) for her, and she rekindles 'a glimmer of life ... in him that he thought had been doused for good' (88).

Likewise, Zoë, feeling abandoned by her parents, finds in Simon someone who needs her, both for love and for help in avenging his mother's death.

Simon and Zoë are shown to consummate their relationship through the 'silver kiss', which, again, is written as 'sex without sex':

[S]he moaned and slipped her arms around him. It was the tender ecstasy of the kissed that he could send her with his touch. It throbbed through his fingers, through his arms, through his chest, like blood through her veins. It thrummed a rhythm in him that he shared with her. She sighed, her breath came harder. (127)

Zoë has enjoyed this sensual experience with Simon: ‘But it was ... I mean, it wasn’t terrible. It was ... I don’t know’ (127), and Simon replies: ‘It can be terrible ... I can make it sweet’; and here teenage sexuality is being expressed, metaphorically through the figure of the vampire, in terms of the *ars erotica* rather than the *scientia sexualis*. The knowledge of sensual pleasure, the truth about that pleasure and how it can be experienced, is being passed from an experienced master (the centuries-old vampire) to the novice (the virginal teenager). This consummation of their relationship is the turning point in the novel for both Simon and Zoë, and serves to empower them both.

Simon finds the strength to avenge his mother’s death and finally destroy Christopher; and Zoë, frustrated that she can do nothing to help her own mother, wants to help Simon: ‘You can *do* something about *your* problem’ (133) she angrily thinks. After they have destroyed Christopher, however, no permanent relationship can be formed and Zoë learns to accept that ‘sometimes’ life offers no guarantees:

Things changed, she realized. People grew, they moved, they died. Sometimes they withdrew into themselves, and sometimes they reached out after needing no one. She remembered Simon’s clinging embrace. What would it be like if nothing changed? she wondered. It would be stagnant, she supposed: frozen, decadent, terrifying. (192)

Realising the full horror of Simon’s ‘stagnant’, ‘frozen’, ‘decadent’ and ‘terrifying’ life, Zoë accepts that ‘[s]ometimes there [is] a time for death’ (193), and briefly considers killing him, but knows she cannot. Simon, however, has already resolved to commit suicide: “I have stayed too long. Death is the nature of things ... I am unnatural” (195), and he asks Zoë to

sit in the park with him until dawn when he fades away but does not burn. In his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault explains how the ancient right of the sovereign 'to *take* life or *let* live' was replaced by the power of the social body 'to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death' (Foucault 1998, 138, emphases in original). Simon is not subject to any sovereign power, terrestrial or otherwise, and as a vampire he falls outside the 'social body' which establishes its power over life and its unfolding. Simon need never die, yet now wishes to die; after his time with Zoë he knows he can never kill another human, and he is tortured by the fact that he would 'spend longer missing her than knowing her' (147). Falling outside of any power structure, his death must be by his own volition. For Foucault, suicide 'testifie[s] to the individual and private right to die at the borders and in the interstices of power that [are] exercised over life' (Foucault 1998, 139); although Simon need not die, he has the right to die, and because he exercises this willingly his death is not agonising, he faces the sun for the first time in three hundred years, and fades away, 'lit by joy' (198).

Zoë's sexuality has been awakened through her relationship with Simon,⁶⁸ and this relationship has empowered her to carry on positively with her life. When Zoë tells Simon: "Lately it seemed sometimes that you were the only one who knew I existed. Soon I won't have anyone", he replies: "But you have yourself. A good, kind, strong, brave self" (196), and Zoë learns to go it alone. Although she cannot prevent her mother from dying, Zoë realises that she can, in fact, 'do something' about her own problem. Whereas Zoë begins the novel churlishly resenting 'hav[ing] to be

⁶⁸ The name Simon is a variant of a Hebrew name meaning 'hear, listen'. Simon has filled the gap in Zoë's life left by her parents' absence.

responsible' (30), she ends it on a more acquiescent and positive note, no longer conflicted by death: 'It's up to me now, she thought. But somehow it wasn't scary anymore' (198).

Another heroine angry at the loss of her mother is Kerry,⁶⁹ in Vivian Vande Velde's *Companions of the Night*. Kerry's mother, however, is not dead or dying, but has run off with another man to 'Florida, to study to be a private investigator – and only one postcard since' (Vande Velde 2002, 3). Kerry is angry and resentful that her mother has left, but, more importantly, the desertion has damaged Kerry's self-esteem. When Kerry asks herself: '*What kind of mother leaves her family ...?*' She finds the answer 'easy: a mother who doesn't like her kids' (3). Indeed, Kerry's involvement with the vampire, Ethan, is 'all her mother's fault' (3), as she comes across him in the middle of night at the laundry where she has gone back to in order to retrieve her four-year-old brother's favourite toy - Kerry's mother having taken the washer and dryer with her to Florida.

Ethan is not as marginal and isolated a vampire as Simon; he passes amongst college students and lives, fairly conspicuously, in a grand house; he is also in contact with other vampires. Unlike Simon, Ethan⁷⁰ has a firm sense of identity and neither questions what he is nor apologises for it. He has no compunction about killing, but explains to Kerry that vampires need not kill every time they feed, and would draw too much attention to themselves if they did so. But, he adds, killing is 'necessary periodically ... too long between kills and the vampire becomes mentally and physically

⁶⁹ The text immediately, and misleadingly, sets Kerry up as being a suitable and willing partner for a vampire: she is running about in the dead of night, and her name is from the Irish, meaning 'dark princess'. The reader could be forgiven for presupposing that she will assume the dead Regina's mantle in Ethan's affections.

⁷⁰ A Hebrew name from the bible, Ethan means 'firm, strong and constant'.

sluggish', and 'besides', he admits, '[k]illing is very pleasurable' (100-101); Kerry has been warned. Ethan freely acknowledges what Simon struggles to admit - the pleasure and satisfaction of killing – and the threat of death is never very far away in this novel. However, what he does share with Simon is some sense of moral ambiguity; although he seems a creature of absolutes, Ethan is not as black as he paints himself. As the novel draws to a close, Ethan admits to Kerry that he feels responsible for his friend Regina's death: "I thought I'd led them to her. I thought I'd done something and they'd found me out, and followed me, and killed her because of me. I thought it was my fault" (208). This is one of the very few times that Ethan lets his guard down, and the only time he expresses any feelings of guilt; Kerry sees that 'he, too, had been blaming himself for someone else's actions' (208), just as she has been blaming herself for the fact that her mother left.

Kerry initially falls for Ethan because of his good looks, and the fact that he is a clever and charming liar who can manipulate any situation. Appearance has become the most important aspect of contemporary vampires, especially adolescent ones, and, in some cases, 'vampiric appetite is underplayed in favour of a focus on the more aesthetic appeal inherent to the species: the beauty, the sensuality, the power' (Pharr 1999, 93); the 'incredibly good looking' and 'incredibly attractive' (44, 45) Ethan typifies such an appeal. Although Kerry uses 'incredibly' in the teenage sense of 'astonishingly', it can also be read in terms of its more formal use: 'beyond belief or impossible'. Whilst it is possible to argue against Pharr's contention that the vampire's appetite is underplayed in any of these novels

(teenage vampires remain as bloodthirsty and hungry as any), it is certainly true that the primary, initial, focus for the (presumably female) teenage reader is the vampire's aesthetic appeal. This works well for both the author and the vampire: the author is rewarded in sales figures, and the vampire's beauty ensures him a steady stream of willing victims, easily lured and kept regardless of the nature of his appetite.

When Kerry learns that Ethan is a vampire she becomes afraid of him - a fact he uses to his advantage - but she is still intrigued by him and develops further, deeper, feelings for him. Sometimes it is suggested that Ethan slowly begins to reciprocate her feelings, but this is never made completely clear. We never learn the truth about Ethan as he lies continually and brilliantly; he answers all Kerry's questions with lies, evasions or tall tales and we know nothing of his life as a human or as a vampire. Indeed, Kerry gets so used to Ethan's lying, that she finds 'she [is] most disinclined to believe him when he use[s] words like *honestly* and *truly*' (122, emphases in original), and, with his incredible beauty and his mendacious tongue, we are again reminded of Lucifer, who is considered the 'Father of Lies'.⁷¹ However, although Ethan's behaviour towards her appears threatening at times, he constantly maintains that he will not hurt her, and is always concerned about her comfort and safety, '[a]nd what', Kerry wonders, is 'she supposed to make of that?' (190).

Aside from some mock-serious threats, Ethan does not make any purposeful attempt to kiss, bite or feed from Kerry. Kerry, however, dreams

⁷¹ 'You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.' John 8:44

about the vampire's kiss in very erotic terms. Firstly she dreams about Ethan being 'sired' by Regina, although she knows that this did not happen:

Because it was a dream, Kerry could feel what Ethan felt, which was fear – how could it not be? – and shame, but also pleasure, which was the reason for the shame. Kerry tried to wake herself up but couldn't. His breathing came faster and faster, until, with a shudder of pain, it stopped entirely. (121)

As Ethan has never expressed any embarrassment for what he is or what he has gone through, Kerry is obviously feeling her own 'shame' and 'pleasure' for the sexual nature of this dream.

The second time Kerry has an erotic dream about Ethan is after they have both saved each other's lives, and Kerry has dragged Ethan into a darkened closet to save him from the sunlight. However, before she falls asleep, she momentarily thinks about killing him: '*Anyone he kills after this, she thought, it'll be like I killed them*' (204). This echoes Zoë's thoughts about killing Simon in *The Silver Kiss*, and, like Zoë's, these thoughts are fleeting. In considering killing the vampires, both girls are figuratively, and unsuccessfully, trying to kill their own desire. Kerry eventually does fall asleep, and her dream is very passionate indeed:

He leaned over her. "I won't hurt you," he whispered ... And then he bit her. There was a moment of pain but, as he had promised, it felt very, very good. She was aware of her heart slowing as her life's blood drained out of her, and of his heart beating faster as her blood filled his veins ... Then he lifted his own wrist to his mouth and ran it across his teeth. "*Choices,*" she remembered him saying, as he put his wrist to her mouth. At first she recoiled from the taste, but it filled her mouth and she had to spit it out or swallow. She swallowed. And a second time: she hesitated and the warm coppery blood filled her mouth again. But then she began sucking on his wrist, drawing the blood from the arteries, unable to stop ... (205, emphasis in original)

And so it goes on. Consciously or not, Kerry has been dreaming about losing her virginity, and it is worthwhile taking the time here to examine Kerry's unconscious desire from a Freudian perspective.

For Steven Bruhm, Freud's theory of unconscious desire⁷² is a key point to understanding the Gothic in general:

As human beings, we are not free agents operating out of conscious will and self-knowledge. Rather, when our fantasies, dreams and fears take on a nightmarish quality, it is because the unconscious is telling us what we *really* want. And what we really want are those desires and objects that have been forbidden. (Bruhm 2002, 262)

What forms the contemporary Gothic, Bruhm continues, is the fact that these unconscious desires revolve around the problem of a lost object. The loss is usually material, but always has a psychological dimension to it. In *Companions of the Night* Kerry has lost her mother; she resents this loss and blames herself for it. For Freud, when the father tears the child away from the mother creating the Oedipus complex,⁷³ he introduces a sense of loss in the child which drives the child to fill the empty space that this prohibition has created. In true psychoanalytic terms, then, Kerry intensely desires the object that has been lost (her mother), or another that might take its place (the vampire/Ethan/sex), but she is aware at some level that the object of her desire carries with it the threat of punishment (the anger of the father/death/vampirism).

In the dream, Ethan has offered Kerry a 'choice', making what happens next up to her, and again there are echoes of Lucifer: when Satan (Lucifer) tempts Eve in the Garden of Eden, God does not interfere

⁷² For further elaboration on the theory of unconscious desire, see Bruhm (2002).

⁷³ The Oedipus complex pertains to both boys and girls. According to Freud, as a young child, both boys and girls love their mother, while resenting their father as competition for their mother's attention. See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1999).

because he wants Adam and Eve have to have free choice. Early on in the novel Ethan warns Kerry against betraying him: “Believe this Kerry: An easy death is only one of the choices I can offer” (74), and he goes on to emphasise the importance of choice repeatedly throughout the course of the text. When Kerry asks: “Do you choose ... To become a vampire? Or is it like an infection?”, he replies: “Oh, there’s a choice ... There’s always a choice. To one extent or another” (156), and when Kerry persists in her questioning, asking if there is a way to stop being a vampire (and still be ‘alive’), he answers: “Yes. So, you see, there are choices after choices” (158). After she has woken from her dream, Kerry gives this some consideration:

Choices, she thought again. She had to make her own, and those were the only ones she was responsible for. Not his. Not – this was a new thought – her mother’s. *Let go of those*, she told herself.

It was the first time since her mother left that she felt free. (206, emphases in original)

After Kerry and Ethan have defeated the vampire hunters and saved one another’s lives, Kerry must choose which path to take. Ethan starts to kiss Kerry passionately, for the first time, and Kerry almost has the object of her desire within reach: she is not dreaming this time; however, despite admitting that she has helped him because she loves him, Kerry insists that she has no intention of becoming a vampire, and, ‘because it was the last thing she wanted to do, she pulled away from him’ (210). Kerry has made her choice – and Ethan respects that choice. He does not tell Kerry that he loves her; he only calls out to her as she is leaving:

“Is there any chance you’d ever change your mind?”

She turned back. It was very tempting. But her only hope was not to let him see that. "Is there any chance you'd change yours?" she countered. (212)

But Ethan, satisfied with his vampiric existence, makes her no assurances. Kerry walks away, and in so doing she lets go of both her objects of desire: her mother and Ethan.

Of course, on a very simplistic level, this can be read as, 'girl refuses to sleep with boy and boy leaves', and it has been shown that Kerry's dreams have unconsciously been concerned with the loss of her virginity; however, despite being sorely tempted, Kerry is strong enough to make her own choice, as well as having the confidence to make Ethan a counter-offer, and, importantly, it is she who leaves. Kerry, like Zoë in *The Silver Kiss*, becomes empowered by exploring her sexuality and the choices that it offers; she spurns the subversive possibilities that Ethan offers, and opts for the 'safety of conformity'. Jackson, Coats & McGillis state that the Gothic 'presents us with a fantasy of desire' that is 'out of reach' (2008, 13). In the figure of the vampire, Ethan has presented Kerry with just such 'a fantasy of desire': Kerry cannot go with him, she cannot subvert the social order without destroying her own foundation, in so doing she would be running away from her family and responsibilities, just like her mother had. Kerry chooses to become the responsible adult that her mother was not. However, she has explored that desire and has chosen, for the time being, to leave it 'out of reach', for, as Ethan has said, "[s]ometimes the choice is like that" (157).

The teenage protagonists of *The Silver Kiss* and *Companions of the Night*, Zoë and Kerry, are ultimately empowered by their relationships with

the vampires Simon and Ethan; these girls both exemplify Lamb's notion of an 'agentive teen sexuality'. They are both shown to relinquish the objects of their desire and move forward toward being responsible adults.

Importantly, despite both being centuries old, Simon and Ethan have both been turned into vampires as teenagers; however, when the teenager's vampiric 'other' does not present himself in teenage form, when his appetite is portrayed as perverse, and the protagonist herself does not relinquish her desire, things are shown to take a far more sinister turn.

Perverse Appetites

The protagonist's relationship with the uncanny figure of the werewolf or the vampire can be seen to offer the teenager reader vicarious participation in guilty pleasures, as well as offering them 'the super-egoical pleasure of control over and repression of the monster as the dark shadow double of the ego consciousness' (Connolly 2003, quoted in James 2009, 21). But when boundaries are fully eroded and encounters with the abject Other result in 'an "unlimiting" of the imagination, an increase in consciousness and capacity to accept ethical guilt about [their] abject desires' then the monster cannot be repressed or controlled, and the teenager recognises that 'the perverse and psychotic desires of the monster are a mirror image of [their] own perverse desires' (21), as does Cynda in the disturbing romantic relationship portrayed in Mary Downing Hahn's *Look for Me by Moonlight*.

Isolated and marginalised, 16-year-old Cynda's entire domestic scene is predicated on loss. Her father and mother separated when Cynda was six after her father, a lecturer, had an affair with one of his students whom he subsequently married, and with whom he has begun a new family. Her mother, too, has remarried, and they have become 'a Navy family, hopscotching all over America,' never staying in one place long enough for Cynda to 'make friends, settle down and feel comfortable' (1-2). When her step-father announces his new posting to Italy for three years, Cynda 'flat-out rebel[s]', throws 'major temper tantrum[s]' and is sent to live with her father in Maine for a while; her father, now a writer, runs an old inn. Cynda finds her father self-centred and ineffectual, thinks her pregnant step-mother, Susan, is taking advantage of her, and resents her five-year-old step-brother Todd.

Into this unsettled and fractured family dynamic walks the dark and mysterious Vincent, whom Cynda mentally invites into the inn when she sees him driving past in the snow: "“Stop,” I whispered ... “Come in from the cold, stay with us”" (40). Vincent is a 'beautiful' 500-year-old vampire who appears to be about thirty: 'unearthly in his perfection' (70), he is 'the sort you'd stop and stare at in disbelief' (48). Cynda is immediately smitten. However, what follows is no romance between a teenager and her vampiric 'Other'. Vincent is an 'adult' vampire, and Cynda is only just sixteen; Vincent is, in effect, grooming Cynda, and, more importantly, Cynda knows it:

As much as Vincent fascinated me, he made me uneasy. More than once I'd caught him looking at me with an intensity I didn't understand. His eyes were dark, unreadable – did he find me attractive or simply amusing? It was hard to imagine a man his age

being interested in me, yet I could have sworn something intangible quivered in the air between us, a knowledge, a familiarity, a scary sense of destiny fulfilled. (59)

Despite claiming that she does not understand the ‘intensity’ of Vincent’s looks, Cynda acknowledges both the ‘intangible’ sexual frisson that ‘quiver[s]’ between them, and their shared ‘knowledge’ that is leading, inexorably, to some form of physical encounter: ‘a scary sense of destiny fulfilled’. Cynda knows exactly what she is letting herself in for (or at least she thinks she does). Vincent even follows Cynda into her dreams:

We were walking through the inn, but it had become a labyrinth of narrow halls and twisting corridors; I was lost, I wanted to get out, but every door I opened led to another room, darker and smaller than the one before. Vincent silenced my fears with laughter and kisses and promises. (60)

‘Labyrinth’ has a variety of connotations signifying secrets and anxieties, and there is even the suggestion of monsters prowling within. This is a dream about sexual entrapment involving Vincent; in the dream Cynda enters smaller and smaller rooms, becoming more and more trapped by her circumstances. This reflects Cynda’s position in her waking life, the deeper she becomes embroiled with Vincent, the less able she is to extricate herself from her situation, or to tell anyone about it.

Vincent successfully preys on Cynda’s weaknesses and insecurities to isolate her emotionally from her family and presents himself as the only one who truly understands her. He comes to her window every night, and Cynda⁷⁴ sneaks out for clandestine moonlight walks with him, these

⁷⁴ The name Cynda is a diminutive of Cynthia, from the Greek meaning ‘the moon, or the moon personified’. All Cynda’s encounters with Vincent occur, for obvious reasons, by moonlight, reflecting the book’s title and emphasising Cynda’s need to keep her relationship with Vincent a secret from everyone around her because she is only too aware of the inappropriateness of it.

culminate in passionate kisses and Vincent⁷⁵ soon has Cynda completely under his control. Vincent is a sexual predator and a classic abuser; he delights in hurting Cynda; instead of just taking what he wants, he makes her fall in love with him first and makes her dependent upon him. Even when she has doubts, Cynda cannot vocalise them; sitting in a café with her teenage friend Will, Cynda begins to wonder:

How did I know what Vincent really wanted from me? Maybe it had been a mistake to sneak out the window, maybe I shouldn't have let him kiss me. There was no telling what a kiss meant to a man his age. Or where it might lead. (90)

She means to confide her worries to Will, but the moment passes and she is silenced. She is silenced, I would argue, because she knows exactly where these kisses not only 'might lead', but will lead, and does not want to prevent it. Cynda allows Vincent to kiss and pet her until she is 'willing to let him do what he wished – no matter what it was' (96), and she is also aware that his relationship with her echoes her own father's seduction of Susan, who was only eighteen years old when they began their affair, a fact which she throws in Susan's face in the midst of a heated argument about the 'proprieties' of Cynda's 'relationship' with Vincent.

After Cynda has had a huge fight with her family, Vincent uses this to his advantage, and comes to her bedroom door at midnight, asking: "May I come in?" (119), and yet another heroine opens the door to her adult self as Cynda willingly lets Vincent into her bedroom. However, things do not go quite as Cynda perhaps imagines. Vincent has contrived to make Cynda so infatuated with him that she says she will do anything for him: 'Whatever he wanted I'd give to him, he only had to ask' (119). And it is at this point,

⁷⁵ And, of course, the name Vincent means 'victorious or conquering'.

with no more than a: “[r]emember, you brought this upon yourself” (120), that Vincent turns from metaphorical seducer to metaphorical rapist. All ‘amusement’, ‘sympathy’ and ‘tenderness’ (120) vanish as:

Making no effort to deaden the pain with a kiss, he sank his teeth into my throat. Pain arced between us ... I tried to scream, tried to escape, but Vincent was too strong. He held me tightly, mercilessly ... At last I understood. I knew what Vincent was, what he wanted. (121)

Now that Cynda is completely under Vincent’s control, he ‘feeds’ on her nightly: ‘Every night Vincent came to my door, every night I tried to resist him, every night I failed’ (129). Afterwards, ‘[w]hen he’d taken what he wanted, he lay on the bed beside me’ (141). There is no moral ambiguity surrounding Vincent, he is neither a good nor a reluctant vampire, and he thrives on the power he exerts over both Cynda and, later, Todd.

If the relationship between Vincent and Cynda makes the reader uneasy, then that unease is amplified in the relationship that Vincent goes on to forge with the five-year-old Todd. Vincent wins Todd over in the same way as he has seduced Cynda, grooming him by playing on his ‘fears and petty jealousies’ (161). Initially Vincent and Todd’s kissing is portrayed in reciprocal sexual terms: ‘Todd sighed and lifted his face. “Kiss me, Vincent. I like how your teeth feel”’ (164); and Todd is described as Vincent’s ‘sweet boy ... quite delicious’ (152). Later in the text, however, there is no doubt that Vincent has, indeed, ‘robbed him of happiness, of innocence’ (182), when Todd states: “He made me do bad things, he made me say bad things ... How can anyone love me now, Cynda?” (188). To further compound this unease, a re-reading of the text reveals that it is conceivably Todd who is the true target of Vincent’s desire all along. In the opening

pages of the novel Todd tells Cynda of his dreams about a wolf hiding somewhere, waiting to eat him up, and these dreams are dismissed by his father who is tired of hearing about them. However, the night before Cynda invites Vincent in, Todd insists: “I heard one scratching at my door. He said, ‘Little boy, little boy, let me come in’” (21), and there is the unsettling feeling that Vincent has been making love to Cynda in order to get access to Todd; this makes Vincent not only a predatory sexual abuser, but a fully-fledged paedophile: a true Gothic monster indeed, functioning to remind teenagers that there are still some areas where sex is a transgressive act.

Cynda cannot find her voice to tell anyone about the abuse she is suffering; she cannot bring herself to tell Will, and she literally and physically cannot tell her father: ‘I couldn’t say Vincent’s name’ (140); she repeatedly tries to name what Vincent is and fails, she cannot say the word: ‘the word I needed was slipping away, sinking into a dark place beyond recall. I couldn’t say it’ (121). Cynda is too ashamed to admit to what she has been ‘do[ing] in the dark’ with Vincent: ‘shameful things that separated me from ... everyone. Things I could never tell’ (130). In her inability to articulate what has been happening to her, Cynda exemplifies Bruhm’s theory that:

[t]rauma collapses the ability to render experience in a narrative, as recent studies of concentration camp prisoners and child sex abuse survivors are making very clear. Trauma destroys what Pierre Janet calls ‘narrative memory,’ the ability to apply principles of coherence and analytical understanding to one’s life events. (Bruhm 2002, 269)

At one point Cynda clings to the belief that: ‘[e]ven if I couldn’t remember the word, my father would believe me’ (124), but, of course, he does not; because she cannot tell, she cannot be believed: ‘no matter how hard I tried

I couldn't say the word' (169). Only when Vincent turns his attention to Todd does Cynda find the strength to try and break the cycle of abuse, making herself act because a child is also now threatened. With difficulty she manages to tell Will that Vincent has 'seduced' (169) both her and Todd, and it is, in fact, Will⁷⁶ who first calls Vincent a vampire (this is the first time the word 'vampire' is used in the text); this releases Cynda from her silence: "Yes, yes," I cried, "that's what he is – a vampire! Vincent's a vampire!" I knew the word again, said it out loud, told the truth about Vincent. He was a vampire' (169). Truth or convenient delusion, the 'naming' of Vincent gives Cynda power over her own voice and spurs her into positive action; it is after this point that both she and Will come up with a plan to kill Vincent, thereby typifying the notion that when child victims learn that they have power over their own voice, they can overcome their victimisation (Trites 2000, 96).

The disturbing nature of the relationships in *Look for Me by Moonlight* exemplifies Trites' contention that:

Nothing demonstrates the power relationships between adults and teenagers as effectively as the abuse of sexual power. Novels about incest, for example, demonstrate the misappropriation of adult power over the nonadult body of a child or adolescent. (Trites 2000, 96)

Such novels depict adults who are capable of turning children into objects.

'In each case', Trites states, 'sexual pleasure and knowledge are the provenance of the adult perpetrator rather than the child victim' (Trites 2000, 96). Nevertheless, there remains a certain ambiguity in *Look for Me by Moonlight*; Todd initially resists Vincent's attempts to enter his bedroom:

⁷⁶ It is interesting to note that the name Will (short for William), means 'protector', as Will not only helps Cynda to kill Vincent, but he appears to be protecting her from the truth of what she has been 'up to' with Vincent by naming him as a vampire rather than a seducer (Cynda's preferred term), or, indeed, a rapist.

“You can’t be sure what wolves want ... They can be very tricky, Daddy” (22), whereas Cynda knowingly invites him into her bedroom: ‘I yearned to please Vincent, to make him love me as much as I loved him’ (119). Cynda has wanted to explore her sexuality, has wanted ‘sexual pleasure and knowledge,’ and it is only when Vincent drops the façade of romance with her, takes what he wants when he wants, and also begins to abuse Todd that she understands herself to be a victim.

The theme of the predatory and sexually abusive male also appears in Patricia Windsor’s novel, *The Bleeding*, where we are presented with another teenage girl complicit in her own seduction. The sexual predator in this novel, however, is not a vampire, but that other creature of the night, a werewolf.

Maris Pelham escapes her mother’s constant picking when she leaves America for England to take a summer *au pair* job. Maris is the product of a broken family, her father having left when she was young, and her mother is an embittered woman who destroys all evidence of Maris’s father’s attempts to keep in touch with her. As a result, when she was young, Maris would dream about her father’s return:

Maris dreamed of a knight coming down a long dirt road, riding a big horse that wore a cloak and blinders ... and the knight reached down and scooped her up and they rode off into a landscape she recognized well, with mountains and a lake in the distance and happily ever after amen. (68)

Maris recognises the landscape well as it is the culturally imbued stuff of fairytale, legend and fantasy.

When she arrives at the (suitably named) Forrests' isolated country cottage in England,⁷⁷ Maris steps right into her own fairytale; she is delighted to 'be part of a family. A real family, with parents and kids' (15), where everything around her is 'magic' (16) and 'enchanted' (43); indeed, 'Maris decided it was a fairy tale and she gave herself up to it completely' (17). The fairytale soon turns sour, as fairytales so often do, and Maris quickly discovers that the Forrest house is not as peaceful as it seems; she begins to wonder about the unknown beast in the woods, whether Barb Forrest is insane, and why Derek Forrest inspires conflicting emotions. Mr Forrest is, of course, a predatory werewolf who works 'in computers' by day and prowls around the rural countryside by night, epitomising the bestial 'other' that lurks beneath the civilised self.

Derek Forrest is a stereotypical male, predatory, abusive and dominant werewolf; he is characteristic of the sexual stalker as he follows Maris through the woods, and his devouring nature is realised metaphorically through his involvement in the deaths of Barb and her mother; he chews the flesh of Barb's wrists so she bleeds to death, making it look like suicide, and he appears in his wolf form to Mrs Rice, who has a history of heart trouble, literally frightening her to death. Derek is also implicated in the abuse and disappearance of the Forrests' former *au pair*, Janice.

There is undeniably a flavour of 'Little Red Riding Hood' about Maris's sojourn in the cottage in the woods. Derek is responsible for the deaths of both his wife Barb, and his mother-in-law Mrs Rice, and *The*

⁷⁷ Werewolves traditionally haunt rural, forested areas, part of the terror of dark nights before electricity; see Wisker.

Blooding is seen to marginalise female monstrosity: the emotionally fragile wife, the interfering grandmother, at the same time as it foregrounds the masculine sexuality embodied by the wolf. However, ‘the wolf is not just the male seducer, he also represents all the asocial, animalistic tendencies within ourselves’ (Bettelheim 1991, 172).⁷⁸ By abandoning her responsibilities to the children in her care, Maris reverts to being a ‘pleasure-seeking oedipal child’ (Bettelheim 1991, 172). At home in the States Maris lost her baby-sitting job because, sidetracked by the possibility of a fun afternoon with friends, she forgot to pick up the little boy in her care from school: he was later found ‘crying and bruised’ (30); and, in England, Maris repeatedly helps Derek to drug the children whilst they both go running naked in the woods. Furthermore, although Maris is not culpable in the deaths of Barb and Mrs Rice, she unconsciously benefits from both; Bettelheim, talking about ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, states that:

[t]he immature person who is not yet ready for sex but is exposed to an experience which arouses strong sexual feelings falls back on oedipal ways for dealing with it. The only way such a person believes he can win out in sex is by getting rid of the more experienced competitors. (Bettelheim 1991, 173)

And it is after the deaths of ‘Mother’ and ‘Grandmother’ that Maris sets about making a place for herself in the family.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Although Bettelheim’s work has been dismissed by many scholars following his suicide in 1990, his analysis of fairy tales in terms of Freudian psychology still has a huge popular influence. He discusses the emotional and symbolic importance of fairy tales for children, including traditional tales at one time considered too dark, such as those collected and published by the Brothers Grimm. Bettelheim suggests that traditional fairy tales, replete with the darkness of abandonment, death, witches, and injuries, allow children to grapple with their fears in remote, symbolic terms.

⁷⁹ According to Bettelheim, ‘by falling in with the wolf’s suggestions [Little Red Riding Hood] has also given the wolf the opportunity to devour her grandmother. Here the story speaks to some of the oedipal difficulties which remained unresolved in the girl, and the wolf’s swallowing [Little Red Riding Hood] is the merited punishment for her arranging things so that the wolf can do away with a mother figure’ (Bettelheim 1991, 172).

Maris is alternately attracted and repulsed by Derek: 'He was nice, then he wasn't. His eyes were alive, then dead' (70); but she only becomes completely infatuated with him after Barb's death, when she realises that she has the opportunity to insinuate herself into their family permanently:

She imagined herself going away with him and the children. A family. All of them together. She wanted to be a person important enough for him to care whether she stayed here or went home. And she was tired of being an in-between. (152)

Maris conflates her search for a father figure, a unified family and romance and concentrates it all upon Derek, who has been grooming her in the same way as Vincent grooms Cynda in *Look for Me by Moonlight*, by preying on her fears and insecurities, knowing that she has no wish to return home to either her mother or her life in the States. When he begins to show more than a fatherly interest in Maris, her feelings are confused: she feels 'something like great happiness tinged with stark terror' (132), and when he asks for and receives 'an embrace. Nothing more' (193), Maris's feelings are thrown into further confusion: 'Now that she was so close to him, she wasn't sure she liked it. The idea of things could often be easier than living the reality' (194). Just as in 'Little Red Riding Hood', *The Blooding* is concerned with the problems that a young girl has to resolve if 'oedipal attachments linger on in the unconscious, which may drive her to expose herself dangerously to the possibility of seduction' (Bettelheim 1991, 170). What Maris thinks she truly desires is the fairytale of the perfect family; initially she does not relish the idea of sexual contact with Derek, viewing such contact more as a means to an end, but she tries to

convince herself that she loves him to justify her actions: 'I am doing this because I love him. Why would I do this unless I love him?' (212).

The werewolf here is an abject creature, constructed through our fear of the closeness between human and animal natures. As an abusive father figure, and her employer, Derek takes advantage of Maris's budding sexuality and leaves her powerless within the patriarchal structure. However, there is some degree of ambiguity; as with the relationship between Vincent and Cynda, it can be argued that the heroine is more than complicit in her own seduction. Derek does not force Maris into becoming a werewolf, he makes her the offer: "If you really want something, you must be willing to go after it. If you want a change, you must make one yourself" (189). Furthermore, when Derek 'initiates' Maris into his world, she undergoes a sexual awakening that she has unconsciously been searching for:

A warmth began to spread over her ... She was ready for him ... His head moved onto her legs. She felt the weight of it, the heat of it. ... Suddenly he pushed forward, nuzzling the soft flesh at the inside of her knee ... The bite, stinging but tender, drew blood ... In one long shuddering tremor, she knew she had been blooded. She put her own fingers into the blood on her knee, lifted them, and smeared her cheeks. (199)

Once again this is a passage that unquestionably relates the metaphorical loss of the heroine's virginity,⁸⁰ but rather than feeling abused, Maris appears immediately empowered by this sexual experience; she puts her own fingers into her blood and smears her own cheeks, thereby bleeding

⁸⁰ The blood is, by implication, hymenal.

herself.⁸¹ There is a direct connection between the loss of Maris's virginity, her own sexual empowerment, and her transformation into a werewolf. She realises that she has allowed Derek to 'transform' her, not through some childish fairytale notion of romantic love, but rather through her unconscious desire to gain knowledge of her own sexual pleasure: 'Do I love him or is this something else, an answer to an old longing, something inside me, that had always been there?' (212).⁸² Through her transformation Maris overthrows her perceived need for romantic love and family life, and acknowledges the power of her own sexuality:

And then the shape of her bones began to shift, and she could feel the change in her, like a fire turned on deep in her loins, churning into full flame, spreading and crackling as flesh and cartilage gave way to new form, as sharp angles replaced soft curves, as her body became a fierce instrument of the night. (214)

The language here conflates the heat of sexual desire: 'fire' and 'flames', with the transforming body: 'shifting bones', 'churning loins', 'crackling flesh and cartilage', and reveals Maris's new found sense of empowerment in her inner beast as her body is now 'a fierce instrument of the night'. Maris delights in the power of her body; she can turn into a werewolf with ease and fears nothing. Maris does not view her transformation as a curse, but rather as a blessing: '*This knowledge of who I now am plows me, deepens me, pushes me through time. I know everything*' (214). Whilst the sexual connotations of 'plow', 'deep' and 'push' are clear, it is the 'I know everything' that is the most telling, for in Maris's transformation the text

⁸¹ The term 'bleeding' is associated with fox hunting, the face of a novice at hunting is smeared with the blood of a fox after the kill; prior to the anti-hunting lobby of recent decades, bleeding was a staple feature of young girls' pony books.

⁸² And here, I would argue, Maris is voicing 'embodied' sexual desire. She is not really looking to please Derek, who she is at times repulsed by; rather she is seeking to pursue her own pleasure.

neatly reverses the path that this particular werewolf tale is taking; Maris has no desire to be Derek's submissive partner/mate, and rather than fearing the beast within Derek, who has, it must be remembered, despatched three women before her and is now threatening the housekeeper, she prefers to relish the beast within herself.

The werewolf myth in *The Bleeding* becomes about sexuality, power and, most importantly, freedom – for Maris. Maris knows that she has to break away from any sort of relationship with Derek, from 'this thing she might once have thought she desired' (260). Throughout the text Derek is domineering and abusive towards all women, and Maris realises: 'He will kill me ... Whether I do what he wishes or whether I don't, in some way I will be killed, in body or in spirit' (263). And so Maris acts first, using 'the cunning, the mind and the heart of a wolf' (273) to leave Derek dead in an English field, and to return to the States: 'different in a way no one could understand' (279). Maris is undoubtedly a survivor of abuse, but she has learned about both empowerment and repression: 'Right now she could still feel herself on the inside as well as the outside. She knew who Maris was. She could contain the wolf, although at moments she wanted to let it emerge' (279). Maris is fleetingly agentive and empowered; however, her sense of empowerment is temporary, and the tone of *The Bleeding* is not celebratory. Although Maris initially revels in her newfound sexuality, romping in the fields of England with a 'werewolf' like herself, back home in the States it is quite a different matter. Maris has been returned to the care of the nagging mother who had always warned her, figuratively, 'not to stray from the path'. For Little Red Riding Hood:

Deviating from the straight path in defiance of mother and superego was temporarily necessary for the young girl, to gain a higher state of personality organization. Her experience convinced her of the dangers of giving in to her oedipal desires. It is much better, she learns, not to rebel against the mother, nor try to seduce or permit herself to be seduced by the as yet dangerous aspects of the male. (Bettelheim 1991, 181)

But this is not 'Little Red Riding Hood', and Maris has, indeed, fully given in to her oedipal desires. Whilst the fairytale ends⁸³ with Little Red Riding Hood, having learned her lesson, happily undertaking never again to run off the path into the woods all by herself when her mother has forbidden her to do so, *The Bleeding* sees Maris left feeling afraid and isolated:

Everything had changed, but only Maris knew it. The rest of them would be the same, and they would expect the same from her. It would be like trying to live in a picture book. What if she forgot and made a mistake? What if she couldn't control the wolf inside her? ... She would have to find her way in this wilderness alone. (280)

Whilst the novel begins with Maris wanting to live in a fairytale, it ends with her fear of living 'in a picture book' where her every move will be subject to scrutiny: one false step and she will be found out. Away from the forest, and back under the social and 'civilised' gaze of police, school and family, Maris knows that she will have to contain her desires and 'act ordinary' (279).

Maris is another heroine who has yearned for and gained 'sexual pleasure and knowledge', but now that she has it she is afraid of the consequences. By being initiated (arguably willingly) into sexual intimacy at the hands of an older and abusive male figure, Maris's physical desires now take precedence over notions of love, romance and lasting relationships; it

⁸³ Like most fairy tales there are several different versions of 'Little Red Riding Hood' with differing endings: some, such as Perrault's, have the wolf victorious, an anxiety-producing ending intended to scare children into good behaviour; others, such as the Brothers Grimm's version, relieve the young child's anxieties by allowing Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother to be 'reborn', and the wolf punished. For further clarification, see Bettelheim, p.166-183.

is particularly apposite that the foxhunting term 'bleeding' also refers to giving the hound its first taste, or sight and smell of the blood of the game it is to hunt: now Maris is the predator. However, whilst she has gained a degree of sexual empowerment and freedom from patriarchy, Maris knows that her 'carnal' desires are not culturally acceptable for a young girl; she is acutely aware that '[s]he must never be found out' (281), and despite her earlier pleasure in her animal nature, the tale ends sadly in repression. Maris is conscious of the fact that her sexuality/bestiality is socially unacceptable, and whilst she has recognised and enjoyed the exciting violence of her bestial abjected 'Other', she knows that she must now struggle to keep it buried, as a forbidden and taboo part of her nature. Unlike Cynda in *Look for Me by Moonlight* who is shown to settle down into a more socially acceptable and chaste relationship with the teenage Will, Maris is left with 'only the faintest hope in her heart that somewhere in America, there was another like herself'; for Maris, the 'real terror was the loneliness, going on and on forever' (281).

Although the metaphorical sexual activities depicted in both *Look for Me by Moonlight* and *The Bleeding* are portrayed as a result of the perverse appetites of a violent and predatory male, there is, as stated, room to question the protagonist's collusion in these activities. The Gothic functions to restore accepted sexual boundaries and ways of being, and generally those who take part in, and are shown to enjoy, perverse activities are commonly removed from the sexual economy and excised from the text, usually through their deaths. However, this does not happen in these two novels; rather than Cynda and Maris meeting a sticky end because of their

(admittedly ambiguous) enjoyment of their experiences, they are shown to kill Vincent and Derek respectively, but, importantly, this is not entirely done in the spirit of 'good' conquering 'evil'; rather it allows the girls the power of claiming the 'dark' nature of their desires as their own. They are shown to 'combat objectification, victimisation, and the stereotype of passivity' (Lamb 2009, 299). Although Cynda ostensibly settles for a socially appropriate relationship with Will, which equates safety with chastity and privileges romantic love over uncontrolled desire, *Look for Me by Moonlight* closes with her neck 'tingl[ing] the way it used to', and reveals her to be '[f]ighting [her] own uncertainty' and 'still tempted by the things Vincent had promised' (197). Similarly, in *The Bleeding*, Maris does not kill her desire when she engineers Derek's death; this is, rather, an act of perceived self-defence: kill or be killed. Maris goes on to be a sexual predator herself, and her (socially) perverse appetite and aggressive female sexuality function with the sole aim of fulfilling her desires.

Healthy Sexuality – Or Not?

It is also worth considering how the Gothic works in texts where roles are reversed, and the female protagonist is the Gothic Other to begin with. As such, she starts from a position where she takes pleasure in her increased sexual knowledge and this subsequently empowers her, but only, I would argue, to a certain extent, particularly when she is circumscribed by her own society - or pack.

Vivian is a beautiful, athletic, sixteen-year-old *loup-garou*⁸⁴, and heroine of Annette Curtis Klause's werewolf tale, *Blood and Chocolate*. She is not afflicted with the loneliness that Maris has to endure; on the contrary, Vivian, who more than lives up to her name,⁸⁵ is surrounded by others like herself as she is a member of a large, happy, friendly and boisterous pack of werewolves. The pack is not without its problems however: they have been forced to flee rural West Virginia after a rogue member broke the ban on devouring human flesh; Vivian's father, the pack leader, has died; and they are temporarily living in the suburbs of Maryland whilst looking for a more remote, rural location to settle down in permanently. Vivian still mourns her father; her pack remains leaderless and in disarray, and she feels isolated amongst the human community too, desperately wanting to be liked at school but not realising that her beauty intimidates boys and girls alike.

Blood and Chocolate is a novel in which teenagers (albeit werewolf teenagers) are depicted as enjoying a 'healthy sexuality' free from adult repression or victimisation. Sex is spoken about, and, it is inferred, acted upon, freely by all adult members of the pack, and, as Vivian is now sixteen her mother, Esmé, encourages her to take her pick from 'the Five', her five 'age-mates', none of whom she is interested in; there is no prohibition on sex in this family, indeed Vivian finds herself thinking: 'Couldn't her mother talk to her as if she was a daughter' (28) when Esmé tattles on about her own sexual needs. Where there is prohibition, however, is in Vivian's choice of mate.

⁸⁴ *Loup-garou*: the French name for a werewolf.

⁸⁵ Vivian's name derives from the Latin meaning 'lively'.

Vivian falls for Aiden, a human boy at school. She tracks him down after reading a poem he has written about werewolf transformation, believing that only someone 'who knows' (16) could have written such words. Whilst disappointed that he is 'not one of us' (24), Vivian is still immediately smitten with Aiden; he is a 'delicious' (23), 'bohemian' (21) poet, whose 'languid' (23) nature comes as a welcome contrast to the 'jangly, nervy, twitching, squirming, fighting, snapping, sharp-edged creatures'(23) of Vivian's pack. Aiden thinks he has a dark side, he likes 'all that stuff – witches, vampires, werewolves' because 'it's exciting', and because he 'want[s] to be like them' (58); he thinks everyone has 'the right to be different' (123) and craves the 'magical' (103). Vivian's sexuality is immediately aroused on seeing Aiden, 'and the thought crossed her mind that she would enjoy him touching her' (23). From this point on Vivian pursues Aiden sexually, isolating herself further from the girls at school through her perceived promiscuity, and angering both her pack and her mother who disapprove of any connection with a 'meat-boy'.⁸⁶ 'Don't date if you can't mate' (29), Esmé pithily observes, to which Vivian rejoins that werewolves certainly do not start relationships merely to have children; sex is definitely enjoyed for its own sake amongst the pack, a fact which Vivian is well aware of, even if she has not experienced it fully for herself yet.

Like all her pack, Vivian has to change at the full moon whether she wants to or not, but at other times she can change at will, she relishes the change and feels sorrow for humans who have only one form; thinking

⁸⁶ Neither human nor werewolf society is truly ready to accept a female 'healthy sexuality'; the dominant (patriarchal and cultural) sexual scripts are shown to prevail, thereby protecting each society from female sexuality and power.

about Aiden makes her want to transform, and the transformation is positive, erotic and exhilarating:

She slowly slid off her clothes. Already her skin prickled with the sprouting pelt. A trickle of breeze curled around her buttocks, and her nipples tightened in the cool air off the river. She laughed and threw her panties down. (30)

The slow striptease, the mention of 'nipples' and 'buttocks', as well as the sensuous, sibilant 's' sounds all celebrate the emersion of Vivian's 'inner beast' in an erotic transformation in which she revels. Vivian derives pleasure from her desire and the knowledge of her own sexuality and this subsequently empowers her, as she metamorphoses into a powerful werewolf, thereby exemplifying Foucault's 'power-knowledge-pleasure' principle: her desire is positive and serves to make her powerful. The passage continues:

Her laugh turned into a moan at the first ripple in her bones. She tensed her thighs and abdomen to will the change on, and clutched the night air like a lover as her fingers lengthened and her nails sprouted. Her blood churned with heat like desire ... She doubled over as the muscles of her abdomen went into a brief spasm, then grimaced as her teeth sharpened and her jaw extended. She felt the momentary pain of the spine's crunch and then the sweet release. (30)

This passage is positively orgasmic: the 'moan[ing]' Vivian's 'desire' takes her to 'spasm' and 'release' - and all by herself. In detailing the transformation in the coded terms of an orgasm, Klause is depicting Vivian experiencing intense sexual pleasure, and, since no lover is present as she explores her desire and undergoes her transformation, Vivian is shown to be asserting her own agency. Indeed, Vivian is aware of the power of her sexuality: she sees herself as agent rather than object, and it is she who pursues Aiden.

As she begins dating Aiden, though, Vivian becomes conscious that she is caught between two worlds: the human world of propriety, and the werewolf world of instinct. She is frustrated that although Aiden clearly desires her, it is a 'desire he wouldn't force on her' (51), and she realises that she does not 'know their rules' (51): '*It's a game, she thought, a game of pretend we don't want sex so badly. Maybe he thought wanting wasn't polite ... I will teach you to be less polite, she thought*' (52); and with that she sets out to 'make him hers for sure' (54). However, on the night she has planned for her seduction there is to be a full moon when she will have to transform whether she wants to or not; she cancels her date with Aiden, telling him she has been grounded. Undeterred, he turns up at her window, but, unlike Zoë and Cynda, Vivian does not 'open the door' to her adult self. As stated, Vivian can transform herself at any time, and the text has shown how her desire aids a positive transformation, however, when there is a full moon she has no choice in the matter, her body imposes the change, much like the imposition of the female body's menstrual cycle. On a simplistic level, then, Vivian is a hostage to the dictates of her body, which spoils her plans for the night, indeed, she even 'force[s] down the cramp in her gut' (62), and she persuades Aiden to leave, claiming sickness and embarrassment. For once Vivian is rendered powerless rather than powerful by her body. With her 'change' comes an increasing inability to control her bloodlust/sexual desire, as she ambiguously considers the 'sweet[ness]' of Aiden's 'round firm thighs', and briefly contemplates: '*So what if I hurt him?*' (64-65). Vivian has an appetite for Aiden in more ways

than one, and she forms an interesting modern counterpoint to heroines of old:

Disgust with meat was a common phenomenon among Victorian girls; a carnivorous diet was associated with sexual precocity, especially with an abundant menstrual flow, and even with nymphomania. (Showalter 2004, 129)

We could argue that Vivian is a case in point.

Vivian manages to persuade Aiden to leave before the change fully takes place, but not before asking herself '[w]hy was he making this beautiful gift seem dirty?' (66) Totally transformed, she now howls in 'frustration' rather than joy, and her voice 'echoe[s] about her like a curse' (67). This is the first time that Vivian has felt the absence of choice, and the first time that she has ever resented being a *loup-garou*, she locks herself in her room and will not go out, scared of what she is and what she might do. The incident effectively presages the entire lack of choice that Vivian, being a pack member, has in her life.

Several more, increasingly steamy, dates with Aiden follow, but, despite Vivian's active, predatory desire, and Aiden's 'wish' for 'something magic' (103) to happen, sex is always deferred. Aiden's group of friends or Vivian's pack continually interrupt their plans and, for the couple, sex is something that they are always on the point of, but never manage to actually engage in 'all the way'.

Although Vivian has been brought up in an environment where there appears to be no prohibition on sex, it soon becomes clear to both Vivian, and the reader, that this is not really the case. Vivian's mother warns her to pick someone from the pack, rather than Aiden who will never really 'know' her (120); 'the Five' caution her against choosing a 'meat-boy' over one of

them, with Rafe, in particular, threatening: “Wait too long and we’ll take what we want” (41); and Gabriel, frontrunner in the competition to be the new pack leader, also warns her to ‘[l]et him go’ (126). Matters are further compounded when, at ‘the Ordeal’, a fight to determine who will be the wolves’ new leader, Vivian inadvertently makes herself the alpha female by ferociously defending an attack on her mother; in so doing, she accidentally names herself as Gabriel’s mate, as he has won the position of pack leader. Vivian’s choices become more restricted than ever; before this turn of events the pack sanctioned her choice of mates from ‘the Five’, but now she is considered to be exclusively Gabriel’s. Sex is fine for this young female, we come to realise, but only within the confines of the pack/patriarchal structure.

Vivian is now the hunted rather than the hunter, as Gabriel confidently makes it clear that, ultimately, she will be his; the only choice he gives her in the matter is whether to ‘take it slow’ or ‘take it fast and rough’ (160). ‘*Damn him*’, thinks Vivian, ‘*I don’t want fierce, I want gentle*’ (160), and she resolves to go to Aiden, for, of course, all this pressure to conform to the pack’s laws merely strengthens Vivian’s determination to ‘choose [her] own mate’ (161). Fantasising about ‘defying pack Law’ and running away with Aiden, Vivian realises that she sounds ‘like one of those romance novels Esmé consumed like popcorn’; nonetheless she is sure that Aiden will ‘appreciate the sheer beauty of what she [is]’ (163) and not only determines to have sex with him, but also to let him see her in her wolf shape.

Vivian arranges to meet Aiden at his house, where he is lying in bed confidently waiting on her. Aiden has always desired Vivian, and they have always had an exciting chemistry between them: 'The thought of him in bed made her flesh heat and her fears dissolve' (44); 'he flashed her smiles like heat lightning' (45); '[his] flesh was burning hot' (104); and this night should see the consummation of all the fire that is between them.⁸⁷ Vivian intends to make love to Aiden first, before revealing her wolf self, but her body has other plans, as, fired by desire, she starts to transform. As Aiden reaches for her, 'eyes burn[ing] with fever', she stops him: "Not yet," she said, and twitched. "When I change back. First I will show you my secret'" (167). And indeed she does, with disastrous consequences, for the once fiery Aiden belies his name and goes out like a damp squib. Vivian, convinced 'he would see the beauty' (167) and expecting to see his 'amazement and pleasure', turns round to find a 'naked and wormlike' Aiden (we can presume he has lost his erection), cowering on the bed and 'whining' with fear (168). When she is totally transformed, Aiden begins to cry:

The bile of self-loathing rose in her. How could she be such a fool?
Mixed with her disgust at herself was contempt for Aiden's cringing,
then guilt because she had caused it. Her heart broke for him
because he feared, because he couldn't see the wonder, then raged
at him because he made her feel unclean. (169)

This is the second time that Vivian's inability to control her body has led to her having conflicting feelings about being a *loup-garou*. On the one hand she is still a proud werewolf: she views Aiden with 'contempt' because he cannot 'see the wonder', and 'rages at him' because of how he makes her feel; on the other hand she feels 'self-loathing,' she views herself with

⁸⁷ Indeed, Aiden's name comes from the Gaelic for 'fiery'.

'disgust' and 'guilt', and, most important of all, she feels 'unclean'. This echoes the previous incident when she was made to feel 'dirty' (66).

Vivian's inability to control her transformations is shown to be due to either her 'monthly cycle', or the intensity of her sexual desire, both of which now make her feel 'dirty'. There is still no room for the initiative-taking, sexually liberated, female teenager who is in control of her own destiny, it would appear.

Although Vivian is portrayed sympathetically to the (implied) teenage girl reader, to Aiden she is undeniably presented as an example of what Barbara Creed has coined the monstrous-feminine,⁸⁸ embodying the castrating *vagina dentata*⁸⁹ in particular with her 'extended jaw', 'sharp teeth' and 'claws' (168). Later on in the text Vivian asks Aiden: "Do you think I can't control my other self? Do you think my teeth will grow as I lose myself in your pleasure?" (193), and Aiden admits that every time he thinks of kissing her he sees her 'other face', and is scared of what 'that mouth [has] done' (194).

In fact, Vivian too, becomes scared of what her mouth may have done, as, after Aiden's rejection of her, she becomes more and more out of control and unable to control her transformations. Several times she awakens, naked, in her bed with the taste of human blood in her mouth, and is unable to account for it; on one occasion there are body parts in her room. Vivian is now doubled as a threatening *femme castratrice*.⁹⁰

According to Barbara Creed, the *femme castratrice* is usually a sympathetic

⁸⁸ The phrase 'monstrous-feminine' emphasises the importance of gender in the construction of the female monster's monstrosity, see Creed (2007).

⁸⁹ Latin for 'toothed vagina': the classic symbol of men's fear of sex, expressing the unconscious belief that a woman may eat or castrate her partner during intercourse.

⁹⁰ Castrating female.

figure who assumes one of two forms: the female psychotic or a woman who seeks revenge on men who have abused her in some way. Vivian, I would argue, is portrayed as both. Although she has not been physically abused, she has previously been threatened by the biker whose hand she finds in her bedroom, and she psychotically stalks Aiden after his rejection of her, as well as shredding his new girlfriend's bedroom, and futilely lying in wait for her in her wolf form: '*Hello Little Red Riding Hood*, she th[inks] ... "I will rip you"' (212-213). Apparently it is not only men that Vivian wishes to castrate.

However, Vivian, it transpires, is not a killer. The deaths are down to rogue pack members, Rafe and Astrid, who want to frame her due to their respective jealousies of her, but what is important to note here is the fact that she has to be told this; she has no recollection of what she may or may not have done. Vivian's violent transformations and subsequent blackouts are 'triggered by great passions like jealousy or rage' (171), and Vivian begins to be portrayed in increasingly animalistic terms: she is now a 'crazy bitch' (190), and, somewhat fittingly, a 'real two-faced bitch' (232); even in her human form she 'crouch[es]' and 'scent[s]' (191), she 'sniff[s]' and 'bit[es]' (197-198), and she 'd[igs]' and 'tear[s]' (207). Vivian no longer 'trust[s] her rage' (194), asking herself: 'Couldn't she control herself? Was she truly just an animal?' (244). Vivian's desire is therefore shown to have moved away from that of a 'healthy sexuality', which it was initially portrayed as. The more that Vivian wants to pick her own mate, the more she sexually desires Aiden, and the more this desire is left unfulfilled, then the more she is characterised as bestial and animalistic; female desire is

presented as monstrous. It seems that Vivian is now a wild animal that must either be killed or tamed; Aiden tries the first approach, Gabriel the second.

Aiden arranges to meet Vivian, intending to 'release [her] from [her] torment' (241) by killing her. Although he relents when he realises that she is not the killer, he does end up shooting her accidentally in the midst of the confusion when other werewolves join the scene. As Vivian lies injured, she cannot control her body enough to take on one form or the other:

Wolf, she thought, naming her animal shape with its imperfect name, but nausea ripped through her. The thought of her fur form disgusted her. Human then. She tried again, but nothing happened. She tried again and again and again. (249)

Whereas Vivian has always felt emotionally caught between the worlds of human propriety and werewolf instinct, now she is physically trapped between the two, neither a gorgeous girl nor a beautiful wolf, but rather a 'freak' with 'clawed hand[s]' and 'furred arm[s]' (253-254). Vivian really is hovering between animal and angel. Of course, it is Gabriel⁹¹ who saves her from this torment, gently comforting and cuddling her whilst telling her about his own doomed love affair with a human. "It's your choice," Gabriel tells Vivian: "You're doing it to yourself. If you want to, you can make the change. Relax. Let go." (262). This is rather ambiguous, as it also reads like an older and more experienced man (which Gabriel is) trying to seduce a virginal young girl (which Vivian is). Matters are further compounded when Gabriel concludes: "And I know how to help you" (262), before kissing her. Vivian returns the kiss, which becomes increasingly more

⁹¹ Which the text has surely hinted at all along: the name Gabriel meaning 'hero of god'.

passionate, and her body, 'arche[s]' and 'shatter[s]' (263) as she resumes her werewolf form completely. Once again Vivian's transformation is described in the coded terms of an orgasm; no sex has taken place, but the force of her desire has brought about her transformation, or, alternatively, brought her to climax.

Vivian can now change back and forward with ease, her transformations are re-inscribed as positive and exhilarating and she and Gabriel go running off, naked, beneath the stars, with sex once again deferred, but imminent. The implication is that their relationship will be companionable and rewarding. Gabriel says he loves Vivian because she cares so much for both her people and humans, because she 'walk[s] like a queen' and 'because of the beautiful curve of [her] neck' (264). It really is the stuff of Mills and Boon, or, indeed, one of Esmé's romance novels. However, there is a more worrying message here, for Vivian has unquestionably been brought back under pack law and, despite Gabriel telling her: "It's your choice" (262), Vivian has never really had any choice. She might be his queen, but he is the pack leader, and Vivian realises that she will be 'bound for duty for life, like her father' (264): '*Like my father ... This is what I owe him. This is how I make it up to him*' (264). The blood may well be 'singing in her veins' (264) as she goes off with Gabriel, but Vivian has been reined back into submissiveness and subservience to the father figure. Vivian's plight highlights Fred Botting's contention that:

The terrors and horrors of transgression in Gothic writing become a powerful means to reassert the values of society, virtue and propriety: transgression, by crossing the social and aesthetic limits, serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity, restoring or defining limits. (Botting 1996, 7)

Nonetheless, it is interesting to note the reversal that this particular Teen Gothic novel offers: it is, after all, the Gothic 'monster' who transgresses her own societal values by pursuing a human boy.

Blood and Chocolate is an interesting novel in its exploration of the nature of Vivian's desire as coded through her transformations, but an unsettling one in that it only allows her to finally satisfy her desire by removing choice and enforcing submission to 'the father'. As such it is a disconcerting precursor to the plethora of 'fantasy werewolf' novels written for the slightly more adult female eighteen to twenty-five year old market,⁹² in which the Gothic is sidelined for pure sexual fantasy and wilful heroines are all brought back in to line by either the literal or symbolic 'father'. It is even more alarming to note that these books have all surfaced since the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

Trites states that, more often than not, teenage characters in 'realist' adolescent literature are 'disempowered by the consequences of their sexual actions', and that although sexuality is a source of power and pleasure for teenagers, novelists are more comfortable portraying adolescent sexuality in negative terms, so reinforcing 'the dynamic of authority within adolescent literature that reminds adolescents of their place

⁹²I am thinking, in particular, of Kelley Armstrong's *Bitten* (2008) and Rachel Vincent's *Stray* (2009); the first, ostensibly a werewolf novel, the second featuring 'werecats'. These texts feature powerful and headstrong heroines, and are indicative of the genre. The heroines are always daughters of pack leaders and are always trying to escape and/or defy the confines of pack law. They have relationships outside of the pack, but are always, ultimately, brought back under pack law by the literal father and/or the man who the father has deemed a suitable mate for his daughter, and who will, of course, progress to being the new pack leader. Mothers, where they feature, are mere ciphers. In these two novels in particular, both heroines are literally 'caged' at different times in their lives by their father or a father figure, supposedly for their own good. The novels end with females being mates to the alpha male, but never leaders in their own right.

within the power structure (Trites 2000, 116). They do this, she asserts, because they feel that teenage sexuality is a source of power that needs to be regulated by repressing it, and, she concludes, this is what much of the discourse that creates human sexuality is designed to do: 'discourse creates and subsequently regulates sexuality as it does all forms of human power' (116).

The novels that have been examined in this chapter have not portrayed adolescent sexuality in negative terms; on the contrary, the metaphorical depictions of sexual desire have all, ultimately, been positive. Zoë in *The Silver Kiss*, and Kerry in *Companions of the Night*, are both happy in the choices they make; Zoë enjoys, and is empowered by, her 'silver kiss' with Simon, and Kerry is happy to dream about being 'bitten' by Ethan, but refuses the reality of it. For both girls, there is 'always a choice' (*Companions*, 156) and therefore they are shown not only to have agency, but to be empowered by their choices. Although *Look for Me by Moonlight* and *The Bleeding* admittedly go further in the transgression of limits and boundaries with their depiction of adult male sexual predators, sexual desire is still portrayed positively; both girls kill the predator but not their desire. And finally, even though *Blood and Chocolate* uses the pack structure to highlight the power struggle between the adolescent and the societal structures within which she lives, it does not show sexual desire *per se* as being negative, Vivian freely enjoys her sexuality, she is another desirous and desired being, and the text finishes hinting at some great sex to take place between her and Gabriel.

Normalising discourses of sexuality leave little room for girls to express their notions of sexuality, and these authoritative discourses define 'what is safe, what is taboo, and what will be silenced' (Fine 1988, 40). This does not promote a healthy, authentic, and embodied sexuality in girls; rather it is, as Fine states, a 'discourse of sexuality based on the male in search of desire and the female in search of protection' (40). Whilst Teen Gothic novels are not countercultural, functioning, as does much Gothic fiction, to 're-confirm institutional order by supplying a vicarious fulfilment of desire and neutralizing an urge towards transgression' (R. Jackson 1998, 72), they do, however, offer the teenager vicarious participation in guilty pleasures with the Other, as well as control over and repression of the Other, thereby empowering them. The erosion of boundaries and encounters with the Other frees the imagination and brings about the capacity to express and explore their abject desires, unshackled from the didacticism that is at work in 'realist' fiction for the same age group. Teen Gothic offers up traditional gothic horror figures such as the vampire and werewolf to teenagers, not to terrify them about sex, but to allow them to explore, for themselves, the nature of their 'dark desires', and to make them aware of the choices that are on offer to them: the possibility of subversion and transgression, or the safety of conformity, whilst acknowledging and not repressing their desire.

For Foucault, all sexuality is a discursive construct, and the metaphorical depiction of sexuality in Teen Gothic novels is no different, however, in its positivism it functions to reinstate pleasure. If the 'realist' fiction written for young adults does indeed make a science of sex,

dedicated to analysing and controlling desire, then Teen Gothic functions more on the level of an *ars erotica*, supporting Foucault's claim that:

We have at least invented a different kind of pleasure: pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing the truth, of discovering and exposing it, of captivating and capturing others by it, of confiding it in secret, of luring it out in the open – the specific pleasure of the true discourse on pleasure. (Foucault 1998, 71)

Teen Gothic fiction at least allows teenagers to reappropriate their desire from institutional discourse, and view their own sexuality with a sense of agency rather than urgency.

Chapter Two

Death Is Not the End:

Death in Teen Gothic Literature

'Perhaps the most obvious thing about death' state Bronfen and Goodwin, 'is that it is always only represented. There is no knowing death, no experiencing it and then returning to write about it, no intrinsic grounds for authority in the discourse surrounding it' (Bronfen & Goodwin 1993, 4). As a result, they argue, '[e]very representation of death is a misrepresentation', and our analyses of such representations must demonstrate not only how they claim to represent death, but also 'what else [they] in fact represent, however suppressed' (20). Death is also 'the constructed Other' they aver, asserting: '[t]hat which aligns with death in any given representation is Other, dangerous, enigmatic, magnetic'; and, '[t]o study representations of death is to study how not only individuals but also groups have defined themselves against what they are not but wish to control' (20). Finally, they declare: 'Death is physical': 'It is real, the referent that texts may point to but not touch. As such it is also uncanny, the return of the repressed, the excess that is beyond the text and to which the text aspires even as it aims to surpass it in potency' (20).

Death, therefore, is both abstract and concrete: it poses metaphysical questions but is also a physical fact. In this chapter I am going to explore what these 'misrepresentations' of death as the 'constructed Other' mean for the teenager, and argue that, in contrast to

mainstream 'realist' texts for adolescents, representations of death in Teen Gothic fiction turn away from the universality, non-functionality and irreversibility of death, all of which are delimited by the fact of our embodiment, and move towards other forms of continuance, embodied or not. According to Clive Seale:

Embodiment dictates basic parameters for the construction of culture, the key problem for which is contained in the fact that bodies eventually die. On the one hand this threatens to make life meaningless, but on the other it is a basic motivation for social and cultural activity, which involves a continual defence against death. (Seale 1998, 1)

Whilst dying remains a biological inevitability in the real world, death, as represented in the fantasy world of Teen Gothic fiction, is transformed 'into an orientation towards continuing' (Seale 1998, 1); oft-times this continuance is welcome, sometimes it is not.

However, although Teen Gothic fiction represents a fantasy world, I also argue that it both addresses and symbolises very real issues that teenagers have when it comes to thinking about both life and death. We all have ambivalent feelings about death, but teenagers are particularly susceptible, I contend, to conflicting tensions that distinguish their interpretations of death from those of adults. I posit that the ambiguity of their status in the world - no longer a child, not yet an adult - is reflected in their ambiguous relationship with death, and that this fact underwrites the representation of death in Teen Gothic fiction. As a jumping-off point for this argument, I examine the recent thanatological literature that suggests that there are indeed aspects of an adolescent's conception of death that distinguish it from both the child's and the adult's conception of death.

A Mature Understanding of Death?

Comprehending death is an important issue for children and they begin at an early age to try and grasp the meaning of it. Over the past one hundred years there have been numerous studies carried out to determine what children of various ages understand about death, and at what stage they achieve a presumed mature adult concept of death.⁹³

There is a general consensus that the concept of death is not a single construct, but rather is composed of several various components. Research varies as to the exact number that has been recognised, but four main components account for the bulk of research: Universality, Irreversibility, Nonfunctionality, and Causality.⁹⁴ Universality refers to the understanding that all living things must eventually die; Irreversibility refers to the understanding that once the physical body dies it cannot be made alive again; and Nonfunctionality refers to the understanding that once a living thing dies, all of the life-defining capabilities of the living physical body cease.⁹⁵ The fourth component, Causality, lacks consensus of definition, but ‘various approaches’ suggest that Causality ‘involves an abstract and realistic understanding of the external and internal events that might possibly cause an individual’s death’⁹⁶ (Speece 1995, 3).

⁹³ See Speece (1995) for further details.

⁹⁴ Note that these four components focus on the *biological* and *scientific* aspects of the death of the physical body.

⁹⁵ e.g. walking, eating, hearing, seeing, thinking and learning.

⁹⁶ “Abstract” refers to the fact that the causes specified are not restricted to particular individuals or events but are classes of causes which are applicable to living things in general. “Realistic” refers to the fact that the causes specified are generally accepted by mature adults as valid causes of death’ (Speece 1995, 3).

In his article, 'Children's Concepts of Death',⁹⁷ Mark Speece outlines children's early views of each of the four components.⁹⁸ He finds that: before understanding Universality, younger children are more likely than older children to indicate that death is not universal, and they are also more likely to think that death is avoidable; before understanding Irreversibility younger children are more likely than older children to view death as temporary and reversible;⁹⁹ and before understanding Nonfunctionality younger children are more likely than older children to think that the dead continue to be able to perform various functions.¹⁰⁰ As for the fourth component, Causality, before young children fully understand it, they are more likely than older children to provide unrealistic causes or specific concrete causes.¹⁰¹

Of the studies that Speece looked at, most were designed to determine when children achieve a 'mature adult understanding of death' (Speece 1995, 4) as represented by these four simple definitions. Unsurprisingly, age was found to be the most common variable to be examined in relation to children's concepts of death, but the evidence supports a positive relationship between age and understanding: on the

⁹⁷ This report does not include adolescents. Younger children are, loosely, four to seven year-olds, and older children comprise eight to twelve year-olds.

⁹⁸ Speece draws his conclusions from over 90 studies (including his own) involving at least one of the four components.

⁹⁹ Speece cites examples of young children likening death to a sleep from which you will wake up, or a trip from which you will return.

¹⁰⁰ The understanding of Nonfunctionality was shown to differ, however, depending on which 'function' is considered. Distinction is made between functions which are external and easily observable, like eating and speaking, and those which are internal and therefore have to be inferred, such as dreaming and knowing. More children understood the cessation of the former than the latter.

¹⁰¹ An example of an unrealistic cause would be 'if you are bad you will die', and an example of a concrete cause would be 'guns' or 'poison'. Younger children are also more likely to concentrate on external causes of death, such as violence and accidents, rather than considering internal causes such as illness or old age, and are shown to 'lack an understanding that death ultimately results from a failure of internal bodily organs of functions' (Speece 1995, 4).

whole, older children's concepts of death are more realistic and abstract¹⁰² than younger children's. Nonetheless, the specific age by which children are reported to have achieved an adult understanding of the four key components has varied between four to twelve years.¹⁰³ This notwithstanding, the majority of studies have found that most children understand each of the four key bio-scientific components by the age of seven.

Speece points out, however, that whilst most studies assume 'that there is a single mature adult's understanding of death and that we know what it is' (Speece 1995, 5), the mature concept of death has not, in fact, been validated empirically. This is important to note, he states, because:

studies of the development of children's understanding of death typically compare the children's concepts against a presumed 'mature adult' concept of death. This mature concept is assumed to be the end-state toward which the process of conceptual development is directed. In this literature, the presumed mature understanding of each component has been assumed to be its simple definition. (Speece 1995, 5).

With regards to Universality, then, we see that the presumed adult understanding of Universality is that, indeed, all living things will eventually die; for Speece this definition appears to be an accurate representation of the concepts of older children and adults. Similarly, despite Causality lacking a consensus of definition, a mature understanding of it is considered to involve both abstract and realistic recognition of the various

¹⁰² That is to say, more 'adult-like'.

¹⁰³ 'This wide variability exists for both inter-study comparisons of a single component and intra-study comparisons of multiple components. Given this fact, one could end up with different conclusions depending upon which set of individual studies were selected for review' (Speece 1995, 5).

causes of death¹⁰⁴ along with the understanding that death ultimately results from organ failure.

Where Speece begins to question the notion of a single mature concept of death, however, is in relation to Irreversibility and Nonfunctionality; he does not feel that their simple definitions adequately reflect the complexity of how many older children and adults conceptualise death. As stated, Irreversibility refers to the understanding that once the physical body dies it cannot be made alive again; however, this simple definition fails to address the question of whether or not there is some sort of ‘noncorporeal continuation’ (Speece 1995, 2) after the physical death of the body, with concepts such as reincarnation and resurrection being left unquestioned and unstudied. Likewise, the simple definition of Nonfunctionality is found to be similarly inadequate: we have seen that Nonfunctionality refers to the understanding that once a living thing dies all of the typical life-defining capabilities of the living body cease, but, once again, ‘specifying the person’s physical body distinguishes this aspect of the concept of death from the issue of whether some noncorporeal aspect of a person, such as the spirit, is capable of any life-like functions after death’¹⁰⁵ (Speece 1995, 3).¹⁰⁶

Despite these more complex concepts not being directly addressed or questioned, noncorporeal continuation responses still emerge; for

¹⁰⁴ e.g. illness and accidents.

¹⁰⁵ e.g. loving, helping.

¹⁰⁶ Speece also highlights the fact that the possibility of medical reversal of death is not explored enough in the literature. The concept of medical reversibility ‘represents a more complex understanding of the irreversibility of death, which has resulted in part from advances in medical technology that have occurred during the past 30 years. These advances in both techniques (e.g. cardiopulmonary and brain resuscitation) and equipment (e.g. respirators) have radically altered our understanding of where to locate the boundary between “alive” and “dead”’ (Speece 1995, 7).

example, children will often cite a belief in heaven, and, in their study, “Adult” Conceptualization of Irreversibility: Implications for the Development of the Concept of Death’, Sandor Brent and Mark Speece found that some adults gave responses that explicitly or implicitly suggested the personal belief in the possibility of some sort of noncorporeal continuation after death despite the fact that the researchers’ questions dealt specifically and exclusively with the death of the physical body.¹⁰⁷ They found that for many adults, the question of Irreversibility is a complex one, involving a variety of naturalistic and non-naturalistic considerations.¹⁰⁸ Naturalistic explanations are those which explore the question of the reversibility or irreversibility of death in relation to natural (bio-scientific) laws; by contrast, non-naturalistic explanations ‘are those that refer to (or imply) the possible existence of some supernatural process, force or being’ (Brent & Speece 1993, 210) to account for the possible reversibility of death.

The results of this study support the general conclusion that for many adults the concept of irreversibility is a complex one. Brent and Speece stress the importance of non-naturalistic understandings of death as well as bio-scientific understandings for some adults, and, by extension therefore, for children and teenagers. They also find that the conventional presumed mature concept of death:

¹⁰⁷ In fact, in this study ‘the adults, as a group, conformed less well to the presumed adult standard than did the children in an earlier study. However, the adults’ explanations indicated that their lower conformation to the presumed adult concept was not the result of some anomalous regression but was a by-product of their more sophisticated understanding of the complexity of present-day efforts to conceptualize the exact boundary marking the transition from life to death’ (Brent & Speece 1993, 203). See study for full explication.

¹⁰⁸ The researchers asked adults the same question that they had asked children in a previous study: ‘Can a dead person become alive again?’ (Brent & Speece 1993, 205).

subsequently comes to serve as merely the stable, or core, of a connotational sphere that the child continues to enrich and elaborate throughout the remainder of life by the addition of all kinds of exceptions, conditions, questions, doubts, and so forth. (Brent & Speece 1993, 222-223)

Speece argues that Noncorporeal Continuation¹⁰⁹ has rarely been recognised as a separate factor in research literature and argues for its inclusion. Regarding the literature concerning children's concepts of death, where there were found to be some indirect references to this component in the literature, the researchers generally coded the answers as indicating a 'less mature understanding of Irreversibility and/or Nonfunctionality'

(Speece 1995, 7):

The failure of most investigators to identify Noncorporeal Continuation as a separate component and the tendency to consider such responses as immature appear to be primarily the result of the emphasis (often bias) in the child development literature on the bio-scientific (naturalistic) aspects of children's conceptual development in general, and of children's concepts of death in particular. (Speece 1995, 7)

The existence of Noncorporeal Continuation responses in the literature, despite the subject not being directly addressed, 'raises both theoretical and methodological issues for the study of children's concepts of death' (Speece 1995, 7). Speece argues that even if a research study is undertaken which focuses on children's understanding of the bio-scientific aspects of death, then the researchers should still expect some children to give Noncorporeal Continuation responses, and that they should have to give serious consideration as to how they wish to score such responses. He points out that:

¹⁰⁹ Which he now initialises with capitals as he henceforth identifies it as the fifth key component of the concept of death; I do likewise.

the mature understanding of Noncorporeal Continuation needs to be further investigated and articulated and that the description of the mature adult understanding of Noncorporeal Continuation will have to include a number of alternative views, including that there is no continuation. (Speece 1995, 8)

Therefore, if we are to measure children's concepts of death against the adult concept of death itself, then this 'developmental endpoint' needs further 'specification and validation', for '[t]he presumed mature adult concept, as represented in the simple definitions of the components, does not adequately reflect the richness, complexity, and diversity, of the concepts of many *older children* and adults' (Speece 1995, 9, emphasis my own).

In an earlier study,¹¹⁰ Speece and Brent had already found that the quantity of children who displayed the presumed mature understanding of Irreversibility and Nonfunctionality did not increase monotonically¹¹¹ with age. Having ruled out sampling artefact and transitional regression¹¹² as explanations for this discovery, Speece and Brent deduced that they had discovered the emergence of a new level of conceptualisation: older children were showing a new awareness of some of the difficulties involved in modern adults' conceptualisations of the relationship between life and death; a relationship which differs significantly from the supposed mature adult conceptualisation. Whilst the richness, complexity, and diversity of these concepts may still be under-represented in the scientific terms of

¹¹⁰ 'The Acquisition of a Mature Understanding of Three Components of the Concept of Death'. See Speece & Brent (1992).

¹¹¹ A sequence of values increases monotonically if and only if they never decrease. Conversely, a sequence decreases monotonically if and only if they never increase

¹¹² A sampling artefact would have shown that for some unknown reason the older children who were questioned were developmentally less advanced than the younger children; transitional regression would have shown that the older children in question happened to be going through a temporary transitional regression common in some developmental sequences. Both these explanations were dismissed. See Speece & Brent (1992).

thanatological research, they do, however, find an outlet in Teen Gothic fiction, which, I will show, turns away from the universality, non-functionality and irreversibility of death, and moves towards exploring the possibilities of other forms of continuance. Later I go on to examine, for instance, Bella Swan's desire in *Twilight* to 'continue' her life as a vampire, and Zach Randall's endurance of a tortured dual existence between life and death in *A Trick of the Dark*; I also look at the ways in which both ghosts and mortals occupy similar liminal states in *A Certain Slant of Light* and *The Afterlife*; and I examine the representation of zombies in *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* trilogy.

'Fuzzy Logic': Towards an Adolescent Understanding of Death

Consistent with the arguments above, then, children do not merely leave childhood and enter adolescence accepting the presumed mature concept of death. Indeed, in a cross-cultural study comparing children and adolescents from the United States and China on their perceptions of Universality, Irreversibility and Nonfunctionality, Brent *et al.* found increasing references to non-naturalistic understandings of death and discovered that adolescents were less likely than children to dichotomise life and death.¹¹³ This is particularly relevant here because it is one of the few studies to have analysed adolescents' death conception, and, in addition, Brent *et al.* describe how the concept of death, especially in connection with Noncorporeal Continuation, goes through a transformation

¹¹³ 'The Development of the Concept of Death Among Chinese and U.S. Children 3-17 Years of Age: From Binary to "Fuzzy" Concepts?' see Brent *et al.* (1996).

from a binary logical¹¹⁴ concept to a more complex 'fuzzy' logical concept.¹¹⁵

In this study, Brent *et al.* found, unsurprisingly, that Universality was understood at an early age by practically all children in both cultures; however, they discovered that children's understanding of Irreversibility and Nonfunctionality varied with both culture and age:

overall a greater percentage of Chinese than U.S. children gave the presumed mature adult response to each of these components, [but] within both cultures this percentage decreased with age, rather than increasing as predicted by traditional theories of children's concept development. The children's explanation for their responses suggest that with increasing age children of both cultures develop a more complex but 'fuzzier' conceptualization of death – one which increasingly includes both 1) Non-naturalistic and Naturalistic considerations and 2) uncertainty about the exact nature and location of the boundary between life and death. (Brent *et al.* 1996, 67)

Two of the main aims of this study were: to examine how children between twelve and seventeen (a group left previously uninvestigated) conceptualise death; and to consider whether the results of previous studies were culture specific or transcultural.¹¹⁶ As stated above, older children (nine to twelve year-olds) and adults from earlier studies had shown a greater tendency than younger children (six to eight year-olds) to give non-naturalistic as well as naturalistic explanations for their responses to Irreversibility questions. Brent *et al.* acknowledged, however, that almost all of the participants in these earlier studies, children and adults alike, were raised in a mainly

¹¹⁴ Binary logic: In logic, the semantic principle of bivalence states that every meaningful proposition is either true or false.

¹¹⁵ Fuzzy logic: a type of reasoning based on the recognition that logical statements are not only true or false (white or black areas of probability) but can also range from 'almost certain' to 'very unlikely' (grey areas of probability).

¹¹⁶ A third aim, to look at how children below the age of six conceptualise death, falls outside the interest of my study.

Christian society, and 'because belief in a spiritual afterlife is a basic teaching of Christianity', they could not determine from those studies whether the increase in non-naturalistic explanations was culture-specific or transcultural:

To answer this question it was necessary to also sample a culture whose beliefs concerning life and death were historically independent of Abrahamic (i.e. Judeo-Christian-Islamic) tradition which dominated our earlier samples. Contemporary Chinese culture fit this requirement in two respects. First, its traditional belief system was a blend of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, in which the Christian notion of an individual spiritual life after death played no significant part. In addition, during the first forty years of Communist rule (c. 1948-1988), all religious teachings and practices were officially banned – all Buddhist temples closed – so that most contemporary school-aged children and their parents have had little or no formal religious education during most of their lives. (Brent *et al.* 1996, 70)

Although the researchers asked all the children (of all age ranges and both cultures) questions relating to Universality, Nonfunctionality and Irreversibility, only the responses to Irreversibility items were analysed;¹¹⁷ the participants' responses were classified into two general categories: naturalistic and non-naturalistic.¹¹⁸ The study found that, on the whole responses to the general questions for Irreversibility and Nonfunctionality were highly correlated across both cultures and all age groups; in addition, responses to these two components were also highly correlated at each age level within each culture. At ages three, six, and fifteen there were no significant differences between the two cultures on either component. The

¹¹⁷ Brent *et al.* give two reasons for this: Firstly, virtually all participants in this particular study and all earlier studies considered the Universality of death to be self-evident; secondly, the participants' responses to Irreversibility and Nonfunctionality were so closely linked that their explanations for those responses were effectively the same. See Brent *et al.*

¹¹⁸ Yet again, non-naturalistic explanations were given by the participants despite the fact that the irreversibility questions specifically asked about the death of the physical body. It must be pointed out however, that in both cultures a significantly greater proportion of children within each age group gave naturalistic than gave non-naturalistic responses.

research also showed that within both cultures combined there was a significant *decrease* from ages three to six combined to age fifteen in the proportion of children who gave the presumed adult response to the general questions on Irreversibility and Nonfunctionality: 'Between 70 and 90 percent of the three and six year olds in both cultures gave the presumed adult response to both components while only about 60 percent of the fifteen year olds did so' (Brent *et al.* 1996, 76).¹¹⁹ Due to the parallel trends for Irreversibility and Nonfunctionality within each culture, the study also concluded that children and adolescents who are willing to consider the notion that, under some circumstance, death may be reversible are also more willing to consider the notion that at least some ordinary life functions might continue after death.¹²⁰

For Brent *et al.* these findings support the emerging theory implied by earlier studies, specifically:

that the tendency to deviate from the presumed adult standard is indicative of a more, rather than a less, mature understanding of this concept. They also suggest that this trend is transcultural, and perhaps universal, rather than culture specific. (Brent *et al.* 1996, 76)

Their results also have further implications for understanding both the development of the concept of death in particular, and the development of complex 'fuzzy' concepts in general.

¹¹⁹ There was, however, one interesting cultural difference: at ages nine and twelve a significantly greater number of Chinese than U.S. children gave the presumed adult response to each component. The developmental trajectories between the two youngest groups and the oldest group therefore differ considerably in the two cultures. In the U.S. sample the decrease starts between six and nine years of age, while in the Chinese sample it starts between twelve and fifteen years of age; both samples converge toward approximately the same value at around age fifteen. Brent *et al.* attribute this to variation in education, suggesting 'that the differences between Chinese and U.S. elementary schools encourage the Chinese children to give more conventional adult-like responses than do the U.S. children' (Brent *et al.* 1996, 76).

¹²⁰ Those not willing to accept one of these possibilities also tend not to be willing to accept the other.

It is widely accepted that, by and large, young children employ binary logic in their thinking and there are no grey areas.¹²¹ The dichotomies of an argument are easy to grasp for a child because he or she is only thinking in one dimension at a time. It had previously been suggested 'that the primary concept learning task for children under age nine or ten is learning which dichotomies are practically useful or culturally sanctioned and which are not' (Brent *et al.* 1996, 79). However, for Brent *et al.* the results of their study suggest that such a straightforward narrow approach may be of limited value in understanding human cognitive functioning in general. Most of the everyday concepts used by adults are of a different nature and are governed by a type of 'fuzzy' logic:

Thus, for example, an action may be 'fair' in some senses or by some criteria, and 'unfair' by others. Thus judging the fairness of an action may involve weighing, balancing, and integrating several competing and often conflicting dimensions in order to form a final decision structure. Similarly, in the context of the present study, with increasing age an increasing number of children reject the simple binary logic implicit in the presumed adult standard. Instead, their explanations imply a more complex but 'fuzzier' logic – one in which under certain circumstances a person may be judged 'dead' by one set of criteria and 'alive' by another set. (Brent *et al.* 1996, 79-80)

The development of 'fuzzy' reasoning has received little critical attention; however 'the binary logic used by the younger children is, from a theoretical point of view, a subset of and a precursor for the fuzzy logic and concepts of later concept development'. Brent *et al.* see the binary choice as an important 'first step' as it 'provides the structural anchoring points between which, and with respect to which, the fuzzy region of 'ambiguity' can begin to develop' (Brent *et al.* 1996, 80).

¹²¹ For example, something is either 'fair' or 'unfair' to a small child; a person is either 'alive' or 'dead'. See Brent *et al.*

Although the concept of 'fuzzy' reasoning has received little scientific attention to date, yet again Teen Gothic fiction provides a literary medium through which adolescents may explore 'fuzzy' and ambiguous concepts. As stated above, I find that the adolescent's ambiguous status in the world – no longer a child, not yet an adult – is reflected in their ambiguous relationship with death, and I argue that their developing 'fuzzy' logic – a logic which allows a person to 'be judged dead by one set of criteria and alive by another' - is given particular vent through narratives about vampires, zombies and ghosts, as I will subsequently show.

'The Tattered Cloak of Immortality': The Adolescent's Ambiguous Relationship with Death

It is therefore not sufficient simply to accept the fact that once a child reaches early adolescence the four components of the mature concept of death are well established, and neither is it adequate to believe that the adolescent understanding of death parallels that of the adult. Developing thanatological literature increasingly suggests that 'there might be unique facets of an adolescent's conception of death that distinguish it from a truly adult interpretation' (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 28). With regard to death's Universality, for example, the fact 'that an adolescent is able to understand or actually does understand that all human beings are mortal is not the same as the realization that the attribute of mortality applies to himself or herself' (Corr 1995, 27); and, in relation to Nonfunctionality and Irreversibility, the teenager's comprehension of these may be 'compromised by a fascination with the afterlife and more primitive notions of another

world of the dead existing in parallel to the world of the living' (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 28).

According to Charles Corr, most adolescents can conceptualise death in adult and abstract ways. However, this assertion seems to suggest that 'the major transition in developing understandings of death is between the cognitive capacities of childhood and those of adolescence' (Corr 1995, 26). Corr does not think that this is true, if it were, he maintains, the only important factor would be the capacity for abstract thought, and there would therefore be no real difference between the ways in which adolescents and adults consider death. This, he states, is not correct:

Normally developing adolescents can think about death in an abstract, conceptual, formal, mature, scientific, or adult way. That fact on its own does not necessarily mean that they actually or even frequently do think about death in those ways. To have the ability to think in a certain way is not the same as actually thinking in that way. (Corr 1995, 26)

Corr warns against isolating cognitive capacity from human experience, and argues that formalistic notions will ultimately, but not automatically, give way to an integration of the teenager's own personal mortality with his or her overall concept of death. There is, he affirms, a difference between understanding the concept as opposed to the significance of death.

During their early years, an egocentric perspective protects young children from fully understanding their own mortality: if anyone is to die, states Corr, it will be the 'other' not the child;¹²² this egocentric thinking

¹²² Corr uses a child's game of peek-a-boo as an example: 'the rest of the world disappears (dies?) and reappears. Whether this threatens or delights the child depends on his or her personality and perception of these events. But the continued existence of the child throughout the game ... is not questioned' (Corr 1995, 28).

may also cushion the early-adolescent from regarding death's universality and inevitability as pertaining to the self. As middle- and late-adolescents progress through life, however, their increasing exposure to death ultimately incorporates their own personal mortality with their overall concept of death.¹²³ Audrey Gordon also supports this view, suggesting that some tattered scraps of the perceived 'cloak of immortality' (Gordon 1986, 16) in which young children are wrapped may carry over into early adolescence, only to be worn away by increasing age, experience, and continued exposure to death: particularly from the adolescent's peers. Indeed, for Gordon, it is '[t]he death of friends, whether accidental or suicidal [which] rips asunder whatever fantasies of immortality that may still exist' (Gordon 1986, 26).

Before this 'fantasy of immortality' gets ripped asunder, however, the teenager spends much of his or her time wrestling with the meaning of life and death. The findings discussed above demonstrate the drawbacks of isolating cognitive capacity from the rest of the individual and reveal the adolescent's ambiguous relationship with death. Lloyd Noppe and Illene Noppe have considered this matter in a broader way by proposing that there are four dialectical themes that underscore what they describe as 'the ambiguous relationship with death that appears characteristic of the adolescent years' (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 31). These dialectical themes relate to the biological, cognitive, social, and affective tensions pertaining to

¹²³ Corr, in keeping with many other researchers, acknowledges Fleming & Adolph's recognition of the differing characteristic developmental tasks and associated death concepts which take place during early-, middle, or late-adolescence. In this model, early-adolescents' (11-14 year-olds) understanding of death is related to issues such as the emotional separation from parents; middle-adolescents' (14-17 year-olds) understanding of death is related to achieving personal mastery and control; and late-adolescents' (17-21 year-olds) understanding of death is related to seeking intimacy and commitment. See Fleming & Adolph (1986) for full details.

adolescent life which the adolescent may endure and which may possibly have to do with death. I will later highlight these dialectical themes at play in some of the Teen Gothic texts that I go on to scrutinise.

The first theme, the biological dialectic, reflects the tension between physical and sexual maturation, and its heralding of inevitable decline:

As the adolescent approaches maximum growth, peak strength and stamina, and reproductive capacity, considerations of death should not logically occupy much soul-searching time. ... The vibrancy of the biological transformation from childhood to adulthood should infuse the adolescent with excitement, optimism, and joy (in addition to the awkwardness, confusion and strangeness that also require adaptation). (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 31)

However, while adolescence is a time of vibrant biological transformation and physical development, where the adolescent attains 'the physical apex', it is also accompanied, argue Noppe & Noppe, by the realisation of the inevitability of biological decline leading ultimately to the death of oneself and others. In *Twilight*, for example, Bella is seen to fear aging and death, and in *A Trick of the Dark* Zach does not want to leave his adolescence behind to enter the 'responsible' grown-up world, both are therefore seen to be affected by the biological dialectic. A further possible connection between this biological transformation and adolescent conceptions of death, continue Noppe & Noppe, may be the loss of innocence that accompanies sexual development. Whilst few teenagers are likely to worry over their emerging sexual identity, they may long for the days of their prepubertal asexual past 'when they were not required to make decisions about behaviours that are fraught with social, emotional, and physical risks'. The loss of this more innocent past may cause

‘discomfort and anxiety that parallels and is intertwined with the physical changes that eventually lead to actual death’ (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 32).

The second theme, the cognitive dialectic, suggests that a fuller understanding of life’s many possibilities contrasts with the contemplation of death. For Noppe and Noppe, the cognitive dialectic concerns the onset of formal thought¹²⁴ and the increased intellectual abilities that the adolescent now has to think about the future, in both positive and negative terms:

The increasing sophistication of an adolescent’s reasoning power necessarily suggests thinking about death as well as life. Most adolescents begin to question their childhood ideas regarding religion, spirituality, ethics, and similar issues. As they reflect on what they have been taught, what they have read, what they have observed in adult actions, and what all of this means, adolescents are forced to confront the clash of life and death. (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 33)

Whilst teenagers look forward to a future full of happiness and success: professionally, personally, and sexually; conversely they also have to consider the negative aspects of their future: the death of themselves and others, the destruction of the environment, losing friendships, professional failure, economic difficulties and a whole host of other ‘unpredictable forms of loss’. Consequently, ‘tension may be created by the juxtaposition of both optimistic and pessimistic components of the future’ (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 34).

¹²⁴ Jean Piaget (1896 – 1980), a Swiss developmental psychologist and philosopher known for his epistemological studies with children, labeled the adolescent’s developing intellectual abilities as ‘the onset of formal thought’. Piaget’s theory of cognitive development is a comprehensive theory about the nature and development of human intelligence, see Piaget (1972).

The third theme that has an impact on the adolescent's conception of death, the social dialectic, gives consideration to the social context of development. Changing social relationships, within both the family and the peer group, can involve opportunities for growth as well as the threat of social losses, and the result of ineffective or failed interaction with others is that the adolescent may feel an overwhelming sense of loneliness or alienation:

Yet even those adolescents who have achieved a reasonable degree of intimacy with others have to grapple with being alone, a metaphorical death. Whether the adolescent's isolation is fairly pervasive or merely occasional, a link between impending death and loneliness is bound to produce some anxiety. The lack of social support and encouragement, the absence of familiar people and friendships, and the loss of shared feelings and activities is surely a realistic fear about death. (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 34)

Teenagers expand their world through peer interaction, and as time spent with the peer group increases during adolescence, so time spent with the family decreases. Whilst this continual scrutiny by the peer group may cause the teenager some anxiety, the alternative, isolation from other adolescents,¹²⁵ can be far more distressing. If the adolescent is unable to get along with his or her peers, then this can lead to 'a contracting and increasingly limited life – a social death. Even a series of small interpersonal difficulties, of the type usually experienced by all adolescents, can be felt as painful "little deaths"' (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 35). The social dialectic therefore considers that the tension between social expansion and social contraction within the peer group may present the adolescent with conflicting and frightening situations.

¹²⁵ Be it self-imposed or due to rejection by the group.

The affective dialectic is the final theme concerning the adolescent conception of death, where tensions are to be found within the processes of adolescent separation and individuation. Although all of the other dialectical themes overlap somewhat and all contain affective content, the affective dialectic emphasises:

those aspects of adolescent development that are most explicitly related to the affective elements of a conception of death. In other words, although death may be a physical process, intellectually comprehended or not, and probably grounded in a social context, it is always personally perceived within an individual, emotional framework. (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 36)

The affective dialectic is set against the background of the adolescent's burgeoning sense of identity and need for autonomy. Whilst 'creating' their own identity, teenagers investigate various value systems, adopt a philosophy of life, and may embrace particular spiritual or religious beliefs. Thinking about their own death, even hypothetically, certainly plays a part in identity formation, and the idea of personal death cannot be an easy one for the adolescent to accept: 'In the attempt to create a unified identity – a knowledge of who one is – the adolescent is forced to reconcile that identity with ultimate disintegration and not being' (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 36). More emotional tension comes into play when the tussle for autonomy takes place. Even at the best of times, independence does not come easily for the adolescent, with confusion and uncertainty arising when he or she makes decisions in the absence of parental/adult control:

At the core of the matter, autonomy means emotional separation, which is a kind of loss. The loss of that bond to parents, although developmentally normal, may be construed by the adolescent as a form of death – the ending of a certain form of affective relationship. (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 37)

Whilst we need not necessarily accept this account of a potentially ambiguous relationship with death and the four types of dialectical tensions within the adolescent years in its entirety, it is surely easy to concede the fundamental principle that growth such as that which characterises the adolescent years embodies aspects of both affirmation and loss.

Adolescent conceptions of death arise to challenge teenagers just at the point when they are trying to determine their own sense of a stable personal identity. I have already shown that, in contrast to younger children, most adolescents can conceptualise death in abstract or adult ways, but that for both developmental and situational reasons, many adolescents may be reluctant to do so, for it is particularly hard for teenagers to think of death as something that will eventually touch them.

Even when the ‘tattered cloak of immortality’ is finally stripped away and the adolescent fully accepts death’s Universality, their relationship with death is still shown to be ‘fuzzy’ and ‘ambiguous’. Teen Gothic, as I demonstrate in what follows, functions both to explore and express this ambiguous relationship with death in direct contrast to realist didactic novels aimed at educating adolescents into a ‘mature adult understanding’ of death.

‘There is Death, But it is Not My Own’

Death, according to Trites, is ‘the *sine qua non* of adolescent literature, the defining factor that distinguishes it from both children’s and adult literature’ (Trites 2000, 118). Having argued, *à la* Foucault, that all sexuality is a

discursive construct, designed to control the biological aspects of sex, she then asserts that death is another biological imperative:

It is, perhaps, even more powerful in the human mind than sexuality, for although in theory some individuals can live asexually, no one avoids death. Moreover, humans have created numerous institutions surrounding the biological reality of death to help them control its power: most religions, for example, have institutional investments in explaining death to people. For many adolescents, trying to understand death is as much of a rite of passage as experiencing sexuality is. (Trites 2000, 117)

Fiction for younger children and teenagers alike, explains Trites, deals with death and dying by having characters work through the five stages of grief: denial, anger, guilt, depression, and acceptance.¹²⁶ In books for younger children, death is used to demonstrate children 'learning to individuate by separating from their actual or symbolic parents ... and death is portrayed as part of a cycle, as an ongoing process of life' (Trites 2000, 118).¹²⁷ Few Young Adult novels, however, use the cycle imagery which dominates children's novels; they are more linear because the *Bildungsroman*¹²⁸ formula demands a plot 'determined by the concept of growth as linear [and] death is the endpoint of that line' (Trites 2000, 118). Mortality, therefore, has a different purpose in adolescent literature:

In this genre, protagonists come to understand that death is more than a symbolic separation from the parent. Acknowledging death is more than a stage necessary toward growing up and away from one's parents. Death in adolescent literature is a threat, an experience adolescents understand as a finality. (Trites 2000, 118)

¹²⁶ Trites draws here on the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: *On Death and Dying*, New York: Macmillan, 1969.

¹²⁷ Trites uses E.B. White's classic children's novel *Charlotte's Web* to illustrate her point. Wilbur the pig only becomes an adult after death separates him from his mother figure Charlotte (the spider), and, in addition, Wilbur brings Charlotte's eggs back to the barn to hatch so that the life cycle continues.

¹²⁸ A *Bildungsroman* is a novel in which the protagonist comes of age as an adult, as opposed to an *Entwicklungsroman* which is more simply a novel of growth and development. Whilst virtually all children's and adolescent novels are *Entwicklungsromane*, only some adolescent texts are *Bildungsromane*.

This is not so, I would argue, in Gothic literature aimed at teenagers, where the 'living dead' predominate.

If, as Punter notes, adolescence is a time when there is a 'fantasised inversion of boundaries' (Punter 1998, 6), then this is particularly evident in Teen Gothic, I would argue, in that supposedly 'final' boundary between life and death. Death in mainstream 'realist' adolescent texts¹²⁹ is depicted as permanent, and is a trope generally used to portray the teenage protagonist's maturation: the teenager is deemed mature when he or she accepts both the permanence of mortality and the fact that we are all, in Heidegger's¹³⁰ terms, 'Being-towards-death'. For Heidegger, 'Being-towards-death' represents the moment of maturation in which the subject defines himself in terms of his own death, in terms of his own 'not being'.¹³¹ Whilst many Gothic texts certainly show the teenage protagonists as 'Being-towards-death', they then refute the permanence of death and/or the state of 'not being' by featuring zombies, vampires and ghosts.¹³²

Paradoxically, then, although death is the Gothic's stock-in-trade, very few

¹²⁹ See, for example, Jenny Downham's *Before I Die* (2010) and John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012), two novels which deal with the imminent and expected death of the protagonist from terminal illness; also see John Green's *Looking for Alaska* (2011) which concerns the effect the sudden accidental death of the female love interest, 'Alaska', has on the male protagonist.

¹³⁰ Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) – an influential German philosopher known for his existential and phenomenological explorations of the 'question of Being'. His central belief was that philosophy, and society as a whole, was preoccupied with *what it is* that exists; but he insisted that we had forgotten the basic question of *what it is to exist*, of what being itself is. For Heidegger, this question defines our central nature. He argued that we are practical agents, caring and concerned about our projects in the world, allowing it to reveal, or 'unconceal' itself to us. He came to believe that our proactive interference and manipulation of reality is often harmful and hides our true being as essentially limited participants, not masters, of the world which we discover. See Heidegger (1962).

¹³¹ See Heidegger (1962, 304-307).

¹³² These Gothic figures have a dual function in Teen Gothic fiction: they are both a threat to life and a promise that death is not the end.

Teen Gothic novels deal with actual death: 'real' death, it would seem, remains the preserve of those mainstream, didactic, realist fictions.

We can undoubtedly argue that any narrative or 'aesthetic representation of death lets us repress our knowledge of the reality of death precisely because here death occurs *at* someone else's body and as an image' (Bronfen 1992, x, emphases in the original). 'There is death' thinks the reader, 'but it is not my own' (Bronfen 1992, x). By renouncing or denying death in this way, death is being expressed in Kristevan terms: it is something Other, something that we exclude or abject because it 'does not respect borders, positions, rules' (Kristeva 1982, 4), and this concept of otherness is critical to understandings of narratives about vampires, zombies and ghosts:

Concerned with limits, with the blurring or the violation of the boundaries between life and death, representations of the 'undead' (those who are technically dead but still animate) essentially question what it is to be mortal, but can also point to deep-seated cultural anxieties regarding death and difference. (James 2009, 20-21)

Kathryn James maintains that a wide variety of shifting meanings are located in aesthetic representations of the living dead; they can:

stand for a crisis of subjectivity; function to demonise those who threaten stability of the cultural order; point to that which must be defeated in order for ideals and social cohesion to be maintained; or work to challenge the notion of death's permanence. (James 2009, 21)

I would argue that it is this notion of death's impermanence that we most often see highlighted in Teen Gothic texts, where death, whilst still sometimes appearing as a threat, is not always 'an experience adolescents understand as a finality'.

'I Wanted to Be a Vampire'

To illustrate this we need look no further than Bella Swan¹³³, the teenage protagonist in Stephenie Meyer's commercially successful *Twilight* series. Critical opinion is divided on Meyer, but (love it or loathe it) *Twilight*¹³⁴ has unquestionably brought Teen Gothic fiction to the fore. However, it would be a mistake to say that Meyer was in any way at the forefront of vampire fiction for teenagers, and there exists quite a canon, dating back to the early nineties.¹³⁵ Vampire fiction aimed at teenagers, as we have seen in Chapter One, can usually be appraised in terms of what it is saying about subverting the normalising discourse that exists in relation to teenage sexuality. Meyer's work was not included in this chapter because sexuality is completely normalised in *Twilight*. Literal, consensual sex actually takes place between the protagonist and the vampire (Edward Cullen), but despite Meyer's initial portrayal of Edward as the one who wishes to

¹³³ Bella's given name is Isabella Marie Swan: whilst Isabella is a Biblical name, meaning 'devoted to God', the diminutive 'Bella' means 'beautiful', and although Edward always considers her beautiful, Bella does not consider herself to be so until she is transformed into a vampire. Bella's middle name, Marie, comes from the Latin for 'bitter' and is, perhaps, more reflective of the moaning and rather truculent, pre-transformation Bella.

¹³⁴ Unless otherwise stated, I use *Twilight* to stand for the whole series which comprises: *Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse* and *Breaking Dawn*.

¹³⁵ Trends in YA fiction generally follow trends in adult fiction. Vampire fiction for teenagers became popular after the resurgence of adult vampire fiction which began in the 1970s and 1980s with Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*. Rice rewrote many of the literary vampire conventions, making the vampire myth seem more reasonable; she writes from the vampire's viewpoint, making him a more sympathetic character; and she also changes the traditional Gothic setting, having her vampires live in beautiful modern homes. Rice's re-invention of the vampire inspired a host of adult vampire fiction to be written by various authors from the early nineties on, ensuring that contemporary adult vampire fiction has remained in the best-sellers list ever since. This is a pattern that has been repeated in the YA market. As well as the books included in this study, there has been a steady output in YA vampire fiction since the early nineties, the most famous of which is L.J. Smith's *Vampire Diaries* series which began in 1991 (pre-dating Meyer by 15 years) and is still running. Since Meyer's phenomenal commercial success, however, the YA market has indeed become awash with vampire fiction (series fiction in particular) such as Rachel Caine's *Morganville Vampires* (2006 to date); mother and daughter team P.C. & Kristin Cast's *House of Night* series (2007 to date) and Richelle Mead's *Vampire Academy* series (2007 – to date). For the most part, these post-Meyer, series-fiction vampire narratives are no more than fantasy romances.

abstain, and Bella as the one who desires, *Twilight* does not promote a healthy, authentic, and embodied sexuality in girls;¹³⁶ rather it can be viewed, by the end of the series, as a ‘discourse of sexuality based on the male in search of desire and the female in search of protection’ (Fine 1998, 40). This is highlighted by Bella’s constant need for both Edward¹³⁷ and Jacob¹³⁸ to repeatedly save her from sticky, life-threatening situations, and both boys’ combative desire for her.

Indeed, other than featuring vampires (decent, upstanding ones at that) and werewolves (who are equally rather noble), it is sometimes hard to see what is truly ‘Gothic’ about *Twilight* at all, until, that is, we think about Bella. What is interesting about Bella is the way in which she at first fits, and then subverts, the character of the teenage protagonist in Gothic fiction. To begin with, Bella Swan’s character is consistent with that of the teenage protagonist in any Young Adult vampire novel as outlined in Chapter One: she is struggling to find her place in the world, is portrayed as being marginalised from the mainstream in some way, and is facing a problem, certainly familial, that she feels she cannot surmount.¹³⁹ In line with the generic narrative arc of these novels, *Twilight* traces the movement from the disintegration of the family unit to the sexual awakening of the protagonist by the vampire; death is often faced along the way (in Bella’s case, almost daily), and the series culminates with the protagonist

¹³⁶ I mean here that, regardless of the fact that *Twilight* emphasises Bella’s own desire, pleasure and subjectivity, the text still privileges marriage and premarital abstinence, as Bella does not persuade Edward to make love to her until after they are married, thereby ‘normalising’ her sexuality.

¹³⁷ Rather appropriately, the English name Edward means ‘wealthy guardian’; this is doubly fitting, for Bella gains protection from Edward and, as I argue later, his wealth is not an unattractive factor.

¹³⁸ Jacob Black is, of course, a werewolf and Edward Cullen’s love rival. His name comes from the Hebrew and aptly means, as Meyer will be well aware, ‘the supplanter’.

¹³⁹ Bella’s mother and father have split up and now live 1,000 miles apart. Bella has left her mother in Arizona and has come to Forks, Washington to live with her father Charlie. She is new in school, and knows no-one to begin with.

establishing an identity independent from her parents. So far, so typical. Where Bella's character parts company with that of the usual teenage protagonist, however, is in her relationship with Edward; Edward, who has the entire wealthy and sophisticated Cullen clan and its varied associates behind him, is not as marginalised as other literary vampires,¹⁴⁰ and therefore does not, in actuality, reflect Bella's marginal nature. Ruminating on the excessive wealth and beauty of the Cullens whilst she is on a shopping trip to the appropriately named 'Thriftway' supermarket, Bella cannot imagine that there would be 'any door that wouldn't be opened by that degree of beauty' (*Twilight*, 28). It is important to note that Bella never tries to resist the lure of the Cullens,¹⁴¹ and sets her stall out quite early in the series: 'I wanted to be a vampire' (*New Moon*, 232). Bella's attraction to vampirism, however, has nothing to do with bloodthirst, and everything to do with immortality.

In Chapter One I argued that Zoë and Kerry, the teenage protagonists of *The Silver Kiss* and *Companions of the Night*, are ultimately empowered by their relationships with their respective vampires, and how these girls both exemplify Lamb's notion of an 'agentive teen sexuality'. They are both shown to relinquish the objects of their desire and move forward toward being responsible adults. Not so Bella. If there is a truly 'vampiric' figure in *Twilight*, then it is Bella. She latches on to, and leeches from, both Jacob and Edward, playing them off one against the other, until ultimately choosing Edward, whose glamour, wealth, nuclear family and,

¹⁴⁰ Although the Cullens live, for obvious reasons, in relative domestic isolation, they have spent the past century insinuating themselves into hospitals and high schools; rather than being 'loners', they are portrayed as objects of respect and desire amongst any community they settle in.

¹⁴¹ As already stated, this contrasts with the usual generic narrative arc where the teenage protagonist at first resists, then succumbs to, and finally relinquishes, the vampire.

importantly, immortality, finally win the day. It has been argued that, in her desire for Edward, Bella subconsciously desires the grave; Edward, with his pale and cool body which requires neither food nor sleep, could be likened to a corpse.¹⁴² However, in actuality, the last thing Edward resembles is a corpse; corpses eventually decay and become food for the worms, this is not true of Edward who is, and will always be, an eternal 'Adonis' (*Twilight*, 277), a 'perfect statue, carved in some unknown stone, smooth like marble, glittering like crystal (228). Adonis is a particularly apt comparison for Bella to make. In Greek mythology Adonis is the god of beauty and desire, and his name is now synonymous with handsome youths, of whom he is the archetype.¹⁴³ However, the association is even more pertinent than Bella probably realises, for Adonis is a dying god,¹⁴⁴ an annually-renewed, ever-youthful god, a life-death-rebirth deity whose nature is tied to the calendar. This is what Bella wants, she does not crave death, she craves stasis; she desires for herself the beautiful immortality that Edward and the Cullens all have, and, despite ambiguously thinking '[l]et me die, let me die, let me die' (*Breaking Dawn*, 349) during the pain of her inevitable transformation, she never really defines herself in terms of her own 'not being'. I posit that the thought is ambiguous because, on the one hand Bella screams internally to die in order to escape the bodily pain she is experiencing at that moment in time, and, on the other she knows she has to die 'momentarily' to achieve her immortality. Bella knows, in the words of

¹⁴² See Margaret Kramar, 'The Wolf in the Woods' (2011).

¹⁴³ More precisely, Adonis is a 'semi-god'. Adonis was a handsome, mortal youth loved by Aphrodite. Killed by a wild boar, he was believed to spend part of the year in the underworld and part on earth, symbolizing the vegetative cycle.

¹⁴⁴ A dying god, also known as a dying-and-rising or resurrection deity, is a god who dies and is resurrected or reborn, in either a literal or symbolic sense.

Donne, that after 'one short sleep past' she will 'wake eternally', and 'death shall be no more'.¹⁴⁵

But it is not just Bella's soul which will enter eternity, something of a convention with religious poetry; her body too will endure forever. The definition of death is 'the act or fact of dying; *the end of life*; the final cessation of the vital functions of an animal or plant' (emphasis my own);¹⁴⁶ to die, therefore, is to be without life, animation or activity. This is not what Bella desires, she desires immortality: 'exemption from death or annihilation; endless life or existence'.¹⁴⁷ She also yearns to be immortal in a wider sense, she does not want to be 'liable to perish or decay', she wants to be 'everlasting, imperishable, unfading'.¹⁴⁸

Assuredly, then, Bella is not, in Heidegger's terms, a 'Being-towards-death', she does not accept her own maturation, and repeatedly complains about it throughout the first three books of the series. *New Moon* opens with Bella, on the eve of her eighteenth birthday, ostensibly dreaming about her Grandmother:

With a dizzying jolt, my dream abruptly became a nightmare.

There was no Gran.

That was *me*. In a mirror. Me – ancient, creased, and withered.

Edward stood beside me, casting no reflection, excruciatingly lovely and forever seventeen. (*New Moon*, 5)

For Bella, '[g]etting older' is, indeed, 'the worst that could happen' (*New Moon*, 9). Adolescents in the western world live in a society that is

¹⁴⁵ John Donne, 'Death, Be Not Proud'. See Donne (1996).

¹⁴⁶ 'death, adj.1'. OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 26 November 2011

¹⁴⁷ 'immortality, n.'. OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 26 November 2011

¹⁴⁸ 'immortal, adj. and n.'. OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 26 November 2011

uncomfortable with aging, illness and death; youthful looks and behaviour are now presented as the norm for all parts of the life cycle:

Cosmetic surgeries, obsession with body fitness, idealized standards of beauty – all these and more conspire to stave off external signs of aging with its inevitable consequence, death. The adolescent absorbs the adult envy of youthful energies and enthusiasms, and intuitively correctly the adult fear of aging and death. The teenager understands that adult society molds itself in the image of youth and learns to fear growing old. (Gordon 1986, 21)

Gordon argues that our society inures itself to the face of death and this ‘engenders a callousness in our youth towards physical deterioration and death’ (Gordon 1986, 21). Bella is therefore seen to be affected by the tensions involved in Noppe & Noppe’s ‘social dialectic’: not essentially by the primary tension between greater reliance on the peer group and an increased sense of isolation,¹⁴⁹ but more forcibly by a different sort of social tension, one which involves the cross-generational relations of adolescents with their parents or other adults: ‘The focus on youth and health in society contrasts sharply with the fear of aging and death. ... Adolescents naturally view older individuals as closer to death and they may try to distance themselves from this situation’ (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 35).

Wishing to forestall the aging process, Bella constantly pleads with Edward to turn her into a vampire, which he always refuses to do, reminding us that many vampires long to die, and do not relish the interminable nature of their own lives. There is no real emphasis on transfiguration in the *Twilight* series until the final book, *Breaking Dawn*,

¹⁴⁹ Although, of course, it can be argued that Bella also suffers this primary tension: we have seen that she is struggling to find her place in the world and is portrayed as being marginalised from the mainstream.

when Bella finally gets her wish and is transformed into a vampire.¹⁵⁰

Edward's hand is forced when he has to step in and save Bella's life after a particularly horrific birthing scene involving a fully sentient and rapidly increasing foetus which is both eating Bella alive and breaking up her body.¹⁵¹ Naturally, here the transfiguration is viewed as positive, for, on balance, the hero has saved the heroine's 'life'. The inherent paradox in immortality for Bella, of course, is that she has to 'die' to achieve it:

My heart stuttered twice, and then thudded quietly again just once more.

There was no sound. No breathing. Not even mine. ...

And then I opened my eyes and gazed about me in wonder.
(*Breaking Dawn*, 356)

This is not presented as 'real' death; Bella experiences no loss of sensation or vitality, quite the opposite in fact, she rises from her transformation with all her senses heightened. Death, when presented as immortality, is hugely desirable in Bella's eyes, and the text completely underplays the idea that this is death. Bella does not have a death wish, nor does she reject life; contrarily, she gains greater awareness and appreciation of the living world, and Meyer spends pages describing the extraordinary clarity of Bella's newly heightened senses.

¹⁵⁰ Generally, in vampire literature for Teens there is not much emphasis on transfiguration at all; the heroine of the novels usually always refuses or escapes transformation, and this is seen as empowering.

¹⁵¹ Edward and Bella have conceived the baby (Renesmee, aka Nessie) on their honeymoon, a consequence they did not think was possible. Bella fiercely protects her unborn baby, allowing the dangerous foetus to grow inside her despite knowing that it will certainly kill her, and despite Edward begging her to get rid of it. Much has been made of the fact that this represents Meyer's pro-life stance on abortion, but leaving the author out of it allows another reading; we could feasibly deduce that this is Bella's pro-life stance for *herself*; so certain is she that Edward will save and immortalise her after the destructive birth of the baby.

Once she is transformed, Bella embraces the life immortal, and what a life it is. Forever eighteen, she is now 'indisputably [and eternally] beautiful' (372); her voice 'shimmer[s] like a bell' (363); she quickly recovers from the trauma of childbirth; and produces a child with accelerated development which she will not have to look after for too long. After, in her own words, 'eighteen years of mediocrity' (484), Bella finds her chance to 'shine': 'I had been born to be a vampire ... I had found my true place in the world ... the place I shined' (485). 'It seemed too good to be true' (478), she thinks at one point, and indeed it is. For this is, of course, total wish fulfilment: having it all and keeping it all, at your physical best, eternally. When Bella likens her new life with Edward to living in a 'fairy tale' in which 'Snow White [could] walk right in with her apple in her hand' (444), she perhaps does not sense the irony that she herself has been 'wakened' into death by a poisonous kiss from her own prince.

However, it is not enough to reduce the *Twilight* saga to the genre of mere romantic fantasy and escapism; there have been enough of those over the years, after all. Instead, other readings of the text must be questioned in order to examine what further deep-seated attraction Bella's immortality holds for the teenager. If it is accepted that Bella undergoes transition without loss, then the wider appeal of immortality begins to emerge. Rather than the end of Bella's childhood and adolescence representing the moment of her maturation in which she sees herself in terms of her own death, in terms of her own 'not being', her maturity is transformed, through her immortality, into a powerful gift. In addition to the beauty which has been conferred upon her, Bella is now no longer clumsy,

accident prone, and in need of constant protection; instead she is strong, agile and an altogether more powerful vampire than those who had previously terrorised her. Nor does Bella require the protection of Edward, Jacob, or her father any longer; gender and power distinctions are swept away: she need not acknowledge male primacy and she is immunised against patriarchy;¹⁵² Bella moves forward into maturity as a powerful equal, having thrown off the shackles of gauche adolescence. Although still a fantasy, the text hints at an outcome the teenager can strive for: becoming an adult need not necessarily mean a step toward death, but, rather, it can present the adolescent with unlimited potential once the angst of human adolescence has been set aside.

Bella's choice between life and death is also figuratively played out in the choice she has to make between Edward and Jacob; in choosing the 'undead' Edward she is seen, conversely, to choose life, and makes an empowering decision. Had Bella opted for life with Jacob she would have been subject to the male dominance of pack law, in which the alpha male reigns supreme. The werewolves are portrayed as short-tempered and volatile, and they are most likely to explode into wolf form when angered. At one point Jacob warns Bella: 'If I get too mad ... too upset ... you might get hurt' (*New Moon*, 274, ellipses in the original). This is a rather ominous warning that can be read on several levels, especially when we think of

¹⁵² In each of the Cullens' romantic relationships neither partner is shown to be dominant and the females are free from any form of gender oppression; in addition, they suffer from no physical vulnerability. This contrasts with the earlier human life of all the Cullen women: after suffering a miscarriage Esme tried to commit suicide in order to avoid returning to her physically abusive husband; Alice's father (who had killed her mother) had her incarcerated in a mental asylum; and Rosalie was the victim of a vicious gang rape, led by her fiancé. Bella herself comes close to being raped when she wanders off on her own in Port Angeles.

Bella physically struggling to resist when Jacob aggressively tries to kiss her:

His lips crushed mine, stopping my protest. He kissed me angrily, roughly, his other hand gripping tight around the back of my neck, making escape impossible. I shoved against his chest with all my strength, but he didn't even seem to notice. ... I grabbed at his face, trying to push it away, failing again ... it aggravated him. (*Eclipse*, 293)

Bella only manages to break away from the force of Jacob's fervour by cleverly playing possum. When he releases her, she punches him and consequently breaks her hand. This incident is indicative of just how defenceless and lacking in authority Bella is, and would continue to be, were she to choose Jacob over Edward. Life with a werewolf appears to render the female completely powerless and leaves her without voice or agency.¹⁵³ There is also the issue of werewolf 'imprinting'¹⁵⁴ to consider: despite insisting that he is in love with Bella, Jacob never manages to imprint on her; had Bella chosen life with Jacob, she would always have been at risk of being thrown over for someone else, yet another example of just how little control she would be able to exercise over her life. Bella, therefore, is seen to make the empowering choice to 'die' in order to live life to the full with Edward, rather than to endure a 'living death'¹⁵⁵ within the confines of an unreconstructed patriarchal system.

¹⁵³ Consider the case of Leah Clearwater and Emily Young: Leah and Emily had been best friends; Leah was the werewolf Sam Uley's love interest until he 'imprinted' on Emily; Leah is subsequently left alone and without hope of finding another 'mate'; the girls are estranged from each other; and Emily now bears the scars of Sam's uncontrollable rage on her face.

¹⁵⁴ 'Imprinting', is the involuntary mechanism by which Quileute shape-shifters (werewolves) find their soul-mates. When a shape-shifter imprints on a specific human of the opposite gender, he becomes unconditionally bound to her for the rest of his life, the girl, however, appears to have no choice in the matter, and babies Claire and Renesmee (whom Jacob imprints on) have their future sex lives mapped out for them from an unconscionably young age.

¹⁵⁵ 'living death n. *fig.*: a state of misery not deserving the name of life'. OED Online. September 2011. Oxford University Press. 30 November 2011

Twilight overturns the truism that '[t]here is nothing more certain at the moment of our birth than the inevitability of our death' (James 2009, 1), and this is most exemplified in the birth of Renesmee, for there is a great deal of uncertainty surrounding the inevitability of her death. Whilst Nessie is not, in *Twilight* terms, an 'immortal child',¹⁵⁶ there is some textual confusion as to whether she will ever die. As a vampire/human hybrid, Nessie benefits from an initially accelerated, then subsequently delayed, development. She will stop maturing at the age of seven, but by then will have the body of a seventeen-year-old teenager, and her brain-power will likewise develop exponentially; she will then cease to age for many centuries, if not longer, and no-one really knows if Nessie will ever die.¹⁵⁷ All of which goes some way, possibly, to expiate Meyer's glaring use of oxymoron when she states that Nessie is 'half-mortal' (*Breaking Dawn*, 491). Nessie is, as is to be expected, beautiful and intellectually brilliant, and we appear to be back in the realms of wish-fulfilment for Bella, especially when we consider that she manages to keep Jacob close (despite spurning him romantically) by almost producing this daughter for him to 'have' carnally later in life. However, because of her own powers, Nessie will not be subject to the werewolf patriarchy, so this future union is imagined as being one of equals. Rather conveniently for all it turns out that Jacob also benefits from delayed aging. The werewolves cannot start aging until a solid period of time without phasing goes by, and, since phasing is instinctual, the werewolves have no real say in the matter;

¹⁵⁶ That is, a child that has been bitten by a vampire and turned into an immortal, these are outlawed by the Volturi, the governing class of vampires.

¹⁵⁷ The Cullens go on a fact-finding mission to South America, where Nahuel, the only other known human/vampire hybrid lives; despite finding out about the increased lifespan of a hybrid, their results are rather inconclusive as Nahuel is, naturally, still living.

however, the fact that the wolves are needed whenever vampires are close could, in theory, mean that Jacob too may live forever. Textual conveniences aside, this could, perhaps, be read as being metaphorically empowering for the teenager. Rather than the reaching of maturity symbolising a step taken towards the end of life, it may be viewed, instead, as the time to begin fulfilling one's potential, to make the most of every moment. In *Twilight* the Cullens are portrayed as having higher ethical and intellectual values than all other humans and vampires; this is their life choice; they never refrain from moral questioning and ceaselessly strive to improve themselves cerebrally. The younger Cullens repeatedly graduate from high school, and Carlisle keeps up-to-date with modern medicine. They all continue avidly in the pursuit of knowledge and betterment. Therefore, for Bella, and by implication the teenager, her 'death' may be construed as her beginning, and, to paraphrase Auerbach, we can recognise that, for the teenager, the immortal life of the vampire 'allow[s] them] to envision li[fe] beyond the constraints of death and social expectations' (Auerbach 1995, 192).

'An Awfully Big Adventure'

The lure of immortality is not presented as being quite so desirable in B.R. Collins' *A Trick of the Dark*, however. Although advertised to the teenage market as a 'supernatural thriller', *A Trick of the Dark* is a far more complicated and sophisticated text than its cover art and paratext would

suggest. It is, rather, a metaphysical thriller, concerned with the dualism¹⁵⁸ that underpins much religious and philosophical thinking. Two intertexts heavily influence *A Trick of the Dark*: John Donne's sonnet 'Death Be Not Proud',¹⁵⁹ in which death is personified and rendered vincible; and J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*,¹⁶⁰ where, arguably, Peter Pan is the personification of death, leading the lost souls/boys to the Neverland. Despite these influences, *A Trick of the Dark* conversely denies the reader the comfort of Donne's Christian boldness and the playful irony of Barrie's work. It is a dark read indeed.

The plot concerns the collapse of all relationships within the Randall family: It has been discovered that dad, Edward, has had an affair; his workaholic wife, Helen, is incandescent with rage; seventeen-year-old Zach, clever, charming and conceited by turns, has been expelled from school for drug taking and dealing; and his younger sister, Annis, resents living in her brother's shadow as well as being an unwilling participant in this rancorous family breakdown. In order to try and come together as a family again, the parents decide to spend the summer in the South of

¹⁵⁸ Dualism, from the Latin word *duo* meaning 'two', denotes a state of two parts. The term 'dualism' was originally coined to denote co-eternal binary opposition, a meaning that is preserved in metaphysical and philosophical duality discourse but has been diluted in general or common usages. Moral dualism is the belief of the great complement (in eastern and naturalistic religions) or conflict (in western religions) between the benevolent and the malignant. Most religious systems have some form of moral dualism - in western religions, for instance, the conflict between good and evil.

¹⁵⁹ 'Death Be Not Proud' is one of three poems that Zach leaves behind in his notebook for Annis; the others are, fittingly, Donne's 'A Lecture Upon the Shadow', which details the shadow's disappearance at noon; and 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning', which needs no further explanation. See Donne.

¹⁶⁰ Unless otherwise stated I use the general term *Peter Pan* to stand for the four major texts in which Peter appears. Peter Pan first appeared in a section of *The Little White Bird*, a 1902 novel written by Barrie for adults. The character subsequently became famous through the stage play *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*. Following the success of the play Barrie's publishers extracted the relevant section of *The Little White Bird* and republished them for children in 1906 as *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. Barrie later adapted and expanded his successful play into a novel, published in 1911 as *Peter and Wendy*.

France restoring an old barn they have bought; it is a move which proves disastrous.

From the outset Zach takes to lurking in a nearby derelict house: all the more attracted to it because his parents expressly forbid him to go there. One day, while Annis is watching, part of the wall collapses, killing him. Stupefied and unbelieving, Annis sees him resurrect himself, his injuries having miraculously healed. It comes to light that Zach has previously separated himself from his 'shadow', the pain and weakness of human existence, but in so doing has become immortal and horribly inhuman. Although Zach is freed from suffering, he is also morally and physically desensitised: literally untouchable.¹⁶¹ To 'save' him (or redeem his soul), Annis realises that he has to be made whole again; he must be reunited with his death, and she descends both literally and metaphorically into her own darkness to send her own 'shadow' in search of his.¹⁶² The perplexing mystery unfolds through the coalescing dual narratives of Zach and Annis. Annis' narrative, written in the third-person, is the more prominent, but it is interspersed with retrospective first-person entries from Zach's notebook, which serve to disrupt both time and perspective.

The novel opens with one of these puzzling retrospective first-person entries: 'Wake up. For God's sake, wake up,' Zach urges Annis, '[y]ou've been asleep for more than twenty-four hours ... So asleep you look dead'

¹⁶¹ If Zach is touched by, or brushes past, anyone, he gives them an electric shock. *N.b.* Peter Pan shares a similar, though not quite so powerful, trait: 'a tingle went through them every time they touched his body' (Barrie 1999, 106).

¹⁶² The text is therefore also heavily influenced by narratives concerning the Gothic double. Ranging from James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* through to Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, the double has enjoyed a long literary run. Two texts in particular impact upon *A Trick of the Dark*, however: Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and Wilde's *Dorian Gray*.

(1). Annis may look dead, but she is alive, just, and Zach is both worried about her and jealous of her: ‘Jesus, I’m scared. I almost envy you, lying there. Almost. You’ve got no idea how much I miss sleeping’ (3). It is not until later that we realise that Zach has lost the ability to sleep because he has become immortal. The novel therefore begins with confusing and conflicting notions of sleep, death and God. In Zach’s opening entry he makes numerous references to God, Jesus and the Lord, but these are all twenty-first century execrations of frustration and fear, made in an areligious rather than a religious sense.¹⁶³

The central argument of Donne’s poem, ‘Death Be Not Proud’, is that death is not all-powerful as it will ultimately give way to eternal life; what the Christian believer fears as death is only a form of sleep, from which they will wake at the Day of Judgement, when death will be abolished. Donne, however, belongs to another time and another world, where, arguably, there was a more widespread belief in God and the resurrection of the immortal soul. Despite Zach¹⁶⁴ reading Donne’s poems in his father’s book, none of this optimism or Christian consolation enters into the novel; and the conceit of death as sleep is turned on its head from the outset.

Like Peter Pan, whom Zach has played to great acclaim in his school play, ‘there never was a cockier boy’ (Barrie 1999, 91). ‘That’s just how it is’ writes Zach, ‘I’m the hero, you’re the adoring hanger-on ... I’m bigger and stronger and ... better looking and cleverer and more proficient at just about anything you can name’ (*A Trick of the Dark*, 2). And, again just like

¹⁶³ ‘For God’s Sake’ (1, 2, 7); ‘Jesus’ (3, 4, 8); ‘Oh Lord’ (2).

¹⁶⁴ Even Zach’s name is a misleading anachronism: Zach, from the Israeli name Zachary, means ‘remembrance of the Lord’. As there is no Christian solace to be found in the novel, this is rather incongruous.

Peter Pan, 'this conceit ... [is] one of his most fascinating qualities' (Barrie, 1999, 91), for, despite his arrogance, Zach is a very attractive figure to all his school mates, male and female alike, as well as to Annis, his 'adoring hanger-on'.¹⁶⁵ However, unlike Peter Pan who is depicted as a young child¹⁶⁶ who wants his shadow back, Zach is a seventeen-year-old on the cusp of adulthood who most decidedly does not want his shadow back, for he knows that to be reunited with his shadow is to be reunited with his death. Indeed, in contrast to Bella's '[l]et me die, let me die, let me die' (*Breaking Dawn*, 349), Zach cries 'go away, go away, go away' (*A Trick of the Dark*, 87 & 113) when his shadow, who is seeking reunification, approaches him. At the outset, though, Zach does have a death wish: so miserable and unhappy is he at the bitter events that have taken place in his life. At one point during the family's acrimonious, temper-fuelled drive down through France, Zach wills his father to '[c]rash, crash, crash' and prays for 'a quick, violent end to all of us' (6). As they emerge from the accident hot-spot unscathed, Zach is 'so fucking disappointed [he] could cry' (7), the incident is premonitory however; as they drive away Zach sees a family of shadows at the side of the road: '[s]hadows without people to cast them, warning me' (7).¹⁶⁷

Miserable and angry, unwillingly uprooted from his London home, Zach is both the physical and psychical epitome of the Gothic displaced

¹⁶⁵ Prior to the family breakdown Zach has also been his parents' 'blue-eyed boy'. However, it is Zach who finds out, and informs about, his father's affair, thus he is unfairly seen as the catalyst for the subsequent family collapse. Although not specified, the text implies that Zach's drug taking and dealing have commenced after the revelation of the affair.

¹⁶⁶ Peter's age is never specified, but he has 'all his first teeth' (Barrie 1999, 77), is looking for a mother, and cuddles up on Wendy's lap.

¹⁶⁷ In reality the shadow figures are black, faceless road markers, put up to mark road fatalities and to act as a warning to drive carefully.

subject. As such, he represents the ‘subject in a state of deracination, of the self finding itself dispossessed in its own house, in a condition of rupture, disjunction, fragmentation’ (Miles 2002, 3). Zach takes to spending his time at the old ruins, and the ruins also perform a Gothic function; as a time-honoured Gothic site, dislocating space and threatening subjectivity, they can be viewed, just as the traditional Gothic castle can, ‘as embodying a past that goes back behind – or beneath – the “moment” of the subject’ (Punter & Byron 2004, 51). Indeed, Zach states:

It felt like that. Like the ruins had been soaking up all the misery and anger, from Mum and Dad, and the people who lived there before, and before that, for years and years – and any moment now it would start to ooze back out. The whole place was like that, storing all the emotions you wouldn’t want to have, building up power like a generator. It was so strong you could smell it. (139)

Zach has an affinity with the mood of the ruins: ‘I *recognised* it. Not the building, but the feeling. I fitted into it, like a key in a lock’ (139, emphasis in the original), and he spends days at time there ‘addicted to the misery’ (139) and disassociating himself from all around him.

Zach is conflicted between physically existing and not existing, and he finds an outlet for this tension by challenging his physical limits. In visiting the dangerous ruins, drinking to excess and taking drugs, Zach, like Bella who goes cliff-diving and dangerous motor-cycle riding, is engaging in risk-taking activities.¹⁶⁸ This is yet another tension highlighted by the biological dialectic:

Instead of succumbing to the tensions aroused by biological maturation versus the end of life, some adolescents may channel this energy into what are labelled, interestingly, death-defying

¹⁶⁸ It is those in the adolescent age bracket, more so than other age groups, who tend to engage in risk-taking activities, see Noppe & Noppe.

behaviours. In part, adolescents who are reckless drivers, who chemically abuse their bodies, who are sexually promiscuous, who perform daredevil stunts (such as diving off high cliffs), and who push themselves athletically well beyond their physical limits, may have found a method for coping with the troublesome sense of mortality while at the same time engaging in contemporary rites of passage. (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 32)

Whilst the adolescent seems to be flirting with death, they are actually displaying 'counterphobic' behaviour: 'a challenge to death wherein each survival of risk is a victory over death,'¹⁶⁹ and these high risk activities are ways of testing the physical body, 'while still remaining cloaked in the remnants of belief in immortality' (Gordon 1986, 27). Ultimately, of course, Zach is not victorious over death.

It must be noted that Zach's drug taking can also be related to the tensions present in the cognitive dialectic. It has been shown above that the onset of formal thought bestows upon the adolescent increased intellectual abilities to think about various alternatives for their future, both positive and negative. Generally the adolescent should embrace this optimistically by making positive life plans and goal setting. Paradoxically, however, 'at a time when they can more fully contemplate the future, they may withdraw into an immersion in an intense present ... or try to manipulate their sense of time through the use of drugs' (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 33). This shortcoming in formal thought affords us another insight to the cognitive conflict in understanding adolescent views of death, whereby the adolescent, in this case Zach, is so caught up in his own 'personal

¹⁶⁹ According to Gordon, descriptions of the emotions experienced in taking part in high risk activities are similar to descriptions of sexual feelings: 'exhilaration, sensations of danger, heightened physical awareness, exquisite sensation, suspension of logical thought, lack of anxiety, and testing of physical limits. Sexual feelings and death fears are hidden in ordinary situations. Dangerous situations stimulate both' (Gordon 1986, 27).

fable'¹⁷⁰, that he believes he is immune to death. Zach wilfully ignores reality and exhibits his adolescent egocentrism; this leads him to act under the influence of drugs and to ignore the danger signs¹⁷¹ that may prefigure an 'impossible' death.

Zach separates from his shadow after a particularly excoriating row with his father. He retreats to the ruins feeling as if '[his] body had turned itself inside out, so even [his] skin hurt' (140). Hating his father, and, importantly, hating himself, he says: 'I would have done anything to make it stop. Anything. And maybe ... I'm not sure. Maybe I said that, aloud' (140, ellipsis in the original).¹⁷² He certainly has, and moments later he gets a response:

Something answered me. Something activated itself, like I'd flipped a switch. And I knew – somehow I *knew*, suddenly, that the walls weren't there anymore. It was still dark, still quiet, but I was somewhere else. The real world had gone and there was just a kind of void, an aching, appalling insane emptiness. And –

Something changed ... Like the world split in two – only it was me, splitting apart from myself ... I was free, I was weightless. I'd slipped the chains. ... It was so good, and so horrible. I can't tell you. It was like ... dying.

No, it was like *living*. (140, emphases in the original)

¹⁷⁰ 'The personal fable' refers to David Elkind's description of the nature of egocentric thought that is associated with adolescence. In summary, adolescents believe they are unique individuals and immune to destruction (death/pregnancy/disease etc). They are so wrapped up in their own thoughts that they fail to see how 'ordinary' and human they are. This belief of being special and not subject to the natural laws which pertain to others, is what Elkind calls the personal fable. The theory is adaptive: it begins in childhood and remnants of it remain in adulthood, however, for the child and adult the personal fable is in the background, but for the adolescent it is 'front and centre'. This exaggerated preoccupation with their own lives may lead to the conviction that they are beyond death. See Elkind (1978) for full explication.

¹⁷¹ Both metaphorically and literally, as Zach consciously ignores the 'DANGER: DEFENSE D'ENTRER' (10) sign displayed at the ruins.

¹⁷² Note how this echoes the sentiment of Dorian Gray's words in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. When Dorian sees his portrait for the first time he laments that he will grow old and the picture will not, he wishes it could be the other way around: 'For that – for that – I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!' (Wilde 2000, 28).

Zach's split comes about because his hedonistic teenage side is fighting against his entry into the adult world of responsibility and social convention. Although he describes the 'void' as being an 'aching, appalling insane emptiness', it is a void he nonetheless craves; physically caught (albeit temporarily) in the adolescent gap between childhood and adulthood, psychologically he desires to remain there permanently. *A Trick of the Dark* is replete with gap imagery: Annis describes the ruins as not being malevolent *per se*, but possessing a 'kind of dislocation, a gap that ought not to be [t]here' (49); she talks about the 'gap in the logic somewhere' when she undergoes her own split, and the 'gap that shouldn't be there, the horrible gaping space' (257) when she cannot find her shadow; Zach describes his absence of pain as 'a gap where there should have been something holding [him] together' (144); and remembers how, previously, he would carry on drinking to 'find this gap', where 'inside the terror there was a little quiet room, just big enough to hold [him] if [he] didn't kick off' (310). The teenage siblings are depicted as being at odds with this gap in the social self which will not go away; they know it 'shouldn't be there', it 'ought not to be there', but neither do they readily want to escape it,¹⁷³ as is evidenced by Zach's drinking himself back into it.

The gap is also the gap between fantasy and reality which is made manifest at the ruins where the boundaries blur, the 'chains' are 'slipped', and the breach cannot readily be undone; Zach and, to a lesser extent,

¹⁷³ Nor do the children in *Peter Pan* who do not want to return home. Interestingly, Mrs Darling dreams that Peter 'had rent the film that obscures the Neverland, and she saw Wendy and John and Michael peeping through the gap' (Barrie 1999, 77).

Annis¹⁷⁴ are caught in this gap, which, Freud tells us, can call forth the uncanny:

[A]n uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes, and so forth. (Freud 2003,150).

The symbol taking on the 'full function and significance of what it symbolizes' is, of course, the shadow. When he splits, Zach's shadow absorbs all the pain and misery of his human existence, leaving a (literally) bright and shining Zach,¹⁷⁵ jettisoned of all moral cares and responsibilities. Reminiscent of Peter Pan, Zach does not want to grow up.¹⁷⁶ Peter Hollindale, in his introduction to *Peter Pan*, notes that although children 'expect and want to grow up ... they also want to remain children, or at least to take up adult privilege on childhood's terms' (Hollindale 1999, xxvii), this could equally be applied to the adolescent Zach who wants to be treated like an adult, but does not want to act like one.

'I wasn't unhappy any more', states Zach, 'I was sitting opposite myself, and I was the most beautiful person I'd ever seen' (141). Unlike Dorian Gray, whose 'sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation' (Wilde 2000, 27), this is not, claims Zach, as narcissistic as it sounds but

¹⁷⁴When Annis splits from her shadow, as well as no longer feeling physical pain, her personality, too, loses its moral compass; she initially feels liberated by this: 'This is brilliant, I can do anything. I can do anything' (202); 'I like being like this' (251). However, she ultimately realises the importance of being morally and physically whole, and is the first of the two siblings to appreciate this. Annis opts to reunite permanently with her shadow, but she is not conflicted by the prospect of immediate death in the same way as Zach is if he reunites with his.

¹⁷⁵ As Zach's shadow absorbs more pain and misery it gets darker and darker, just as Zach himself becomes paler and paler; his pallor is described as 'transparent' (39), 'luminous' and 'glowing' (85). Zach's appearance is often described as uncanny: he is 'so white it's uncanny' (46), and he gives off an 'uncanny radiance' (87).

¹⁷⁶ 'I don't ever want to be a man' says Peter, 'I want always to be a little boy and to have fun' (Barrie 1999, 92). Whilst Zach obviously does not want to be a 'little boy', he desires to remain an adolescent: he does not want to face the harsh realities of adult life, preferring to 'have fun' by indulging himself with sex, drink and drugs.

rather, 'it was just ... like meeting my soul' (141, ellipsis in the original). As such, it is more evocative of Jekyll's 'leap of welcome' (Stevenson 1994, 73) when he first beholds himself as Hyde. However, whilst Hyde functions as Jekyll's *alter ego* for the purposes of transforming his evil or immoral thoughts into deeds, and Dorian's portrait functions to absorb and portray Dorian's degeneracy, Zach's shadow serves as a repository for all his pain and misery, both physical and psychological, and the dualism at hand in *A Trick of the Dark* is not necessarily a straightforward conflict between good and evil. According to Angela Connolly, '[t]he shadow is a metaphor that translates an experience that we have every day of our lives, the knowledge that we have a 'twilight zone', an obscure part of ourselves in which many presences reveal themselves' (Connolly 2003, 414). For Mario Trevi¹⁷⁷, as Connolly states, there is a multiplicity of meaning enclosed in this metaphor:

[S]hadow as the opposite of light, shadow as absolute darkness, shadow as that part of the body that gives us corporeality and depth, shadow as the outlines that we see in the dark, as that which gives definition, and shadow as the realm of death. To reduce the shadow to any one of these contents, the shadow as evil for example, means, as Trevi says, 'an impoverishment of this emotive experience, of this imaginal and affective mass'. (Connolly 2003, 414)

Zach initially feels 'high' after his split, as if he'd taken 'some amazing drug',¹⁷⁸ nonetheless, part of him knows that he has 'done something terrible' and will have to go back to being his 'old, whole, miserable self' (142). He realises that it is important for the body to be

¹⁷⁷ Connolly draws on her own translation of the work of Mario Trevi: *Metafore Del Simbolo: Ricerche Sulla Funzione Simbolica Nella Psicologia Complessa*. Milan: Raffaello Cortina Editore (1986).

¹⁷⁸ There is, of course, an argument to be made that Zach's drug taking is the cause of a psychosis, as Annis initially believes and his parents continue to believe.

physically and psychologically 'whole' and reasons that this is why the shadow looks 'so beautiful': 'It wasn't desire, it was *need*. I needed him, and I knew it' (142, emphasis in original). Zach means to take his shadow back (or at least he tries to tell himself this later) but is prevented from doing so when the wall collapses, killing him (or rather, killing the Zach that is immune to pain). Henry Jekyll and Dorian Gray are seen to take their own lives in order to end the evil power of their *alter egos*, and, with their deaths, so too do their 'doubles' cease to exist. Things are rather different for Zach, however, for with his (accidental) 'death' comes invincibility and immortality: 'I'm invulnerable – I'm completely fucking *immortal*' (130, emphasis in the original). Now morally and physically desensitised, he unsuccessfully tries to kill, and then mentally banishes, his shadow who has absorbed the pain and reality of his killing, for he knows that reuniting with it will mean his certain death. Matters are complicated, though, by Zach's acknowledgement that as well as trying to repel his shadow, at the same time he 'want[s] him so much' (145), and is drawn to him like a 'compass needle':¹⁷⁹ 'It was love, though. Even though I knew he'd kill me' (147). As such, Zach's feelings about his shadow echo Connolly's exploration of the metaphor of the shadow: 'It is both what we are and do not wish to be and what we are not and wish to be, endless font of horror, shame and guilt, but we cannot do without it for my shadow is that which defines me as a unique individual' (Connolly 2003, 414).

Zach's rejection of the shadow snaps the bond between them, and he finds he can no longer summon his shadow back; at first Zach is

¹⁷⁹ This magnetic imagery recurs several times in the text, most notably when Annis sends her 'shadow' in search of Zach's: 'It was like a magnet inside her, a very faint movement that could have been attraction or repulsion' (180).

pleased about this: 'I don't want him back. Because if he comes back to me I'll die' (148), he states, believing that he can outrun death. However, rather than enjoying the brief feelings of euphoria he experienced when he first separated from his shadow, he begins to sense the inherent danger in the situation as both discrete parts begin to get stronger now that they are fully independent of each other. The more pain and misery that the shadow absorbs, the more danger and harm it emanates, 'giving out more and more dark' (164); at first it merely kills any plant life in its wake, but as it gets stronger it begins to have the potential to inflict harm to humans, and eventually will have the ability to 'start[] killing people' (267). As stated above, this is not a straightforward conflict between good and evil: the shadow, which has fled 'home' to London, strives to hide in dark places to *avoid* causing harm; Zach, meanwhile, is living in the full glare of daylight, and is 'giving out more and more light' (164) as well as inadvertently throwing off more frequent and more harmful electric shocks; disconnected from each other, both are dangerous. Consequently Zach becomes paler and almost 'transparent' (248), and Annis realises that he will 'fade away, eaten by the light until there [is] nothing left of him' (222), indeed he will 'be, for ever, only a ghost' (222); Zach's friend Pete states that '[h]e'll get brighter and brighter ... until he's a kind of a ghost' (267); and Annis later reiterates that 'Zach is fading into a dazzling insubstantial ghost of himself' (277).¹⁸⁰ These statements all suggest that Zach is in the process of

¹⁸⁰ Textually, Zach is dying from the outset: he is described by Annis as 'dissolving' (12) back home in London before he even comes to France and the incidents at the ruins take place, and, when he finally does die, Annis states that it is as if 'he'd *always* been dying, all along' (305, emphasis in the original).

becoming a ghost, but we can surely argue that, rather like Marley, Zach was already a ghost 'to begin with' (Dickens 2009, 3).

As well as challenging the notion of death's permanence, the siblings' shadows also stand for a crisis of subjectivity. According to McCallum:

In many contemporary adolescent fictions the double is represented as an aspect of the developmental process ... States of fragmentation and/or multiplicity experienced by the characters as a consequence of the double motif are conceptualized as conditions of the possibility of subjectivity, rather than aberrations ... That is, the double represents another possible position that the character *might* occupy, an internalized aspect of otherness, and/or is indicative of the internal division of the subject. (McCallum 1999, 77, emphasis my own)

The dualism at play in *A Trick of the Dark* is not directly oppositional, and nor is it structured morally; it concerns the complement between the benevolent and the malignant, rather than the conflict, which both brother and sister soon come to understand. Talking about their shadows, Zach sums it up rather succinctly: 'they're negative energy, and we're positive ... and normal people are neutral' (191, ellipsis in the original). When Annis separates from her shadow, two distinct sides of her personality emerge, neither of which is the 'real' Annis; understanding that when the two sides are apart they 'don't balance anymore' she realises that 'Zach's shadow *will* kill people, because he can't go back to Zach; and Zach *will* burn away, because he can't go back to his shadow' (178, emphases in the original). Zach's immortality, therefore, is not presented as being either desirable or empowering; his shadow lies cowering in the dark, knowing it will eventually kill someone, and what is left of the 'original' Zach is holed up in his London bedroom, lacking agency, fading into insubstantiality and fearful of inflicting

pain upon others. Zach can be understood in the same way as Hollindale understands Peter Pan who, he states, 'is indeed the tragic boy ...exempted from a personal reality he is free ... but in the end his freedom is the freedom to be nothing' (Hollindale 1999, x). Zach initially tries to kill his shadow because he knows that to be reunited with it will mean his certain death; subsequently he believes that if he can kill his shadow it will prevent the shadow from killing others, and perhaps stop himself from fading further; however, he eventually comes to appreciate that killing his shadow 'would be like killing [his] soul', and it would not leave Zach himself 'living' in any agentive way, shape or form; in a neat paradox, Zach finally realises that: '[y]ou can't kill death, it just doesn't work ... He's as immortal as I am' (289, ellipsis in the original).

Now that Zach fully appreciates that 'death shalt *not* die' after all, he resolves to bring back his shadow and end both their suffering; this is easier said than done, for although he now desires to be reunited with his shadow, Zach admits to being 'scared', 'frightened' (291) and 'too cowardly to call [his shadow] back and mean it' (297). 'The word I'm trying not to use is *die*' (309, emphasis in the original), he states, understanding, for the first time perhaps, that this time his death will be real. Failing to complete the task on his own, he asks Annis to help him. Despite being temporarily tempted by a life free from physiological and psychological pain herself, Annis has decided to reunite permanently with her own shadow, realising that as well as experiencing 'love' (260), 'to be human' is to endure the 'pain', 'fear' and 'misery' (251), and so she calls Zach's shadow back to him in order that he can be 'whole again' (303). As Zach finally dies, conversely

he becomes 'human, alive, *human*' (305, emphasis in the original) again, and is now safe: 'safe from his shadow, safe with his shadow ... it was right' (306), and Annis is left feeling that she 'won't ever be scared again' (306).

There is an easy conclusion to be made that Zach is, after all, a 'Being-towards-death', and that he has reached a moment of maturation in which he finally defines himself in terms of his own death; the terrors and horrors of transgressing boundaries have been used to reassert normality, as is so often the conservative way of the Gothic, and defining limits between life and death have been restored. However, it is worth remembering that Zach begins the novel with a death wish, and there is an argument that this is precisely because he wishes to remain *immature* rather than mature; he does not want to acknowledge his entry into the world of grown-ups where he will have to assume the responsibilities of adulthood. Zach also briefly enjoys his immortality before it begins to cost him too dearly: finding that he cannot touch anyone, that he is fading away, losing all agency, that his brain is telling him he 'can't possibly exist' (280), and that he is 'not – *alive* ... not human any more', he finally 'just want[s] to get it over with' (299). Zach's words end the book: 'I really do have to go', he says, 'I'm quite looking forward to it actually' (310); in so saying, he is reminiscent of Peter Pan who, despite being 'afraid at last', thinks that '[t]o die will be an awfully big adventure' (Barrie 1999, 152). Unlike Peter Pan, (who does not die, but remains in the Neverland, forever a little boy) Zach does die, but we are left with the feeling that he has ultimately made some sort of a getaway to a 'neverland' of his own, an

escape from the real world that he has always craved; as such, his position is seen to reflect that of Bella.

If the wall had not fallen on Zach when it did, we do not know how he would have handled his 'dualism', and it is Annis who is deemed to have reached maturity by the book's end. Rather like Wendy (who returns from the Neverland), she is old enough to have an adult's fear of death, but wants to grow up nonetheless and take those steps closer to death, experiencing love and pain and all that adult life throws at her along the way.

From Beyond the Grave

Zach is shown to have been a sort of 'living' ghost until he finally dies completely, and, with his death - the 'endpoint of the line' - so his story ends. Ghosts 'proper', however, provide another means for Teen Gothic fiction to challenge the notion of death's permanence, and the 'dead-narrator' tale allows for the insights and observations of characters that have already died, and are now telling their stories from 'beyond' the boundaries of life. 'A boundary,' after all, may be conceived as, 'not that at which something stops ... [but] that from which something *begins its presencing*' (Heidegger 2001, 152, emphasis in the original). Firmly located in the realm of the fantastic, these texts are, in common with other adolescent texts about metamorphoses, 'apt to symbolise the physical and psychological changes involved in adolescence, and to destabilise orthodox ideas about personal growth and development' (James 2009, 143), and it is interesting to see ghosts becoming equated with bodily changes and

sexuality, rather than in terms of a rejection of the body. In keeping with werewolf, vampire and zombie narratives, the metamorphoses that occur in dead-narrator tales rarely take place by choice, and they, too, focus on the change from mortal to immortal; however, unlike the werewolf, the vampire and the zombie, the dead-narrator, or ghost, also suffers a transformation from embodied to disembodied, leaving the protagonist with very little control or agency.

This is the problem facing Helen¹⁸¹, the ghostly protagonist in Laura Whitcomb's *A Certain Slant of Light*, who has been dead for 130 years:

If I were to move too quickly too near an object, it might tremble or rock, but not much, and never when I wanted it to. When you are Light, it is not the breeze of you rushing past a flower that makes it tremble. Nor is it the brush of your skirts that starts a drape fluttering. When you are Light, it is only your emotions that can send a ripple into the tangible world. (*A Certain Slant of Light*, 3)

Completely disembodied, Helen has never managed to register her presence in the lives of the various 'hosts' to whom she has attached herself, and 'lived' with vicariously, over the years, and her loneliness is tangible. Helen has lived with each of her hosts: 'my Saint', 'my Knight', 'my Playwright', 'my Poet', until their respective deaths, and now lives¹⁸² with her 'Mr Brown', a high school English teacher and would-be writer. Significantly, all of Helen's hosts have been writers, and, as well as being a lover of literature herself, it is possible to conjecture that she is searching for her own 'story', for, despite being invisible, omnipresent and having the visual power to see all around her, Helen is no omniscient narrator: she has

¹⁸¹ Helen is, as her name suggests, 'light'; the name Helen derives from the Greek meaning 'light, one who is bright', and Helen calls those like herself 'Light', and the living 'Quick'.

¹⁸² Naturally I note the irony in using the term 'lives' for a ghost, but Helen neither haunts nor possesses her hosts in the sense of causing them any unease, she merely inhabits their lives, completely unknown to them.

no memory of her past life .¹⁸³ As each of her hosts die, so they move on to another realm and Helen is left behind, seemingly eternally caught between the two worlds of the living and the dead. Unknown, unfelt and unseen, Helen is not so much a ghost who haunts, but rather a ghost who is haunted: haunted by the guilt of a past she cannot remember, but which causes her to remain trapped in limbo. Helen is beyond death, but out of reach of heaven.

Things change for Helen when, one day, whilst she is floating around Mr Brown's classroom, she realises that someone is looking at her; this is, she states, 'a disturbing sensation if you're dead' (1). She is being watched by James,¹⁸⁴ who, it transpires, is 'Light' like herself; James has been dead for around eighty-five years, but has managed to 'climb into the flesh again' (4) by taking over the body of Billy Blake, a high school student who has been lying in a coma due to a drugs overdose. So begins an unusual courtship which is conflicted by constantly shifting views of subjectivity and the dislocation of past and present: James, who was a twenty-nine-year-old soldier in the First World War when he died,¹⁸⁵ is now embodied in the seventeen-year-old body of a high school student and is 'wooing' a twenty-seven-year-old disembodied ghost who last lived in the 1870s; subsequently, when Helen takes over another high school pupil's living but 'empty' (108) body, believing she is sixteen, she later finds out (after she and James have had sex) that Jenny, the girl in question, is only fifteen,

¹⁸³ Like Cynda in Chapter One, Helen is another protagonist for whom '[t]rauma [has] collapsed the ability to render experience in a narrative' (Bruhm 2002, 269).

¹⁸⁴ James is a derivation from the Hebrew name Jacob, and so we have another appropriately named 'supplanter', for James has displaced Billy from his own body and taken it over.

¹⁸⁵ James later remembers that, prior to the war, he was a writer for a newspaper, and so Helen is attached to another writer.

and a virgin. Trapped in the 'beyond', Helen and James have neither left behind the past, nor reached a new horizon, and truly find themselves:

in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the beyond. (Bhabha 2004, 2).

Homi K. Bhabha's description of the cultural 'beyond' readily pertains to the position of ghosts, and, similarly, it can just as easily be applied to the condition and experience of adolescence: 'a moment of transit', albeit a prolonged one, for all teenagers; and it is particularly apt that the ghostly and liminal entities, Helen and James, are equated with the liminal teenagers, Jenny and Billy, whose bodies they now occupy.

This sense of liminality operates on several levels in the text. A liminal state, widely understood as being 'a transitional or indeterminate state between culturally defined stages of a person's life',¹⁸⁶ applies as readily to the ghosts Helen and James, who are caught between death and the afterlife, as it does to the teenagers Jenny and Billy, who are caught between childhood and adulthood. However, the adjective 'liminal' proves doubly apposite for Jenny and Billy as it also pertains to the level of their conscious awareness: liminal conscious awareness is a point beyond which something cannot be experienced, felt or communicated, and Billy and Jenny are both at this point when their bodies 'ring' 'empty' (108). Both have been numbing their respective realities through the use of drugs: Billy has been a criminal drug addict who 'took so many drugs he almost died' (24), and Jenny, whose bathroom is 'stocked with little blue pills for anxiety,

¹⁸⁶ liminality, n.'. OED Online. December 2011. Oxford University Press. 4 March 2012

little yellow pills for stress, and little white pills for sleep' (128), has been abusing prescription drugs.

Billy and Jenny, who are from different social classes, are both trying to escape the realities of their lives. Billy's father, currently in jail, is a violent alcoholic who has beaten his mother so badly she is in hospital in a permanent vegetative state.¹⁸⁷ Billy blames himself for not stopping the attack, but he was only twelve at the time, and his father threw him through a window. Jenny's parents are strict Christians who have 'crushed the life out of [their] own daughter' (250); they do not want Jenny to mix with anyone from outside of their church, and do not allow Jenny any freedom or form of artistic expression; she is not allowed to read anything other than Christian tracts and when her interest in photography and writing is discovered, her diary, portfolio and equipment are destroyed, apart from the one camera and a few photos that she has managed to hide. Her parents do not allow her to question anything. Jenny really begins her dependency on prescription drugs at her parents' behest; they believe they are bringing their daughter into line by subduing her, and she accedes, for she would 'rather wander in limbo than live with [them]' (250); the drugs allow her this limbo. Neither Billy nor Jenny kill themselves, or express an active desire to kill themselves, but both use drugs to attain a state of liminal conscious awareness in which they cease to fully feel, experience or communicate life, and were it not for the intervention of Helen and James, the reader feels that an early death would ultimately have befallen both Jenny and Billy.

¹⁸⁷ Billy's mother's liminal state therefore mirrors that of the novel's protagonists; however, unlike Helen, James, Billy and Jenny, she remains in this 'limbo', and by the text's end she has neither died nor come out of her coma.

Whilst Jenny and Billy undoubtedly appear to be heading towards death, at this point in time they are as trapped between life and death as Helen and James are. Billy 'vacated' his body, says James, '[h]e left it mind and soul, like an empty house with the door open'; '[h]is body didn't die ... [h]is spirit chose to leave' (24). Similarly, Jenny, who follows along in the wake of her mother like an automaton, moving 'like a machine responding to the turn of a crank' (113), just 'stop[s]' (112) and 'surrender[s]' (114), allowing Helen to enter her body. In the same way that Helen and James are beyond death, but out of reach of heaven, Jenny and Billy are beyond life, but out of reach of death (just); as such they symbolise 'living' ghosts in the same ways as Zach does.

Incidentally, Jenny and Billy could also be described in terms of those other liminal creatures, zombies. I am, of course, talking about the zombie in its original incarnation: a living body without a soul, 'a living person who has been vacated of all the faculties and qualities that make up personhood: of memory, of will, of thought, of sensation and emotion, in short of consciousness' (Warner 2002, 122). Particularly apt when we consider that the text never once allows us access to either Billy or Jenny's consciousness. For Warner:

The concept of the zombie runs the timeline on mind-body, life-death separation backwards and postulates a living thing evacuated of soul *before* dying, a husk inhabited by a non-being that mimics being automatically but with eerie emptiness. (Warner 2002, 122, emphasis in the original)

This description applies rather well to Jenny and Billy as they are presented as living husks in the text; however, ask any teenager today what a zombie is and they will surely describe the zombie in its current, almost universally

accepted form, as a creature who dies first, then subsequently returns in the form of animated death, part of a ravaging, infecting horde.¹⁸⁸ We will encounter those later.

The idea of Jenny, in particular, being a 'living' ghost, or enduring a living death, is also symbolised through her photography, especially her self-portraits: in one she is shown 'with a white sheet over her head, sitting with a suitcase beside her on the bed ... with the words *the ghost waits* written on it' (178, emphasis in the original); 'Adam's Reach' shows Jenny's hand stretching, 'Spirit' depicts a faceless Jenny jumping, and 'Gethsemane'¹⁸⁹ has a nude Jenny, again faceless, with her head on her knees (269, 270). The photographs show a fragmented and dismembered Jenny and there is a complicated relationship between subject and object in Jenny's photography in that the photographs turn the subject (herself) into an object. However the act of taking the photographs has allowed Jenny a small act of agency because of the communicative abilities that her pictures have, their subtext being Jenny's own death. Roland Barthes discusses this subject/object duality in photography, and also its conflation of life and death, calling the photograph 'that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death ... I am truly becoming a specter' (Barthes 1981, 14). Whilst the text denies us any insight into Jenny's thoughts, her photographs do not.

¹⁸⁸ And so we see that the zombie, in keeping with many of its other supernatural cohorts, has also moved on from its original incarnation.

¹⁸⁹ The Garden of Gethsemane: scene of the agony of Christ where Jesus and the disciples prayed before the crucifixion, Matt 26:36-46. The term Gethsemane is now commonly used to depict a scene or instance of spiritual or mental anguish.

Now that Helen and James have both ‘step[ped] into the flesh again’ (93), they are each inhabiting two realities and are forced to live in the interface between the two, the boundary where each of their two lives meet. They initially feel that they have managed to achieve a kind of concrete reality, as well as the possibility of immortality: ‘What a gift, to be suddenly young’ (121) muses Helen; and later she questions why old age should ever stop them: ‘Could we not find two young abandoned bodies again when these bodies died?’ (200). However, these feelings of ‘an escape into the present world’ (125) prove temporary, for with this present ‘reality’ comes past memory. Whilst there are some pleasant memories, most are distressing, especially for Helen. Having bodily satisfied their previously repressed sexual desires, without shame or embarrassment: ‘[W]e are the only two of our kind in the whole world,’ says Helen, ‘[w]ho could be more mated in God’s eyes?’ (139), James and Helen now find that memories of their respective long-repressed traumas are released. In contemporary terms James and Helen may be understood to be suffering from a form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), ‘in which the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them’ (Caruth 1995, 151). Cathy Caruth calls PTSD ‘a singular possession by the past’¹⁹⁰ which:

extends beyond the bounds of a marginal pathology and has become a central characteristic of the survivor experience of our time. Yet what is particularly striking in this singular experience is that its insistent re-enactments of the past do not simply serve as a testimony to an event, but may also, paradoxically enough, bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred.

¹⁹⁰ Note Caruth’s use of the terms ‘possess’ and ‘possession’ in relation to PTSD, naturally she is referring to living people who are haunted by past events, however, it is interesting to see that Whitcomb’s ghosts, who now ‘possess’ the bodies of Billy and Jenny, are themselves becoming increasingly ‘possessed’ by their past.

Trauma, that is, does not simply serve as a record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned. (Caruth 1995, 151).

Of course, neither James nor Helen have literally survived their respective experiences, as they both died during the events that now haunt them, but nonetheless they are still possessed and troubled by them, and all the more so since they have become embodied. In Caruth's terms both James and Helen's flashbacks and memories are bearing witness to pasts that were never fully experienced as they occurred, and are registering the force of experiences that are 'not yet fully owned'. Helen in particular finds her past full of fragmented, traumatic and dismembered reminiscences¹⁹¹ as her present embodiment, which has merely created yet another space in between life and death, finally allows memories to come seeping through.¹⁹²

Helen and James have been kept on earth by repressed feelings of guilt, for they both unconsciously and mistakenly believe that they have been responsible for the death of others.¹⁹³ After their embodiment these memories at first drip, then finally flood, through, and the release of this conscious awareness finally bestows another form of agency upon the

¹⁹¹ 'The flashback, it seems, provides a form of recall that survives at the cost of willed memory or of the very continuity of conscious thought. While the traumatized are called upon to see and to relive the insistent reality of the past, they recover a past that encounters consciousness only through the very denial of active recollection. The ability to recover the past is thus closely and paradoxically tied up in trauma, with the inability to have access to it' (Caruth 1995, 152).

¹⁹² Repeated images of being 'pulled down' into 'icy' and 'freezing waters' (9, 28 & 54) recur more and more frequently in Helen's consciousness, as do conflicting notions of motherhood: mothers should be 'ready to catch the children should they need saving' (69) she thinks, whilst at another point she reflects that 'mothers with the best intentions kill their daughters all the same' (254). Helen ultimately re-experiences her death by drowning and becomes conscious of the reality that she had a baby daughter whom she believed she had failed to save; she now grasps the truth that she had actually pushed her child to safety.

¹⁹³ James has been repressing a mistaken belief that he was responsible for the death of his wartime comrades. Helen's mistaken belief is discussed in the above footnote.

spirits Helen and James, as they are now seen to allow themselves to progress to heaven where their family and friends are waiting.

In the process of discovering the truth about their own deaths, James and Helen discover the truth about what haunts each of Billy and Jenny's lives; ironically these two 'spirits' help Billy and Jenny to exorcize their 'ghosts': James uncovers the history of Billy's father's violence, and 'takes' Billy to face his father in prison, this is the catalyst for Billy to return to his own body; Helen brings about a partial reconciliation and understanding between Jenny and her mother before attempting to drown herself in the bath,¹⁹⁴ Jenny's spirit, curious about 'the speck of life inside' (272) what is her own body, is persuaded to return to it.¹⁹⁵ As reflected in their respective titles, *A Certain Slant of Light* has a happier resolution than *A Trick of the Dark*; Helen and James ultimately leave behind them more than 'a ripple in the tangible world' (3) as Jenny and Billy return from the boundary between life and death, now shy strangers to one another, but soon to discover that they are to be parents together.¹⁹⁶

Helen and James leave the interface between life and death and transcend to the afterlife, their 'green place' (282), where both of them can exist eternally, 'soul to soul', rather than experiencing 'the mere heat of a stolen moment in borrowed flesh' (282). Conversely, Jenny and Billy are seen to return from death; although they have never explicitly tried to kill

¹⁹⁴ Believing James has gone on to heaven without her, and that she is stuck on earth alone, Helen tries to kill herself (in Jenny's body) with an overdose of pills in the bathtub: this is when she fully re-experiences her 'own' drowning, and realises that she had, in fact, managed to save her baby.

¹⁹⁵ This 'speck of life' is, of course, a baby, which Helen and James have created whilst in the teenagers' bodies, resulting, surely, in a hugely tricky question of subjectivity.

¹⁹⁶ Billy finds a Polaroid photograph of himself and Jenny in bed together, taken when James and Helen 'occupied' their bodies: 'You look happy with me' (278) he tells Jenny, and their newly fledged future feels optimistic. The reader is left with the feeling that these two teenagers, from 'opposite sides of the track', have each found in the other their unlikely and unexpected soul mate.

themselves, they have absented, or mentally disassociated, themselves from their bodies, and it is implicit in the text that, without intervention, death would have been the next stage for both of them. If, in considering Heidegger's 'Building Dwelling Thinking', we allow ourselves to think of the body as a building, then *A Certain Slant of Light* appears to address the questions: 'What is it to dwell?' and 'How does building belong to dwelling?' (Heidegger 2001, 141). Heidegger says of buildings which are functional but not residential, that man 'inhabits them and yet does not dwell in them' (Heidegger 2001, 142); we see that Helen and James inhabit the teenagers' bodies briefly, but, when we accept that 'to dwell' means 'to live', we understand that Jenny and Billy, having turned their backs on death, come back not merely to inhabit their bodies, but to 'dwell'¹⁹⁷ in them.

The teenagers in *A Certain Slant of Light* are seen, with the aid of a little supernatural intervention, to make the decision to reject death in favour of life. This is not a choice that is available to Chuy and Crystal,¹⁹⁸ another pair of teenagers from different sides of the social divide who form an unlikely relationship in Gary Soto's *The Afterlife*,¹⁹⁹ for both Chuy and Crystal are dead from the outset: Chuy has been murdered by a stranger in

¹⁹⁷ Whilst both 'inhabit' and 'dwell' commonly share the same meaning in the sense of 'to occupy', or 'to reside in', any form of abode; 'dwell' also has a more lingering and permanent connotation, as supported by one of its rather more archaic definitions: 'to continue in existence, to last, persist; to remain after others are taken or removed.' OED Online. December 2011. Oxford University Press. 8 March 2012

¹⁹⁸ Chuy's given name is Jesús, the Latin American form of Jesus, for whom he is named, and the connotations are obvious. Crystal's name is another rather obvious choice, again from the Latin American, it means, a clear brilliant glass, equally reflecting her present transparent appearance and her former social brilliance.

¹⁹⁹ Although *The Afterlife*, like *A Certain Slant of Light*, sets up the notion of the afterlife as a realm in which an essential part of an individual's identity or consciousness continues to reside after the death of the body, it does not fully engage with it. I mean here that the emphasis of both these texts is rather on the interface between life and death. Once the respective plots are resolved James and Helen do transcend to their 'green place', and Chuy and Crystal head toward 'the afterlife', but the texts do not expound this notion further.

a random knife attack, Crystal has died by her own hand;²⁰⁰ told from Chuy's perspective, *The Afterlife* is another example of the dead-narrator tale.

In most young children's novels, says Trites, death tends to happen offstage and is reported by means of indirect narration or through the speech of another character, but '[d]eath in the YA novel is far more immediate' she contends, and generally '[t]he reader is not protected from ... death by the filter of indirect narration'. For Trites, this direct 'confrontation with death seems essential for adolescents to gain knowledge of death's power and of their own powerlessness over it' (Trites 2000, 120). However, the first-person narration she is talking about concerns texts in which adolescents have *witnessed* death at first hand, not texts in which they have *experienced* death at first hand, and the dead-narrator tale in Teen Gothic fiction argues against death being a final and unchallengeable authority in adolescent literature.

'I closed my eyes. When I opened them a minute later, I was dead' (*The Afterlife*, 4), so says Chuy after he has been fatally stabbed, yet rather than experiencing pain and anger, 'I didn't feel even as bitter as aspirin' (11), he is rather intrigued by his new position in the world: 'The gravity of my new status as a ghost began to sink in as I hovered above the roof. I was amazed by this transformation, and by how in my heart I didn't harbor

²⁰⁰ In relative terms, adolescence is the 'safest' time to be alive; in comparison with all other age ranges, above and below, adolescence has the lowest death-rate. The three leading causes of death in adolescence are accidents, suicide and homicide. Zach's death was the result of an accident, Crystal commits suicide, and Chuy is the victim of homicide.

hate for the dude who stuck me' (10).²⁰¹ Initially, Chuy's spirit slips in and out of his body as it lies dead on the bathroom floor, and his split subjectivity is exemplified through such statements as: 'The ghost that was me hovered over my body' (7); '[s]uddenly my ghost settled back in my body' (8); and, 'I felt myself – the ghost, I mean – again slip from my bones and drift toward the ceiling' (9). However, ghost and body eventually separate irrevocably: 'In the distance, the sirens of an ambulance and fire truck were wailing for me. Or, at least, for that body on the bloody floor of a dirty restroom' (10), and for Chuy, 'my body' finally becomes 'that body'. Chuy now starts to learn about his 'new self' (12): 'Dead, with my eyes wide open, I began a new life without a body. I had nothing to fear' (13), and death is shown to be a starting point rather than an end point for the teenager. Chuy says of his killer: 'He had taken my life – or did I mean my body? After all, I still had a sense of myself and a place in this world. It was just a different reality' (35).

Kathryn James states that, in keeping with 'so many other YA novels dealing with death', dead-narrator tales:

are overtly concerned too, with life, grief, love, and other such existential issues. However, soul-searching takes on an especially profound meaning here because what is represented is not the death of an/other, but the death of oneself. The protagonists of these fictions therefore tend to express an intense regret for what they did not achieve or could not do. (James 2009, 143)

Although he is not bitter at his death, Chuy does feel regret that he has some unfinished business on earth and sets about visiting Rachel (his

²⁰¹ Despite *The Afterlife* being a poignant and moving story, Chuy's narration is often humorous, as shown here when he describes the 'gravity' of the situation 'sink[ing] in' as he himself 'hover[s]'; later on he declares: 'It's a trip ... I'm a ghost' (13). Whilst he often expresses regret, he never expresses bitterness.

'might have been' (5) girlfriend), his family, old friends and stamping grounds. He seems to be unconsciously aware that he (in similar fashion to Helen and James) has 'neither left behind the past, nor reached a new horizon'; watching the trees in his friend Angel's yard, he states: 'The leaves were releasing themselves in their simple deaths, and, I suppose, I should have been doing the same' (31). But Chuy cannot 'release' himself into his death until he fully matures: 'Now that I was dead, I had to grow up', he states, 'I had to confess my first real sin' (51-52). Whilst this 'first real sin' is nothing more than the fact that he stole his grandfather's lighter when he was about eight, it is important to Chuy to confess it now (at his grandfather's graveside) because, of all the sins (real or made up) that he has imparted to the priest over the years, this is the one that he has never truly confessed to.

Chuy has also been killed before he has had the chance to have a proper girlfriend, and his death 'interrupts what is typically perceived as a continuum of psychosexual development which, according to the general aims of adolescent literature, must then be resumed if the character is to grow up or come of age' (James 2009, 144); the text remedies this by allowing Chuy to have a relationship with Crystal, another ghost who he meets in the course of his wanderings. In life it is highly unlikely that Crystal and Chuy would have met as teenagers, far less been attracted to one another. Crystal comes from a more affluent neighbouring town;²⁰² in addition to being beautiful and a high-school track star, she is also a popular, high-achieving, upper-middle-class student: 'She was seventeen,

²⁰² The text is set in California, USA.

a senior in high school, and vice president of the school. She was even a cheerleader' (78). Crystal's character contrasts dramatically with that of Chuy, who describes himself as 'an ordinary-looking guy, even *feo*²⁰³ (1), who 'could have easily been elected vice president of the lonely boys on campus' (78). Chuy also runs track, but not very well, and only because he is 'too small for football and basketball' (78); he is the son of lower-working-class Mexican immigrants who wears plastic shoes instead of leather to his high-school dance, and rides a bike because his family cannot afford to buy a car. Death, then, erases the singularities of social and class boundaries that would previously have stood between Crystal and Chuy in life. To appropriate Bhabha's work on the location of culture for Gothic purposes once more, we see that Crystal and Chuy's status as ghosts allows them 'to think beyond narratives of ordinary and initial subjectivities' and to use this 'in-between' space to 'provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood ... that initiate new signs of identity' (Bhabha 2004, 2). Indeed, as Chuy has already stated, his death is 'just a different reality' (35).

As well as experiencing very different lives, Chuy and Crystal have experienced very different deaths for very different reasons: Chuy, a real innocent abroad, has been killed for no other reason than being in the wrong place at the wrong time and looking at someone the wrong way; Crystal has misguidedly killed herself with an overdose in her car because she was scared of not 'making it' in life. A big fish in a small pond, Crystal 'doubted that she could demand the same attention' outside of her own home town, and feared that she would always be 'small in a new place, just

²⁰³ *feo*: Spanish word for ugly. Chuy's vocabulary is peppered with Spanish words and phrases because he lives in a Mexican community in the southeast part of town.

a little ant' (113). Although she has been accepted by USC,²⁰⁴ she has been rejected from Harvard and Stanford, and all she feels is rejection and a fear of failing. By contrast, Chuy's 'dream had been to grow up, work a regular job, nothing special, hang out with friends, and be with someone special like Crystal' (158). Chuy is the only teenage protagonist in my selection of texts who is unable to exercise any choice in either his life or his death; as such his death is used to contrast with, and show the futility of, Crystal's: Crystal was the universally admired girl who had everything to live for, yet chose not to; Chuy was just an ordinary, nondescript 'little guy' who simply would have loved to live the life that was taken away from him.

Crystal's death by suicide is indicative of the affective dialectic which can entangle the adolescent's emerging sense of identity with depression and the loss of self. I have already stated that the adolescent's autonomy means emotional separation, and that this is a kind of loss; Crystal's decision to commit suicide is symptomatic of the fact that:

[w]hen the choices, the loneliness, and the losses of life become unbearable, extreme reactions are possible. Sometimes adolescents may feel that the struggle is not worth the benefits and they are willing to contemplate their own destruction. (Noppe & Noppe 1991, 37)

As Chuy and Crystal explore their new ghostly 'reality' together, they begin to fade, limb by limb; this contrasts with Bella's desire for (and experience of) immortality in *Twilight*, for, as stated above, Bella wishes to be immortal in the widest possible sense, she wants to be 'everlasting, imperishable, unfading', a permanent fixture on earth. Chuy and Crystal are not shown to express such feelings, they have accepted their deaths,

²⁰⁴ University of Southern California.

and whilst they do experience regret, they show no desire to linger; instead they are intrigued to learn what the next stage in their journey is.

Consequently the protagonists of dead-narrator tales are shown to be looking both ways, as the ambiguity of becoming a ghost allows the narrators to look back at what they were, and forward to what they might become.

Don't Fence Me In

Materially present, but wholly absent, no such questions of subjectivity plague that other supernatural creature, the zombie. Different from ghosts, who have a soul but no body, 'zombies and vampires are all body – but unlike the vampire who has will and desire and an appetite for life (literally), a zombie is a body which has been hollowed out, emptied of selfhood'

(Warner 2006, 357):²⁰⁵

They are more silent even than ghosts, but they resemble them in that they are revenants, forced to live suspended in time, neither fully alive nor fully dead, in a state of anomie degree zero, disaffection to the point of numbness. But they are all too living in their living death, yet absent in presence, and they figure the elusiveness of meaning itself. ...The zombie has been robbed of all the qualities that make up personhood – feelings, sentience, reflexivity, memories – but survives under a sentence of immortality (like the vampire). Unlike angels and daimons, pagan shades or Christian ghosts, the zombie is a spectre still tormented by the carnal condition of being. (Warner 2006, 358-357)

²⁰⁵ For a brief outline history of the development of the zombie in film and literature, particularly the film-maker George Romero's apocalyptic cross-pollination of the zombie with the vampire to reconfigure zombies in their now almost universally modern form as 'living dead' that are ravaging to devour human flesh, see Warner's chapter 'Our Zombies, Our Selves', in *Phantasmagoria* (2006).

If the vampire and the ghost are creatures of uncanny horror, offering the reader ‘the possibility of an unconscious participation in guilty pleasures through the identification with the monster and its subjectivity’, the zombie is, rather, a creature of abject horror, devoid of subjectivity and psychic reality: ‘[i]t is faceless, speechless and possesses a kind of mechanical quality that identifies it as utterly inhuman’ (Connolly 2003, 419-420).

Generally, zombies feature as a collective threat in YA fiction and, in their particular incarnation of the living dead, they stand for *all* the shifting meanings highlighted at the top of this chapter (and repeated here) in that they can:

stand for a crisis of subjectivity; function to demonise those who threaten stability of the cultural order; point to that which must be defeated in order for ideals and social cohesion to be maintained; or work to challenge the notion of death’s permanence. (James 2009, 21)

With the zombie ‘there can be no process of identification, no integration is possible and the [zombie] can only be foreclosed, expelled [merely to] return with frightening regularity ... in an endless spectacle of destruction and meaninglessness’ (Connolly 2003, 420).

This is undeniably the nihilistic sentiment present in Carrie Ryan’s cross-generational, post-apocalyptic zombie trilogy which begins with *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*.²⁰⁶ The story opens after an unexplained disaster has long ago turned much of the human race into mindless, cannibalistic undead who roam the forest of the title; this particular zombie apocalypse is called the Return. Mary, the teenage protagonist, lives with a

²⁰⁶ The trilogy comprises: *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* (FHT), *The Dead-Tossed Waves* (DTW), and *The Dark and Hollow Places* (DHP).

band of survivors who are barricaded inside a fenced-in village deep within the forest; the village is ruled by the Sisterhood, a matriarchal religious order who tell the villagers that theirs is the only human habitation left on earth; and the Guardians, the inner-circle of men who repair the fences and defend against breaches by the Unconsecrated:²⁰⁷

As a child growing up, I learned in my lessons from the Sisters that just before the Return They – who They were is long forgotten – knew what was coming. ... They still thought they could contain it. And so, even as the Unconsecrated infected the living and the pressure of the Return began to build, They were busy constructing fences. Infinitely long fences. Whether the fences were to keep the Unconsecrated out or the living in, we no longer know. (*FHT*, 26-27)

The fences tangibly exemplify Heidegger's notion of the boundary being not that at which something stops, but that from which something begins its presencing, in this case death, or living death, for the villagers are perpetually surrounded, as the title suggests, by the Unconsecrated moaning and reaching and gnashing ceaselessly at the fence. Mary has been raised on stories passed down from her great-great-great-grandmother about life before the Return, and she is particularly fascinated by the ocean, believing that if she could somehow reach it she would be free.²⁰⁸ However, the fence that protects the villagers also imprisons them within a society marked by secrecy and repression; both the forest and the fences therefore profoundly influence all the action of the novel.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Because the village is governed by a religious order, Ryan uses the holy term 'Unconsecrated' for her zombies; they are unconsecrated because they are impure or defiled. Most are slow, shambling creatures of the kind popularised by George A. Romero's film *Night of the Living Dead*, but an infected person who is isolated when they turn will become a faster, stronger type of undead termed a 'Breaker'. Breakers are hard to kill and can infect whole populations.

²⁰⁸ Mary does reach the ocean by the end of the first novel, but it is not free of the Unconsecrated. The title of the second novel, *The Dead-Tossed Waves*, therefore reflects Mary's false hope.

²⁰⁹ A network of fenced-in paths lead to and from the village, but no-one knows where they lead to, and all are forbidden from using them, except the Guardians who use them when maintaining the perimeter fence.

Indeed, the trope of barriers and their purpose repeats insistently throughout the trilogy, and no matter how large each of the respective teenage protagonist's world expands, it is never big enough. In *The Dead-Tossed Waves*, which jumps forward a generation from *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, the protagonist Gabry, Mary's adopted daughter, has been brought up in a town by the ocean. Larger than the village in the forest, the town, Vista, is still hemmed-in, this time by barriers and the sea wall; Vista is governed by the Protectorate and defended by the Recruiters who strive to keep the Mudo²¹⁰ at bay. In the final book of the trilogy, *The Dark and Hollow Places*, the action again moves to an even larger arena: a city. Annah,²¹¹ Gabry's twin sister, lives in the Dark City which is barricaded against the 'plague rats'²¹² with fortifications and palisades.²¹³ Note that the different terms each community has for the zombies reflects not only the nature of the community, but highlights how isolated they are from each other. To call them Mudo or Unconsecrated in the Dark City is to mark yourself as an outsider Annah states (*DHP*, 53), and it is not a good idea to be an outsider in the Dark City, which is a lawless and dangerous place, controlled by the Recruiters²¹⁴ who have rebelled against, and overthrown, the previous governing Protectorate. The controlling body is

²¹⁰Vista is not a religious community, so the term Unconsecrated is not used. Mudo, meaning mute, is a pirate term for zombies reflecting Vista's position on the ocean.

²¹¹ Gabry, who was found lost and traumatised in the forest by Mary, had no recollection of her early years and did not remember that she ever had a twin. This is revealed at the end of the second book; the third book deals with Annah's life in the Dark City, and Gabry's quest to find her sister.

²¹² The Dark City's euphemism of choice for their zombies.

²¹³ There is also a shadowy no-man's-land just outside the city walls, called, appropriately, 'the Neverlands'. As previously discussed, Neverland is the fictional island in the writings of J. M. Barrie, the home of Peter Pan and the Lost Boys; it has since become a term used to describe fantasy realms in general. Although not all people in Barrie's Neverland cease to age, its best known resident famously refused to grow up, and it is often used as a metaphor for eternal childhood (and childishness), immortality, and escapism. Ryan's 'Neverlands' are rather less benign however; home to a desperate but brave few scavengers, they are unprotected by the ruling body and at constant threat from an unwelcome form of immortality: that of the incoming hordes.

²¹⁴ Prior to the Recruiter rebellion, the Recruiters were professional and honourable.

now entirely male, all is insurrection and chaos, and the threat of rape and violence is ever present. All three texts deal with their individual teenage protagonist's desire to escape the circumscribed nature of their lives, regardless of the nature of this circumscription.²¹⁵ For Mary, Gabry and Annah it is a question of having choice. Mary states that 'the only true thing that separates the living from the Unconsecrated is choice, free will ... but it is the Sisterhood's word that is always final' (*FHT*, 9), and subsequently acknowledges: 'My life will never be my own' (*FHT*, 65). Each of the girls feel that it is better to risk dying in order to live freely, rather than to continue living a life devoid of autonomy and choice, and the living dead that surround the fences, barriers and walls can be construed to mirror the living death that each endures by being trapped within those fences, barriers and walls. This is 'the life I have been given', Mary laments, '[n]ot the life I have chosen' (*FHT*, 122).

Danger abounds in the precarious existence eked out by all the various communities after the Return. As Mary lies in her bed in the cathedral listening to the Sisters tending a screaming Travis²¹⁶ who has broken his leg, she thinks about 'how we are so focused on the peril presented by the Forest that we forget that the rest of life can be just as dangerous. I think about how fragile we are here – like fish in a glass bowl with darkness pressing in on every side' (*FHT*, 37). Mary is referring to the

²¹⁵ In retrospect, the Sisterhood's matriarchal hold on the village in *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* seems, if not exactly utopian or thoroughly benign, at least mutually beneficial to the continued growth and survival of the community when compared to the completely patriarchal, violent and dystopian nature of life in the Dark City as depicted in *The Dark and Hollow Places*. This, of course, is to miss the point, which is the question of individual freedom for the protagonist.

²¹⁶ Travis is Mary's love interest; he and his brother Harry are rivals for Mary's affections. Mary is betrothed to Harry. Marriage is prescribed in the village by the Sisterhood who help to make matches and officiate marriage ceremonies. The Sisterhood teach that life in the village is about duty, and that marriage in particular is not about love but about commitment and procreation. Mary's only choice is either to marry Harry or join the Sisterhood.

day-to-day dangers inherent in their lives within the village: illness, accidents, still-births, crop failures and the like. However, as each successive society in the trilogy gets larger, the threats and dangers from *inside* the barriers increase, becoming more human and more malign. When Gabry first encounters the stranger Elias²¹⁷ alone and at night, she realises that he could rob, kill or rape her and no-one would come to her aid:

The only thought in my head is to wonder at how we focus so much on the terrors of the Mudo that we don't think enough about the dangers of the normal world. Of the in-between places full of lawless and desperate scavengers. (*DTW*, 87)

Although Elias proves a friend, Gabry does have to defend herself later on when Daniel, a member of the town's militia, attempts to rape her and blackmail her into marriage. The fact that Daniel is 'in complete control of [her]' (*DTW*, 182), and says that what happens between them will be 'inevitable' (184), galvanises Gabry into finally taking control of her life; she kills Daniel and flees Vista, ending up in the Dark City by the beginning of *The Dark and Hollow Places*. As previously stated, the Dark City is a lawless and dangerous place; Gabry and Annah are in permanent danger from sexual threat and physical violence, and the Recruiters subsequently use the power they have over the girls in order to control the boys, Elias and Catcher,²¹⁸ to make them do their bidding. However, the most striking

²¹⁷ The stranger Elias later becomes Gabry's love interest in yet another teenage love triangle that includes Catcher, a boy from Vista whom Gabry has grown up with. Unsurprisingly this situation is resolved in the last book with the appearance of Annah, Gabry's twin, and Catcher and Annah conveniently fall in love. However, the underlying message is also that adolescents need to be able to go out freely in the world, to meet new people, take risks, and pick their own partners.

²¹⁸ Catcher, who was bitten and infected in *The Dead-Tossed Waves*, has proven to be immune. He did not die and return. He survives, and can walk freely amongst the undead; as such he is deemed a powerful and valuable tool to the Recruiters who want to control him. Catcher is therefore a beacon of optimism and hope in an otherwise nihilistic world.

example of the ‘threat within’ comes when the Unconsecrated breach the city walls, causing panic and disorder as the city dwellers try to reach the Sanctuary²¹⁹ for safety. Not only do the Recruiters open fire on the crowd seeking refuge, but citizens turn on each other in an attempt to make it on to the cable-cars. In the midst of the carnage Annah reflects: ‘how thin the distinction between living and dead is in this mob – how quickly they’d turn and kill for the chance at survival’ (*DHP*, 111); the living dead are again seen to mirror the living.

The Forest of Hands and Teeth upholds Trites’ contention that few Young Adult novels use the cycle imagery that dominates children’s novels: “‘We’re already dead. We’re surrounded by it every day ... We aren’t part of any cycle of life’” (*FHT*, 145) Mary tells her friend Cass. However, the second part of Trites’ argument is that adolescent fiction demands death as the endpoint of the line, and *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, replete with the living dead, most assuredly disputes this. If Mary, or any of the other protagonists in the trilogy, were unquestioningly to accept the predestined nature of their deaths,²²⁰ then their adolescence would merely be regarded as an inevitable stepping-stone towards that death, devoid of any purpose: “‘Is this all there is?’” Gabry asks at one point in *The Dead Tossed Waves*, “‘Is this what life is about? Waiting for death? Looking for it? Inviting it in?’” (*DTW*, 320), and of course the answer is a tender yet crucial “‘No’” from Elias, who takes the opportunity to kiss her. The romantic interlude aside, in all three books the threat of the living dead and death’s impermanence is seen to function figuratively to stress the importance of

²¹⁹ The Sanctuary is a fortification on a small island on the river that runs through the Dark City. It is controlled by the Recruiters and acts as their headquarters, access is by cable-car.

²²⁰ That is to say, their ‘living deaths’, at the hands (and teeth) of the Unconsecrated.

not enduring a 'living death' whilst alive, and to emphasise living a life of purpose and agency, no matter how badly the odds are stacked against it.²²¹

In reality Mary already endures a 'living death' within the confines of the village as she lives a life over which she can exercise no control; once she has fled the village after it has been breached by the Unconsecrated, the struggle to see the point in surviving proves no easier: 'Every night I drown and every morning I wake up struggling to breathe' (*FHT*, 146) she states. After the death of Beth, her sister-in-law, she even questions '[h]ow useless it is to try to exist when surrounded by nothing but death. Unceasing, determined death' (*FHT*, 171). But these feelings are temporary and Mary proves a resilient heroine, with a strong will to live and an equally strong desire to take control over her own life: 'I do not accept the hand of God' she states; 'I do not believe in divine intervention or predestination. I cannot believe that our paths are pre-chosen and that our lives have no will. That there is no such thing as choice' (*FHT*, 175). Yet again, as I discussed in Chapter One, the importance of having choice is shown to be vital to adolescents who must work through their problems by making their own decisions rather than being told what to do, how to think, or through any sense of predestination. So determined is she to live and be in control of her own destiny, Mary is the only one of the group to make it out of the forest alive and reach the ocean.²²² Mary's desire for autonomy

²²¹ This argument reflects, albeit in a different manner, Bella's choice not to endure a 'living death' with Jacob that I have argued for above.

²²² It subsequently transpires, in *The Dead-Tossed Waves*, that Harry and Cass also survived, but they did not reach the ocean. They made their way back to their original village, found a few other survivors, and created a new community.

costs her dearly, however, with the loss of all her loved ones, and is another example of the affective dialectic at play.

Whilst Mary no longer believes in God, the Sisterhood in *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* stand firmly by their religious convictions, and their God is not necessarily a merciful God, as Sister Tabitha explains:

“The exact cause of the Return may be shrouded in mystery, but we do know that they were trying to cheat God. Trying to cheat death. Trying to change His will.” She holds her hand out toward the Forest. As always the Unconsecrated pull at the links in the fence. “This is what happens when you go against God’s will. This is His retribution. This is our penance.” (*FHT*, 63)

Sister Tabitha urges Mary to stop asking questions she should not be asking, and learn to accept God’s will. They are safe from the Unconsecrated, she believes, because they ‘do not tempt God’s wrath’ (*FHT*, 66). This, of course, is imposing an adult didacticism on the adolescent, which the text urges against.

Despite being brought up in this religious community, Mary loses her faith early on in *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*: ‘In the moment between my mother’s death and her Return, I stop believing in God’ (*FHT*, 15) she states, and there is no hint of Donne’s resurrection of the immortal soul here; although death does give way to a form of eternal existence, after someone ‘dies’ and ‘Returns’ there is no evidence of a soul whatsoever, what is left is a soulless, ravening shell, whose only intent is to infect others. However, despite knowing this, Mary’s mother still deliberately lets herself get infected so that she can become Unconsecrated and join her

husband in the forest,²²³ since she has endured her own form of 'living death' for long enough by having to live without him. Mary knows that her brother Jed will be angry with her and blame her: 'He'll ask me why I allowed her to make this decision for herself, why I did not stand in for her and tell the Guardians to kill her' (*FHT*, 10).²²⁴ However, Mary does not believe that it is the Guardians', the Sisterhood's, or her own right 'to *take* life or *let* live' (Foucault 1998, 138); the decision is, and should be, her mother's she thinks, and it is this belief in free will that drives the narrative of the trilogy.

The idea of religious faith takes an interesting turn in *The Dead Tossed Waves* with the appearance of the 'Soulers', a nomadic cult that worships the Mudo. They travel from city to city trying to spread their belief that being Mudo is an honour, and that it is 'the path to resurrection and eternal life' (*DTW*, 152). The rationale behind the Soulers' belief system is somewhat confusing; they are known to turn members into Mudo on purpose, then they remove the jaws and teeth of the infecting Mudo so that they can no longer cause harm, and subsequently lead them around on chains, spreading the word. However, if the Soulers truly believed that this was the path to an appealing immortality, then the reader has to question why they do not all just give themselves over to the horde. I think it could be possible to argue that, in line with the overarching theme of the texts, it is a question of having control over their choices; rather than individuals being indiscriminately infected and turned in a fairly wholesale manner, they are seen to go at a time of their choosing, and in a manner which they can

²²³ Mary's father never features in the novel. He had previously disappeared whilst on patrol in the forest and is presumed to be one of the Unconsecrated.

²²⁴ If the Unconsecrated are killed before they 'Return' then they remain physically dead.

control, whilst still leaving a sufficient number of their members to go around evangelising, for, as Trites says above, most religions have institutional investments in explaining death to people. This still does not answer the question of what is appealing about being turned into one of the living dead, and what the purpose of the Soulers' evangelising is. An argument could be made, perhaps, that the Soulers are totally nihilistic, believing that ultimately everyone is going to be destroyed, but desiring nevertheless to dress this up in some sort of philosophical and religious belief, one that helps to ameliorate their position in the here-and-now, and bestows upon them some feelings of power and control. This skewed belief: that at least it is better to be one of the soulless living dead than completely dead, is the complete antithesis of what all the main teenage protagonists believe.

Religious institutions also rely on ritual, and when Gabry first witnesses the Souler ceremony where they turn a young boy into a Mudo, she wonders if it is 'a symbol of defeating death by killing it in an elaborate ceremony' (*DTW*, 143), and one feels again that this is where the nub of the Soulers' belief system really lies, in that they are trying to claim an advantage over death. The inscription on the Soulers' ceremonial blades also bears this out: '*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power*' (*DTW*, 151). The Soulers, who ironically become 'soulless' when they Return, believe that they are spreading 'the word of God and the truth of his salvation through resurrection' (*DTW*, 165); this is in direct contrast to the Sisterhood who

believe that whoever (or whatever) caused the Return, they were trying to cheat both God and death.

The presence of the Soulers in the text does, at least, allow for some discussion between Elias and Gabry on what happens to the soul after someone has Returned. Whilst Elias is not a Souler, he does not know exactly what to believe, and wonders: “Then what happens to who they were?” Gabry, however, is intransigent: “It’s gone. They’re just like anyone else who dies” (*DTW*, 220). Elias counters this by asking about people who come back to life but are not infected: “People who drown and their heart stops and then it starts again. It happens – they die and come back. But they’re still the same person. They don’t lose anything from having died” (*DTW*, 221). Elias is certainly questioning death’s ‘Irreversibility’ in Speece’s terms, as detailed above, where the concept of medical reversibility ‘represents a more complex understanding of the irreversibility of death’ and alters ‘our understanding of where to locate the boundary between “alive” and “dead”’ (Speece 1995, 7), but Gabry again argues against this by stating that, in such cases, people have not been infected. Gabry insists that infection leads to death, ‘nothing but animated death’ (*DTW*, 275); the body comes back, the soul does not. She has to believe this:

I don’t want to think about the Mudo being anything but monsters. What would that mean? That there’s something left of who they are trapped in a body that wants only to consume us? That every time we kill a Mudo we’re killing a soul? I refuse to believe it. (*DTW*, 220)

For Gabry, succumbing to such a belief would perhaps be the first step towards accepting that becoming one of the living dead would not only be

acceptable and inevitable, but would also be preferable to the life she is enduring now.

Gabry's friend Cira has already surrendered to this way of thinking. Cira asks Gabry: "Tell me what's worth it. Tell me what we're doing just barely clinging on here. Why? Tell me what's the difference between you or me and the Mudo?" (*DTW*, 178). Hopeless and depressed, Cira has already unsuccessfully tried to commit suicide by slashing her wrists and is now suffering badly from a blood infection; she now begins to be swayed by the Soulers' belief in a 'second life' and a 'second chance': "They said it was another way of living. That it's a resurrection" (*DTW*, 317). The others repeatedly try to prevent her from getting herself infected by a Mudo, but, she tells Gabry: "Life is life ... You choose to live it or you do not" (*DTW*, 324), and eventually achieves her aim by escaping into the forest and getting herself infected. When Gabry sees her best friend for the last time, she is a ravaging, infecting creature:

I wait for the spark of recognition between us. For the haze of memories to fall over her eyes. Something inside her to say no, to make her hesitate, to shatter the horror of this moment.

There must be something of humanity left inside Cira. How can death erase it all? How can the same body walk, the same brain exist and retain nothing of who it used to be? I want so badly to believe that the Soulers are right, that there's something left behind. (*DTW*, 331)

As what was once Cira stumbles and lumbers towards her, attempting to grasp, bite and infect her, Gabry acknowledges what she has really known all along, that her friend is truly gone: 'Every part of her, every memory, idea, dream. Gone. Dead. Forever' (*DTW*, 331).

With this, Gabry finally dismisses the small nagging doubt she had temporarily entertained. Unwilling to succumb to any form of living death, metaphorical or literal, Gabry chooses life despite its difficulties, taking courage from the inscription in the back of her mother's book: '*We will always survive. There is always hope*' (DTW, 339).

At one time or another, Mary, Gabry and Annah are all faced with the question that Ox asks of Annah towards the end of *The Dark and Hollow Places*: "What's life and what's existence?" All three girls choose the 'pain' of life over the 'numbness' of existence (DHP, 366-367); in the face of relentless death, they are equally relentless in their pursuit of life. "Maybe we'll always live in a world of fences," Mary tells Gabry. "But they're to keep the Unconsecrated out. Not to keep you in" (DTW, 359).

Conclusion

The message contained in mainstream 'realist' texts dealing with death and aimed at the young adult is clear: people are mortal. Trites argues that the despondency of this is ameliorated, to a small degree, by the understanding that these texts do, at least, offer the teenage reader, 'images of empowered adolescents who better understand agency and the discourses surrounding death', and that 'death is only one of the many phenomena that engage people as subjects and objects' (Trites 2000, 140). However, she continues:

death is the ultimate and inviolable authority in adolescent literature. Adolescents who come to accept Being-towards-death are teenagers accepting (once again) their own limitations. The discourse of death in adolescent literature therefore represents yet another institutional discourse in which the genre serves to simultaneously empower readers with knowledge and to repress

them by teaching them to accept a curtailment of their power. (Trites 2000, 140)

It is to be assumed, therefore, that the understanding that these 'empowered adolescents' have relates to the institutionally accepted discourse that holds that once a child reaches maturity he or she achieves a 'mature understanding of death', and unconditionally accepts the concepts of universality, non-functionality and irreversibility which are contained in the fact of our embodiment.

Teen Gothic novels do not deal with death in this way. The texts I have examined in this chapter are shown to question universality, non-functionality and irreversibility; in addition they engage with an understanding of Speece's fifth key component of the concept of death, Noncorporeal Continuation, and demonstrate the ways in which adolescent concepts of death undergo a transformation from a binary logic to a more complex 'fuzzy' concept which throws up uncertainties about the exact nature of the boundary between life and death.

In keeping with Trites' concept of mainstream 'realist' fiction, I would argue that these Gothic texts also offer the teenage reader 'images of adolescents who better understand agency and the discourses surrounding death'. In addition, however, they present the reader with protagonists who question, and are not repressed by, such institutional discourse; who do not accept 'Being-towards-death'; who do not accept a curtailment of their power; and who consequently, therefore, do not accept their own limitations.

Questions of choice drive all the narratives. In *Twilight* Bella opts for immortality in order to have a life worth living, whereas in *A Trick of the Dark* Zach chooses to renounce his immortality which has bestowed him with an inhuman life not worth living. In *A Certain Slant of Light* when the adult ghosts, James and Helen, uncover and resolve why they have been left in limbo, they decide to relinquish their chance of immortality and leave Billy and Jenny's bodies behind; the teenagers' spirits subsequently choose to return from their liminal states, reassume their bodies and embrace life. Whilst Chuy in *The Afterlife* is shown to be devoid of choice, his death is used as a counterpoint to Crystal's; it highlights the pointlessness of her choice. Finally, all the protagonists in *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* trilogy choose to live a difficult life over merely existing or succumbing to a living death.

These 'misrepresentations' of death in Teen Gothic fiction therefore function to represent the ambiguous nature of adolescent understandings of death. The study of representations of the vampire, zombie, ghost and immortality in Young Adult literature reveals how adolescents define themselves against what they are not: dead; but wish to control: life. Teen Gothic fiction shows us adolescents who do not succumb to institutional discourse and who explore the grey areas in between the boundaries of life and death; ultimately the texts have more to say about living than dying.

Chapter Three

O Brave New World:

Power and Autonomy in Teen Gothic Literature

Whilst there are a number of identifiable developmental milestones that adolescents must pass in order to achieve adulthood and healthy psychosocial functioning, one of the most important elements of the transition from adolescence to adulthood is the development of autonomy. Autonomy is generally understood to be the ability to regulate one's own behaviour. Recent research into the development of adolescent autonomy has moved away from theories that emphasise the importance of detachment,²²⁵ and newer findings now stress the importance of continued and healthy attachment to the development of autonomy, as I will go on to show in this chapter. Attachment is understood to be the quality of the relationship with significant others, and research in the field of adolescent psychosocial development shows how supportive relationships actually facilitate rather than inhibit autonomy. According to social psychologists Margret Baltes and Susan Silverberg:

the developmental task of adolescence seems to be a complicated one that calls for a negotiated balance between an emerging sense of self as a competent individual on the one hand, and transformed, but continued, feeling of connection with significant others on the other. (Baltes & Silverberg 1994, 57)

²²⁵ i.e. the argument that emotional distance from parents plays a crucial part in the healthy development of adolescents, and now largely discredited. For a comprehensive overview of the history of the 'attachment vs detachment' debate, see Silverberg & Gondoli, 'Autonomy in Adolescence: A Contextualized Perspective' (1996).

This increasing and emerging sense of self and autonomy in the adolescent, combined with their 'transformed, but continued' attachments to others, is accompanied by an equally increasing awareness of their own personal power.

As observed in Chapter One, but worth repeating here, Trites finds that in YA fiction:

protagonists must learn about the social forces that have made them what they are. They must learn to negotiate levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions within which they must function, including family; school; the church [and] government. (Trites 2000, 3)

Trites finds that although adolescents in YA fiction are empowered to an extent, ultimately their individual power becomes repressed and reinscribed within the existing power structures. She states that the YA novel is a 'genre predicated on demonstrating characters' ability to grow into an acceptance of their environment', and that the 'YA novel teaches adolescents how to exist within the (capitalistically bound) institutions that necessarily define teenagers' existence' (19).

The intent of this final chapter, therefore, is to explore how adolescent power and autonomy is represented in Teen Gothic fiction, and to argue that Teen Gothic fiction does not reinscribe adolescents within the existing power structures. I also argue against the culturally accepted cliché that adolescents must separate from their parents in order to be fully autonomous, but show that often it is more the case that adolescents fear losing their attachments to their parents. According to recent scholastic

literature,²²⁶ individuation²²⁷ is not something that happens from parents but rather occurs with their help, and much Teen Gothic fiction depicts adolescents who suddenly become bereft of their parents and are cast out into the world alone. As well as addressing these adolescent fears of parental abandonment and institutional repression, Teen Gothic fiction also serves to show adolescents triumphing over those fears through close association and attachment with their peers, plus agentic action. I argue that it is a far more empowering genre than mainstream 'realist' fiction.

As dystopian fiction carries out 'important social, cultural and political work by challenging and reformulating ideas about power and identity [and] community' (Bradford *et al.* 2008, 2), it therefore provides the ideal medium for this part of my study. I will be concentrating on YA post-apocalyptic novels which offer the adolescent a new kind of *Bildungsroman* that is far removed from the dreary didacticism at play in 'realist' fiction aimed at the YA market. Once again these texts represent a fantasy world, as indeed do all the Teen Gothic texts involved in this study; however, I argue, yet again, that they signify and address very real issues and worries that adolescents may have about their developing autonomy and place in the power structure.

The Forces That Shape

For Trites, the core of all adolescent literature relates to issues of power:

²²⁶ See, for example, Silverberg & Gondoli, 'Autonomy in Adolescence: A Contextualized Perspective' (1996); and Ryan & Lynch, 'Emotional Autonomy versus Detachment: Revisiting the Vicissitudes of Adolescence and Young Adulthood' (1989).

²²⁷ 'individuation': the act or process of making somebody or something separate and distinct from others.

Although the primary purpose of the adolescent novel may appear to be a depiction of growth, growth in this genre is inevitably represented as being linked to what the adolescent has learned about power. Without experiencing gradations between power and powerlessness, the adolescent cannot grow. (Trites 2000, x)

Power is therefore even more important to adolescent literature than growth, she argues, contending that:

[d]uring adolescence, teenagers must learn their place in the power structure. They must learn to negotiate the many institutions that shape them: school, government, religion, identity politics, family and so on. They must learn to balance their power with their parents' power and with the power of the other authority figures in their lives. And they must learn what portion of power they wield because of and despite such biological imperatives as sex and death. (x)

Intentionally or not, Trites' repeated use of the imperative phrase 'must learn' reflects and reinforces the didactic nature of most mainstream adolescent 'realist' fiction, and simultaneously renders the adolescent powerless: as anyone who 'must learn their place' surely is.²²⁸

Trites explores the four main institutions that show how important power is to the 'adolescent experience' in novels: politics, school, religion, and identity politics, and asserts that:

[i]n books – as in life – institutions both empower and repress adolescents in the ways that they create new opportunities for teenagers while they simultaneously establish rules within which the teenager must operate. (xii)

²²⁸ One of the most famous examples of this in 'realist' fiction is, of course, the character of Jerry Renault in Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War*, who tries to defy his school's cruel and ugly mob rule. He is unsuccessful and lies badly beaten at the novel's end, stating that there was no way that he ever could have won, and that he should have gone along with what everyone wanted him to do; he should never have tried to 'disturb the universe' (Cormier 2000, 205). For further examples of the genre see Brian Gelinas' *American Odyssey* (2006) and the YA novels of Walter Dean Myers (*Monster* (2004), for example); whilst more optimistic in tone than *The Chocolate War*, these novels are also cautionary tales with dire warnings, and show the protagonists being reinscribed within the existing institutional power structures.

Government politics and identity politics, she argues, are 'forces that shape' adolescents in YA novels; similarly, schools and organised religion are also depicted as institutions whose function is to 'mold' the adolescent into 'appropriate degrees of power' (xii). Trites' lexicon, which talks of the 'rules' and 'forces' which 'shape' and 'mold' teenagers into 'appropriate' power, is, again, more connotative of powerlessness than power.

Power struggles that exist between individuals and institutions in YA novels generally lead to conflicts between adolescents and authority, and '[w]ithin the text, authority is often depicted as a struggle with a parent or a parent substitute' (xii). As well as discussing authority 'within the text', Trites also identifies 'the authority of the author over the reader'. Although the question of the author's 'authority' is outwith the focus of my study, it is interesting to note Trites' argument here. She states that 'authors themselves become authority figures in adolescent literature', manipulating the reader in to assuming 'subject positions that are carefully constructed to perpetuate the status quo'. Because of this, she states, 'YA novels themselves serve as yet another institution created for the purpose of simultaneously empowering and repressing adolescents' (xii). Whilst Gothic fiction for adolescents similarly, and often, depicts the teenager in various struggles for authority and autonomy, it does not generally perpetuate the status quo; it is my contention that the emphasis of Gothic fiction lies, rather, in overcoming repression and leaving ultimately empowered teenagers who do not necessarily 'learn their place in the power structure' or 'learn to balance their power with their parents' power'.

In her exploration of the concept of power as it pertains to adolescent literature, which I summarise here, Trites cites Foucault, Butler, Lacan, and French. Foucault²²⁹ famously defines power as ‘that which represses’ (Foucault 1980, 90), and identifies and contrasts two political definitions of institutional power: ‘contract-oppression schema’ and the ‘domination-repression’ model.²³⁰ Foucault favours the ‘domination-repression’ model as a more credible explanation of social dynamics,²³¹ arguing that repression in the latter schema does not perform a similar role to that of oppression in the former:

[I]t is not abuse, but is, on the contrary, the mere effect and continuation of a relation of domination. On this view, repression is none other than the realisation, within the continual warfare of this pseudo-peace, of a perpetual relationship of force. (Foucault 1980, 92).

Trites rightly recognises, however, that there are problems with both Foucault’s models of power in that ‘neither allows for the individual’s potentially positive power’ (Trites 2000, 5). If we think of power in terms of something which oppresses or represses, she states, then we are focusing

²²⁹ See Michel Foucault: *Power/Knowledge* (1980).

²³⁰ The ‘contract-oppression schema’ is the ‘juridical one’, predicated on the binary opposition ‘legitimate and illegitimate’ (Foucault 1980, 92), i.e. individuals have a certain amount of power which they surrender of their own free will in order to live under the rule of a governing body. The ‘domination-repression’ (or war-repression) schema, by contrast, is predicated on the binary opposition ‘struggle and submission’ and holds that the individual exists in a ‘perpetual relationship of force’ (92).

²³¹ Foucault uses the ‘domination-repression’ schema to define power as a political force that is a function of the economy: ‘it is discoverable in the process of exchange, the economic circulation of commodities’ (Foucault 1980, 89), and is therefore always in perpetual motion. ‘Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain’ (98), and ‘only exists in action’ (89). For Foucault, then, power is more a process than a commodity, and he finds that the individual’s power is repressed by market forces rather than oppressed by a sovereign.

on power as something that conspires against people.²³² Another way of considering power, she suggests, is in terms of subjectivity, ‘in terms of the individual’s occupation of the linguistic subject position’ (5). Judith Butler’s²³³ analysis of power helps to make her case. According to Butler one is not born, but rather becomes, a subject and the way one does so is by submitting to power: “Subjection” signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject’ (Butler 1997, 2). The subject is, therefore, ‘at once formed and subordinated’ (Butler 1997, 6) by power.²³⁴ However, for Butler, the subject, which ‘is itself a site of ambivalence ... emerges both as the *effect* of a prior power and as the *condition of possibility* for a radically conditioned form of agency’, and, she argues, the subject is an agent, despite being ‘mired’ in power structures (Butler 1997, 14-15, emphases in original).²³⁵ The subject’s relationship to power is, therefore, ambivalent: whilst it depends on power for its existence, it also wields power in unexpected and potentially subversive ways. Butler’s definition of power ‘allows for an internally motivated subject who can act proactively rather than solely in terms of taking action to prevent oppression or repression’ (Trites 2000, 5). As such, Butler’s definition ideally exemplifies the nature of power wielded

²³² This may seem rather ironic, coming from Trites, as the mainstay of her argument is that YA literature as a whole conspires against teenagers. However, her argument is not that teenagers are rendered completely powerless in texts, but that they are empowered *to an extent*, before they are then repressed and reinscribed within the existing, stronger power structures, which, of course, are exclusively adult.

²³³ See Butler: *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997).

²³⁴ Although Butler criticises Foucault for ignoring the subversive potential of the psyche in his work on power, she herself describes power in Foucauldian terms as multiple, myriad and productive, and agrees with Foucault that power is a process.

²³⁵ The subject appears as the ‘effect’ of a prior power that it also exceeds, but, in addition, power ‘acts on’ a subject that seems to (but does not) precede power. This cause-and-effect relationship is important because if the subject were simply the ‘effect’ of power, then it would be difficult to see how it could challenge existing power structures.

by the protagonists in my chosen texts: Katniss in *The Hunger Games*, Sam in *Gone*, and Todd in *The Knife of Never Letting Go* are all seen to be able to take action to prevent oppression and repression, if not initially, then certainly by the texts' conclusions.

However, Lacan's²³⁶ description of power further qualifies Trites' definition of power in adolescent literature. Lacan focuses on both the interior formation of the subject and on the exterior forces that repress the subject, describing individual power in terms of '*assomption*': 'the individual's active assumption of responsibility for the role into which society casts her or him' (Trites 2000, 5). Lacan states that 'one is always responsible for one's position as a subject' (Lacan 1989, 7), and, for Trites, '[s]uch a definition of power acknowledges both the external and internal forces that compete to empower and repress individual power, but it also allows for the individual's acknowledgement of one's power as a necessary function of subjectivity' (Trites 2000, 6). This is important for teenagers, she states, who must 'reckon with both their sense of individual power and their recognition of the social forces that require them to modify their behaviors' (6). Yet again, Trites' word choice is telling; if teenagers are required to 'modify' their behaviour, then they are obliged by a higher power to: 'alter in the direction of mildness or moderation; to make less severe, rigorous, or extreme; to qualify, tone down [or] moderate'²³⁷ their behaviour. I do not posit that Teen Gothic texts promote anarchy, but do argue that, in regard to questions of individual power, their emphasis lies more with Butler's 'condition of possibility' for the teenager, than Lacan's responsibility

²³⁶ See Jaques Lacan: 'Science and Truth' (1989).

²³⁷ 'modify, v.' OED Online. June 2012. Oxford University Press. 21 July 2012

for one's 'position as a subject' which Trites' argues helps to repress individual power.

Finally, Trites draws on the work of feminist theorist Marilyn French,²³⁸ who talks about power in terms of being enabled. French makes the distinction between individuals having the 'power-to, which refers to ability, capacity, and connotes a kind of freedom', and 'power-over, which refers to domination' (French 1985, 505). Trites is interested in how adolescents are 'empowered (and disempowered) in terms that French uses', and asks: 'when are teenagers in Young Adult literature allowed to assume responsibility for their own actions and when do dominating adults refuse to acknowledge their capabilities?' The power of the adolescent in YA novels, she argues, is 'simultaneously acknowledged and denied, engaged and disengaged' (Trites 2000, 6). Yet again, every term of empowerment that Trites uses in relation to adolescents in YA literature is negated with one of disempowerment. Indeed, she concludes:

Power is a force that operates within the subject and upon the subject in adolescent literature; teenagers are repressed as well as liberated by their own power and by the power of the social forces that surround them in these books. Much of the genre is thus dedicated to depicting how potentially out-of-control adolescents can learn to exist within institutional structures. (7)

As well as presenting the rather clichéd view of adolescents being 'out-of-control', this is yet another instance of the didactic approach which is at play in much YA literature, an approach which seeks to control rather than liberate. Although the teenager's power is acknowledged, it is continually undercut: it is shown to be carefully 'placed' and 'balanced' with the existing

²³⁸ See Marilyn French: *Beyond Power: On Women, Men, and Morals* (1985).

power structures of family and institutions; it is 'moulded' and 'shaped' into 'appropriate levels of power'; in short, it is recognised then neutralised.

If it is Trites' argument that mainstream 'YA novels teach adolescent readers to accept a certain amount of repression as a cultural imperative' (55), then it is my argument that adolescent power is depicted in a far more positive and empowering fashion in Teen Gothic texts, where power structures are shown to be challenged, compromised and defeated. One of the major differences, I contend, between 'realist' YA fiction and Teen Gothic fiction, is in the portrayal of the parent. For Trites, the role of the parent in 'realist' YA fiction is 'one of the defining characteristics of the genre', we generally accept as a cultural truism 'that adolescents must separate from their parents in order to grow' (55) and the literature reflects this bias.²³⁹ Parents represent security in younger children's literature, whereas the presence of parents in YA novels often proves problematic because they 'usually serve more as sources of conflict than as sources of support. They are more likely to repress than empower' (56). However, this is to engage, yet again, with another clichéd view of adolescence, for when we look at the emerging theories of adolescent autonomy it becomes clear that it is not necessary to separate from the parent for the adolescent to become fully autonomous, and that in reality parents more often serve as sources of support than sources of conflict: quite the reverse of the way in which parents are portrayed in much YA fiction. Teen Gothic fiction is not concerned with portraying 'out-of-control' teenagers rebelling against their

²³⁹ This is in contrast to children's literature, states Trites, where the parent is often absent, leaving the child free to have an adventure before happily returning to the security of 'some sort of parent-based home' (55), for example, Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and Dorothy in Frank L. Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*.

parents, and, by extension, society, but rather reflects the adolescent's latent, and little acknowledged, fear of abandonment; as we will see later, Katniss, Sam and Todd, along with many of their companions, are all unwillingly removed from the safety and support of their respective families. Focusing on the post-apocalyptic novel, I argue that Teen Gothic fiction addresses the adolescent's fear of 'what would happen if' they were to suddenly lose the guidance of their parents (and/or parent substitute), as well as tackling questions of the nature of their power, autonomy and authority within the wider world.

'The Vicissitudes of Autonomy'

One important element of the transition from adolescence to adulthood is the development of autonomy and there are many different approaches to the conceptualisation of adolescent autonomy, for example: separation-individuation, detachment, psychosocial maturity, self-regulation, self-control, self-efficacy, self-determination, decision making, and independence.²⁴⁰ The length and diversity of these 'operationalizations':

suggest that autonomy is probably more appropriately conceptualized as a chapter heading, under which a variety of putatively related phenomena might be grouped, than as a unidimensional aspect of adolescent psycho-social development, (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986, 841)

and so autonomy proves to be another 'fuzzy' and elusive concept for the adolescent.

Autonomy advances and declines throughout the life-span as individuals develop new skills and competencies, previously acquired ones

²⁴⁰ See Steinberg & Silverberg's study: 'The Vicissitudes of Autonomy in Early Adolescence' (1986) for a full history of these 'operationalizations' of autonomy. This article highlights the confusion in much of the literature on adolescence concerning the concept of autonomy.

decline, and changing conditions require altered behaviour.²⁴¹ During adolescence, however, autonomy development:

typically accelerates because of rapid physical and cognitive changes, expanding social relationships, and additional rights and responsibilities. Self-reliance and personal decision making increase, the self and identity are gradually consolidated, and affect, behaviour and cognition are increasingly self-regulated. (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins 2003, 175)

Whilst the term autonomy is used to refer to a set of psychosocial issues that are of importance during adolescence, the specific meaning of the term is difficult to detail. Developmental theorists have proposed a variety of definitions:

Some view autonomy as an individual quality of the individual²⁴² ... whereas others define autonomy as a characteristic of an adolescent's relationship with others or a response to others.²⁴³ ... Likewise, some definitions emphasize *freedom from* the constraints of childhood dependence on others, whereas others focus on the *freedom to* make choices, pursue goals, and so forth. (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins 2003, 176)

Defining the concept of autonomy is further complicated by the fact that autonomy 'refers to multiple dimensions of thought, action and emotions' (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins 2003, 176).

Broadly speaking, there are three 'dimensions' of autonomy: behavioural, cognitive, and emotional.²⁴⁴ Behavioural autonomy may be defined as 'active, independent functioning including self-governance, self-regulation of behaviour, and acting on personal decisions' (Zimmer-

²⁴¹ See Baltes & Silverberg's study: 'The Dynamics Between Dependency and Autonomy: Illustrations Across the Life Span (1994) for a full study of the dynamic interplay between autonomy and dependency across four phases of the life span: infancy/early childhood, adolescence, middle adulthood, and old age.

²⁴² For example, actions that are initiated and regulated by the core self.

²⁴³ For example, as disengagement from parental ties and control.

²⁴⁴ For full explication see Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins: 'Autonomy Development During Adolescence' (2003).

Gembeck & Collins 2003, 176); cognitive autonomy is usually defined as a 'sense of self-reliance, a belief that one has control over his or her own life, and subjective feelings of being able to make decisions without excessive social validation' (Sessa & Steinberg 1991, 42); and emotional autonomy is generally defined as a 'sense of individuation from parents and relinquishing dependence on them' (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins 2003, 176). Although these three theoretically discrete dimensions of autonomy all appear to increase during adolescence, it is the concept and understanding of emotional autonomy that is of most relevance to my study. Whilst just about any novel aimed at the YA market will depict teenagers who are increasing in behavioural and cognitive autonomy in similar fashion, there is a marked difference in the approach taken to the concept of emotional autonomy between mainstream YA 'realist' fiction, and YA Gothic fiction.

Viewing adolescent autonomy solely as independence and self-reliance, free from emotional attachments and social commitments, has come under criticism from contemporary scholars²⁴⁵ who express the concern that to do so is to encourage a way of thinking in which interdependence between, and reliance upon, individuals becomes problematic. Current research, therefore, accords:

greater significance to relational ties, support, and social commitment in the stud[y] of autonomy at this period of the life span. Evidence for this revised approach can be found in recent empirical work in which investigators have conceptualized healthy ego development, identity formation, and self-esteem as growing from familial climates that promote a sense of connection as well as individuation. (Silverberg & Gondoli, 1996, 15)

²⁴⁵ See Silverberg & Gondoli, 'Autonomy in Adolescence: A Contextualized Perspective' (1996) for full details.

Ellen Greenberger's conceptualisation of psychosocial maturity was one of the first studies which reflected this shift in scholarship. Her study shows that 'psychosocial maturity entails the complementary development of autonomy on the one hand, and social responsibility on the other' and according to Greenberger's model of mature adolescence, a 'sense of responsibility towards others is placed on equal par with a sense of independence or autonomy' (Silverberg & Gondoli 1996, 15).²⁴⁶ We see this pattern exemplified repeatedly in Teen Gothic fiction. Later I go on to show the ways in which Katniss, Sam and Todd all become psychosocially mature; not only do they survive their respective 'abandonments' and become fully autonomous, but they achieve this by forming new relational ties and undertaking greater social commitment.

The Detachment Debate

'One of the most prominent and lively debates in the recent literature on autonomy at adolescence turns on the question of whether emotional distance from parents serves an adaptive function' (Silverberg & Gondoli 1996, 16). The process of 'individuation' during adolescence and the transition to young adulthood has been characterised in terms of autonomy,

²⁴⁶ 'Greenberger's study finds that self-reliance is '[p]erhaps the most basic disposition that underlies the capacity for autonomy' (Greenberger 1984, 6). For Greenberger, self-reliance entails the absence of *excessive* dependence on others, a sense of control or agency over one's life, and an action orientation or sense of initiative. She finds that social commitment, an underlying feature of social responsibility, entails 'feelings of community with others; willingness to modify or relinquish personal goals in the interest of social goals; readiness to form alliances with others to promote social goals; and investment in long-term social goals' (Greenberger 1984, 8). For further see E. Greenberger 'Defining Psychosocial Maturity in Adolescence' (1984).

independence, and detachment from family members:²⁴⁷ Although interconnected, each of these terms can be given a distinct meaning:

Autonomy, both etymologically and in current usage, refers to self-government and self-regulation.²⁴⁸ ... The concept of *independence* concerns self-reliance, the ability to care for oneself.²⁴⁹ ... Finally, *detachment* has been used to describe the adolescent's withdrawing from the family, which in turn typically involves his or her moving toward new attachments of social bonds in the wider community. (Ryan & Lynch 1989, 340, emphases in original)

Ryan and Lynch argue that although detachment can be seen as an inevitable characteristic of adolescent development, nonetheless it possesses both positive and negative connotations:

Detachment can represent a necessary but not sufficient step toward independence and/or autonomy; it can set the stage for, but does not define, self-reliance or self-regulation. Yet detachment can also represent loss and separation, wherein a relatively dependent person is severed from a source of guidance, affection or nurturance. (340)

They question the construct of emotional autonomy as being an important aspect of individuation and 'suggest that individuation during adolescence and into young adulthood is facilitated not by detachment (i.e. "emotional autonomy") but rather by attachment where the latter is appropriately conceptualized' (341).

Historically, it was the psychoanalytic writings of Anna Freud²⁵⁰ which propounded the strongest assertion that emotional distance from parents plays a crucial part in the healthy development of adolescents:

²⁴⁷ See Ryan & Lynch, 'Emotional Autonomy versus Detachment: Revisiting the Vicissitudes of Adolescence and Young Adulthood' (1989).

²⁴⁸ 'Its opposite, heteronomy, pertains to being controlled by external forces or compulsions, in other words, the relative absence of volition' (Ryan & Lynch 1989, 340).

²⁴⁹ 'Dependence, conversely, describes relationships in which one relies on another for satisfaction of needs. Definitionally, it is clear that a person can be dependent on a provider without necessarily being controlled, that is, without lacking autonomy. Indeed, a provider can even support autonomy while still caring for the dependent' (Ryan & Lynch 1989, 340).

²⁵⁰ See A. Freud, 'Adolescence' (1958).

From Freud's orthodox psychoanalytic viewpoint, it is detachment from parental ties (initially manifested in adolescent rebelliousness against parents) that makes possible emotional adjustment, healthy independence, and later attachment to extrafamilial objects. (Silverberg & Gondoli 1996, 16)

However, the results of more modern research studies find that it is no longer possible 'to enter into the debate over the adaptive value of emotional distance if one assumes that emotional distance entails a state of detachment from parents as described by Anna Freud.' Although adolescents and their parents 'engage in bickering ... and adolescents seek out greater amounts of privacy ... the vast majority of adolescents report that they feel rather close to and respect their parents' (Silverberg & Gondoli 1996, 17).²⁵¹

By previously exclusively emphasising independence and self-reliance during adolescence, scholars have 'accorded minimal significance to relational ties, support, and interpersonal competence at this period of the life span' (Baltes & Silverberg 1994, 57), and true gains in autonomy at adolescence have often been misunderstood:

For example, when family relationships are considered, rebelliousness and parent-child detachment have sometimes been confused with the development of a healthy sense of autonomy (Freud 1958). In fact, rebellion is most likely an indicator of problems in the development of autonomy rather than its equivalent; and the majority of teens maintain fairly close relationships with their parents over the course of adolescence. ... Moreover, youngsters who appear most competent at late adolescence in terms of ego development and identity exploration are those who have maintained close, supportive – albeit transformed relationships with their parents.²⁵² (57)

²⁵¹ See Silverberg & Gondoli for full details of the relevant research studies.

²⁵² See Baltes & Silverberg for full details of the relevant research studies.

The currently accepted view, then, is that attachment is 'not a regressive bond from which the teenager must free him or herself but rather a dynamic relationship that changes in accord with the developmental tasks at hand' (Ryan & Lynch 1989, 341). Adolescents who are attached to their parents generally experience them as accepting and supportive of independence and autonomy regardless of periodic, normative struggles, and part of the development of responsible autonomy, therefore, includes a sense of when it is appropriate to turn to others – not only parents, but peers, and nonfamilial adults. 'Such a portrayal is quite different from one that equates rebellion against parental wishes as a sign of healthy autonomy' (Baltes & Silverberg 1994, 59).

Consequently, in the novels that I examine in this chapter (*Hunger Games*, *Gone* and *The Knife of Never Letting Go*) we are not presented with the clichéd view of adolescents rebelling against their parents in order to achieve power and autonomy; rather it is the case that the texts address the adolescent's latent fear of abandonment. 'Indeed, individuation is not something that happens *from* parents but rather *with* them' (Ryan & Lynch 1989, 341, emphases in original), and all the texts studied here show the protagonists as suddenly being untimely severed from their family ties, cut off from the people best suited to guide them through the 'individuation' process. In addition, they are thrown into situations where they not only have to achieve behavioural and cognitive autonomy, but demonstrate social responsibility, thereby embodying Greenberger's notion of psychosocial maturity. The protagonists unwillingly lose their attachment to

family and home, but the texts show how they deal with this in a positive and empowering manner.

The portrayal of power and autonomy in Teen Gothic texts is therefore quite different from that which Trites describes as operating in mainstream 'realist' texts. Trites rightly contends, in yet another paradox of YA fiction, that 'adolescent literature seems to delegitimize adolescents ... even though the surface intention of most YA novels is ostensibly to legitimize adolescence' (Trites 2000, 83); she states that YA texts accomplish this 'deligitimization':

by conveying frequently to readers the ideological message that they need to grow up, to give up the subject position culturally marked "adolescent". In order to mature, they need to murder the parent who represses their power, regardless of whether that parent is actual, surrogate, or imaginary, so that they can fully enter into the Symbolic Order. Since so many adolescent novels contain parents who must be rebelled against and adult narrators who are the source of the text's often repressive ideological wisdom, the genre does seem to communicate to teenagers that authority is not and should not be theirs. In communicating such ideologies to adolescent readers, the genre itself becomes an Ideological State Apparatus, an institution that participates in the social construction of the adolescent as someone who must be repressed for the greater good. (83)

I find that the opposite is at play in Teen Gothic fiction, however, which offers an ultimately empowering message to the adolescent. The protagonists are not put into clichéd, rebellious power struggles with their parents; on the contrary they are shown as having to cope with the far greater challenge of being ripped asunder from their families in untimely fashion, as well as becoming socially responsible for their community and embracing this role. Furthermore they are also depicted, as I will show, as not only gaining autonomy and authority, but being deserving of it, and all

without necessarily having to 'give up the subject position culturally marked adolescent'.

'No Real Paths to Follow'

The dystopian or post-apocalyptic novel, where the action is taken out of the home and the present and into a wider future-world where the familiar is made strange, affords a good scenario in which to fictionalise conceptions of adolescent autonomy. Post-disaster fictions 'can be used to make a comment on a vast number of topics ranging from world politics ... to gender ... to history ... and to the very "meaning" of life and of death' (James 2009, 154); however, there is one defining factor that is common within the genre: they are all set in the future. Post-disaster or post-apocalyptic texts tend to be set some time off in a fantasy future that exists after the world as we know it has been destroyed by some form of cataclysmic disaster, generally at the hands of humans, and a new society has been established which is usually a dystopia. Alternatively, they may be set in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, but the focus remains on life after the disaster. The exact nature of the disaster may or may not be specified in the text, but common themes, which have changed with the years, include: nuclear, environmental, genetic engineering and disease pandemics.²⁵³

The futuristic setting is the hallmark of the post-disaster novel; it begins with the known and extrapolates some part of it into the unknown future, imagining what life may be like "if ...". As such, it is an exploration of social possibility, but since it invites readers to

²⁵³For a comprehensive and concise introduction to trends, themes and variations in post-disaster fiction for young adults see Braithwaite (2010); for a fuller study into the ways in which utopian and dystopian texts for children and young adults have responded to the cultural, economic and political movements of the last fifteen years see Bradford *et al* (2008).

examine the contrast between the present world and a world which might be, it is also a critique of the existing social order. While these fictions may be set in the future, they are therefore not really about “tomorrow”, but rather about “today” because they are effectively a statement regarding the particular historical moment that produced them. (James 2009, 154)

In keeping with Gothic fiction as a whole, post-disaster fiction is unlimited in its possibilities and can transgress all boundaries, supplying, therefore, a very broad canvas which can be used to depict a wide range of narrative situations ‘dominated by authorial fears about the violent, inhumane social and political worlds young people seem likely to inherit’ (Sambell 2004, 247). Kay Sambell, in agreement with many critics, maintains that post-disaster or dystopian fiction represents a future that ‘child readers must strive to avoid at all costs’ and ‘didactically foregrounds social and political questions by depicting societies whose structures are horrifyingly plausible exaggerations of our own’ (247-248). Indeed it does, but that is only to go half way; if we look past ‘authorial fears’ for society’s future and concentrate instead on the actions of the individual protagonists in these texts, we can also read them as ultimately empowering narratives in which adolescents are not only allowed autonomy and agency, but, additionally, a say in how the world is run: a fact denied to them in the ‘real world’ of the here-and-now, and which does not, perhaps, sit well with them. The ‘exploration of social possibility’ that James posits such texts offer is not only the negative possibility of future disaster, therefore, but also the positive possibility of future empowerment.²⁵⁴ Their endings are usually explicitly redemptive and hopeful, unlike classic adult dystopias such as Orwell’s *1984* in which all

²⁵⁴ Consequently there is an argument to be made that YA post-disaster fiction may be one of the only genres that is characteristically less didactic than its adult counterpart.

hope is denied, or Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* where hope is ambiguously implicit. Sambell criticises the endings in children's and YA dystopian fiction for privileging '[r]omantic conceptions of childhood' and points out that they can lead to 'flawed novels that are imaginatively and ideologically fractured' (Sambell 2004, 252); because the texts appear reluctant to extinguish hope they therefore equivocate in delivering a moral she argues; however, this is to concentrate too much on the purpose of the didactic nature of the dire warnings for the future of the world, and not enough on the inherent message of autonomy and empowerment that are contained within. For the adolescent reader post-disaster fiction is not necessarily about a future to be averted but about what is already happening to them in their own world; in this respect they are 'a critique of the existing social order' not only in the didactic terms of the wider global issues posed by the danger of nuclear and environmental threats, but, more importantly, in terms of the adolescent's perceived lack of autonomy, agency and their own sense of self.

As a result, the angst of adolescence can be portrayed on both a public and personal level in post-disaster fiction with narratives that include:

scenarios which force the adolescent protagonist to: rebel against parents, cope without them, or live with them in a situation where the power balance has changed; to find a sense of identity; or to leave childhood behind them for good. (James 2009, 156)

This is nowhere more evidenced than in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*.²⁵⁵ The main protagonist of *The Hunger Games* is sixteen-year-old

²⁵⁵ *The Hunger Games* is the first part of a trilogy which also includes *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*.

Katniss Everdeen, who lives in the post-apocalyptic nation of Panem.²⁵⁶

Political control is exercised over Panem by the Capitol, a highly advanced and sophisticated metropolis. The titular Hunger Games are an annual event in which one boy and one girl, aged between twelve and eighteen, from each of the twelve districts²⁵⁷ surrounding the Capitol are selected in an annual ceremony called 'the reaping' to compete in a televised battle to the death until only one victor remains.²⁵⁸

Whilst *The Hunger Games* is set in an unspecified future, it harks back to antiquity for its roots, and is heavily influenced by both Greek mythology and Ancient Roman history: the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur tells of how, as punishment for past problems, the people of Athens were periodically forced to sacrifice seven youths and seven maidens to Crete, who were then thrown into the Labyrinth and killed by the Minotaur; and the actual Hunger Games themselves are futuristic versions of the Roman gladiatorial games which were also devised by a ruthless

²⁵⁶ Geographically, Panem is sited where the countries of North America once existed; the continent's civilisation has previously been destroyed by an unspecified apocalyptic event.

²⁵⁷ The twelve outlying districts are divided up into various industrial and agricultural sectors which supply goods for the Capitol. Although there is a slight perceived hierarchy within the districts, with the ones supplying luxury goods, say, to the Capitol being slightly more affluent than Katniss' own coal-mining District 12, there is no real evidence of a free-market economy, the state is a completely totalitarian one and the populace simply suffer different degrees of hunger.

²⁵⁸ The Hunger Games have been devised as punishment for a previous rebellion against the Capitol over seventy years ago, in which a thirteenth district was destroyed; as a demonstration of the Capitol's power they serve to keep the citizens of Panem subdued and in line. The power that the Capitol exercises over Panem is therefore predicated on Foucault's 'contract-oppression schema' in that the individuals of Panem have surrendered what little power they have in order to live under the rule of a governing body.

government that forced people to fight to the death in a public arena as a form of popular entertainment.²⁵⁹

The Hunger Games offers a wide social critique of issues such as severe poverty, starvation, oppression, and the effects of war as the people of Panem are shown to struggle to survive in the outlying districts, and this struggle is contrasted against the (literal) gluttonous excesses of life in the Capitol; it can also be read as an indictment of reality television, now so prolific throughout the Western world, as the people of Panem ritually ‘tune-in’ to watch the slaughter of their children, and ‘sponsors’ are attracted to provide provisions for the ‘favourites’. As such it is what Elizabeth Braithwaite would term a ‘social order’ text,²⁶⁰ that is, a text in which the original disaster (specified or unspecified) is used to ‘create a scenario in which a particular kind of society develops ... Such texts are usually set many years after the disaster, when a new society has been established, usually a dystopia’ (Braithwaite 2010, 11) and the function of the dystopia is to forewarn readers about the future possible outcomes of their present world. However, as already stated, I posit that within that they also function

²⁵⁹ Indeed, the world of Panem, particularly the Capitol, is loaded with Roman references, in particular the Roman names of many of the characters: Portia, Cinna, Caesar etc. Panem, with its outlying districts feeding and providing for the insatiable and affluent inhabitants of the Capitol, clearly alludes to the Roman Empire, and the rebellion and subsequent invasion of the Capitol by the districts (see *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*) echoes Rome’s fate. The word ‘panem’ itself comes from the expression ‘*Panem et Circenses*’ which translates as ‘Bread and Circuses’, a metaphor for a superficial means of appeasement, and is a reference to the satiric poet Juvenal’s comment on the society of Ancient Rome: he maintains that all the populace wants is bread from the corn dole and the excitement of the bloodthirsty games of the amphitheatre; and states that power is easily held if these needs are indulged. Today, in the case of politics, the phrase is used to describe the creation of public approval, not through exemplary or excellent public service or public policy, but through diversion, distraction, and/or the mere satisfaction of the immediate, shallow requirements of a populace: to wit, in either ancient or modern terms, the Hunger Games.

²⁶⁰ Braithwaite identifies three sub-genres in YA post-disaster fiction: ‘survivor’, ‘social order’ and ‘quest/adventure’ texts. Whilst texts may contain elements of all three sub-genres, they tend to sit most clearly in one. See Braithwaite.

as conduits for the exploration of the possibilities of adolescent empowerment.

The 'hunger' suggested by the *The Hunger Games*' title is many and varied: there is the literal hunger of the starving people of Panem; the hunger for survival of the 'tributes' in the arena; the hunger of the watching public for the diverting spectacle of death; the hunger of the Capitol to keep control over Panem; the hunger, later in the trilogy, of the rebels to overthrow the ruling government; and Katniss' own burgeoning hunger for autonomy. *The Hunger Games* begins with the immediate and literal hunger of the people of Panem, and ends with Katniss' realisation that, without the daily hardship of looking for food, which is all her life has consisted of to date, potentially she has neither purpose nor identity, a situation she is compelled to remedy. Katniss wakes on the morning of the reaping to go hunting in the woods, an illegal but necessary activity if she is to keep her family from starving. Katniss is already a protagonist who is coping without her parents: her father died when she was eleven, and her mother has been mentally absent ever since; when Katniss looks at her mother she sees 'a woman who sat by, blank and unreachable, while her children turned to skin and bones' (10), and one whom she cannot forgive. From a young age Katniss has been the provider for her family, effectively both mother and father to her younger sister Prim; when Katniss talks about there being 'no real paths to follow' (6) while hunting in the woods, she

could be talking about her own life.²⁶¹ Although she has become emotionally autonomous before she should, having been forced to relinquish any dependence she may have had on her parents, Katniss is also behaviourally and cognitively autonomous to an extent: she functions independently, governs her own actions and behaviour, and acts on personal decisions; however, although she has a sense of self-reliance, she does not believe that she has complete control over her own life because of the power structures governing Panem. Katniss also encapsulates Greenberger's notion of 'psychosocial maturity', as her sense of autonomy develops on a par with her sense of responsibility towards others; she and Gale²⁶² know that they could both run away together from District 12, and survive, but her responsibility to Prim holds her back.

The reaping itself reads like an extended adaptation of Shirley Jackson's highly original and influential short story, 'The Lottery'.²⁶³ Whilst the inhabitants of Jackson's village no longer remember the reason for the lottery, they still go along with it, scared to question their own roles in ritualistic murder. They figuratively devour a member of their own community because tradition has deadened their ability to think for themselves, and this is symbolic cannibalism at its worst. *The Hunger*

²⁶¹ The trope of 'paths' recurs in both YA and children's literature. In Chapter One, I highlighted the dangers that Maris (*The Bleeding*) encountered when she, like Little Red Riding Hood, stepped off the safe path despite her mother's warning; in Chapter Two we saw that Mary (*The Forest of Hands and Teeth*) successfully follows the dangerous paths to the ocean; she later encourages her daughter Gabry (*The Dead-Tossed Waves*) to overcome her fears and face the forest of Mary's past by giving her a path to follow, ideologically and literally, as she marks up the numbers of the paths all around the lighthouse.

²⁶² Gale is Katniss' old childhood friend with whom she goes hunting; he is a couple of years older than her.

²⁶³ Jackson's dystopian story takes place some time in the future in an unnamed small, agrarian village, where the people are close and tradition is paramount. A yearly event, called the lottery, is one in which one person in the town is randomly chosen, by a drawing, to be violently stoned by friends and family. The drawing has been around for over seventy-seven years (the Hunger Games are approaching their seventy-fifth year) and is practiced by every member of the town without question. See Jackson (2009).

Games at least gives a reason for the reaping: they are a ‘punishment’ for a failed ‘uprising of the districts against the Capitol’ (21) many years ago.

Ideologically this does not appear to make sense: the idea of killing a nation’s children for entertainment would seem more likely to provoke a rebellion than to quell one; but, taken in relation to Jackson’s ‘The Lottery’ we see that the function of both texts is to depict and censure communities that are in complete thrall to tradition²⁶⁴ and deadened to individual thought. Additionally they function as a critique of our own social order; although the reader may think it incredible that any community should act, or fail to act, in this way, they need only be reminded that they are living in a world that has stood by and watched its own share of genocides and holocausts.

When Jackson’s villagers go to attend the lottery, they appear to be taking part in a social, festive event, run along the same lines as ‘the square dances, the teen-age club [and] the Halloween program’; the women ‘greet one another and exchange bits of gossip’ (‘The Lottery’, 292) and the whole occasion is overseen by the ‘round-faced’ and ‘jovial’ Mr Summers. The seemingly happy and light-hearted nature of the event only serves to intensify the horror when the reader, who has been kept in the dark as to the exact nature of the lottery, realises what is happening. In

²⁶⁴ These communities are in thrall to, or controlled by, ‘tradition’ in the accustomed sense of the word, i.e. the customs, beliefs, rules and practices that have been handed down from generation to generation without question, but they are also in thrall to ‘tradition’ in the sense of some of its older and even more apposite definitions: ‘1. The action of handing over something material to another; delivery, transfer,’ and ‘2. A giving up, surrender; betrayal’. OED Online. September 2012. Oxford University Press. 18 September 2012.

The Hunger Games the mood at the reaping²⁶⁵ is, by contrast, far more sombre and silent despite the Capitol 'requir[ing]' the citizens 'to treat the ... games as a festivity' (22); attendance is mandatory, and everyone must dress up for the ubiquitous camera crews which afford the Capitol 'a good opportunity' for keeping 'tabs on the population as well' (19);²⁶⁶ the reader is aware of what is about to happen because it has already been explained, but the horror produced is still the same: no one questions the practice or 'tradition' in either text.

After Mayor Undersee²⁶⁷ has given his yearly speech in which he incongruously reminds District 12 that this 'is both a time for repentance and a time for thanks' (22),²⁶⁸ the reaping begins: "Happy Hunger Games!" cries the ineffable Effie Trinket,²⁶⁹ "And may the odds be ever in your favour!" (23, emphasis in original). Effie, a functionary of the Capitol, absurdly deems the odds to be in someone's favour if they are, in fact, 'successfully' drawn to take part in the Hunger Games. This is because the Capitol deems it an honour to take part in the Games; the victor is allowed

²⁶⁵ Whereas the word 'lottery' connotes that there is a prize to be won, thereby making the reality of Jackson's story all the more shocking, the word 'reaping' in *The Hunger Games* is more prescient, being connotative of something sown and raised only to be cut down. It also invokes a horrible emotional inversion on the sentiment contained in the biblical verse: 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' Galatians 6:7. This is intended to be interpreted simply that if you do bad things to people, bad things will happen to you, i.e. you get what you deserve; in the world of Panem however, we see that the Capitol (God) will not be defied (mocked) or else what man literally sows – his children – he will be forced to reap.

²⁶⁶ Bradford *et al* point out that one of the key tensions in 'new world order narratives' is the 'tension between individual subject position and the ideology of a society built on surveillance, conformity, and repression' (Bradford *et al* 2008, 19), all of which are at play in Panem.

²⁶⁷ A nice inversion of 'oversee', given the nature of the occasion.

²⁶⁸ In 'social order' texts the adolescent protagonist generally has no experience of pre-disaster life and must rely on descriptions from adults who have, and/or 'the descriptions of pre-disaster life given by the authorities in his or her society' (Braithwaite 2010, 12). In the last chapter we saw that this was the case for Mary in *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, a prime example of a 'social order' text within post-disaster fiction. In *The Hunger Games* Katniss is regularly reminded of Panem's history both in school and when the mayor gives the same speech at the reaping every year outlining Panem's pre- and post-disaster life (21-22).

²⁶⁹ Effie Trinket, who has been sent by the Capitol to oversee Mayor Undersee, is in every way as ineffable, ineffectual, superficial, gaudy and trivial as her name suggests.

to enjoy a privileged life, and their home district is sent extra food allocations; moreover, the victor is able to cross over from being a subordinate of the districts to being a quasi-citizen of the Capitol.²⁷⁰ The other twenty-three contestants, of course, wind up dead. The odds for Katniss being sent to fight to the death are most certainly 'in her favour' as the entry of an individual's name is done on a cumulative basis, increasing with age;²⁷¹ furthermore, the system is additionally unfair to the poor and starving who can opt to add their names more times in exchange for tesserae²⁷² which can be used to buy meagre supplies of grain and oil for themselves and each member of their family, this too is cumulative, and Katniss, now sixteen, has her name entered in the reaping twenty times. Prim, who is twelve, only has her name entered once because Katniss will not allow her to take out any tesserae, and is therefore 'about as safe as you can get' (18), thinks Katniss. The reaping, however, is a game of chance,²⁷³ and despite the odds it is Prim's name that is drawn; Katniss immediately volunteers to take her place,²⁷⁴ which is allowed within the rules but, unsurprisingly, rarely done. Gratifyingly, Katniss finds that her actions are not met with heroic cheers and hoopla:

²⁷⁰ This is another nod to Roman history: the most successful gladiators were allowed to 'cross over' into Roman citizenship, and to have or attain Roman citizenship put one in a higher class of society.

²⁷¹ 'You become eligible for the reaping the day you turn twelve. That name your name is entered once. At thirteen, twice. And so on and so on until you reach the age of eighteen, the final year of eligibility, when your name goes into the pool seven times' (15).

²⁷² Collins goes back to the Roman Empire again for the naming of her tokens. Tesserae (from the Latin) are the small individual cut tiles used in mosaic making. In the time of Ancient Rome mosaic panels and floor coverings were highly popular, and the tesserae were made from cut stone, and later coloured glass or clear glass backed with metal foils, they are therefore valueless baubles. Linking the trivial value inherent in pieces of shiny glass to 'tokens' which can mean the difference between life and death for an individual in any one given year is another comment on the high disregard for life with which the Capitol treats the people of Panem.

²⁷³ Or, indeed, a 'lottery'.

²⁷⁴ Katniss' actions are noble in comparison to those of Mrs Hutchinson in 'The Lottery' who shamefully tries to have her own daughter's name included when the draw comes down to the Hutchinson family.

To the everlasting credit of the people of District 12, not one person claps. Not even the ones holding betting slips, the ones who are usually beyond caring. ... So instead of acknowledging applause, I stand there unmoving while they take part in the boldest form of dissent they can manage. Silence. Which says we do not agree. We do not condone. All of this is wrong. (28-29)

The auspices are not good for Katniss if 'silence' is her community's 'boldest form of dissent', and she and Peeta Mellark, whose name is pulled out in the boys' draw, leave for the Capitol as District 12's 'tributes'²⁷⁵ in the Hunger Games. Forsaken by their parents and their community, Katniss and Peeta read like an adolescent, future-day Hansel and Gretel.²⁷⁶

The Hunger Games, like 'Hansel and Gretel', expresses an unpleasant truth: 'poverty and deprivation do not improve man's character, but rather make him more selfish, less sensitive to the sufferings of others, and thus prone to embark on evil deeds' (Bettelheim 1991, 159), and both the literal and metaphorical importance of hunger in *The Hunger Games* allows for a comparison to be made to the issues raised in the fairy tale.²⁷⁷ Bettelheim points out that whilst 'Hansel and Gretel' is particularly relevant to the younger child because it stresses the young child's desire to hold on to his or her parents even though the time has come for meeting the world on their own, and lays emphasis on the young child's need to transcend a

²⁷⁵ Another Roman influence: 'tribute' (from the Latin *tributum*, meaning contribution) is wealth, often in kind, that one party gives to another as a sign of respect or, as was often the case in historical contexts, of submission or allegiance. By using the word 'tributes' for her contestants Collins evokes the tributes paid by the losing side after a war in the ancient world. The ancient tributes often involved hostages, and the link to sacrifice here is obvious. Using the word 'tribute' to effectively describe people as payment emphasises the contestants' loss of identity and humanity. 'Tribute' is also invocative of 'tribune', again from the world of ancient Rome; a tribune was a protector or champion of the people; a contestant in the Hunger Games can be viewed as a protector of sorts in that they serve to protect the rest of the community from participating in the Games, and, if they win they help to supply extra food to their district; the Capitol urge the populace to view the victor as a champion of the people at the same time as they use the Hunger Games to keep the people in place.

²⁷⁶ Who also had 'no real paths to follow' after the birds ate Hansel's breadcrumb trail.

²⁷⁷ Hansel and Gretel are abandoned in the forest by their father and step-mother because they can no longer afford to feed them. See Grimm (2007).

primitive orality, symbolized by the children's infatuation with the gingerbread house; it also has meaning for the adolescent:

But separation anxiety – the fear of being deserted – and starvation fear, including oral greediness, are not restricted to a particular period of development. Such fears occur at all ages in the unconscious, and thus this tale also has meaning for, and provides encouragement to, much older children. As a matter of fact, the older person might find it considerably more difficult to admit consciously his fear of being deserted by his parents, or to face his oral greed; and this is even more reason to let the fairy tale speak to his unconscious, give body to his unconscious anxieties, and relieve them, without this ever coming to conscious awareness. (Bettelheim 1991, 15)

With her father dead, and her mother 'absent', Katniss has already been figuratively abandoned by her parents, particularly by her mother who is no longer the 'source of all food to her children' (Bettelheim 1991, 159).²⁷⁸

This abandonment is then seen to be repeated when Effie Trinket and Haymitch Abernathy (assuming the rôles of Hansel and Gretel's wicked step-mother and ineffectual father respectively)²⁷⁹ effectively abandon Peeta and Katniss in the Hunger Games' arena: fittingly this is a forest.

²⁷⁸ For Bettelheim, although both parents abandon Hansel and Gretel, it is '[t]he mother [who] represents the source of all food to the children, so it is she who is now experienced as abandoning them, as if in a wilderness. It is the child's anxiety and deep disappointment when Mother is no longer willing to meet all his oral demands which leads him to believe that suddenly Mother has become unloving, selfish, rejecting' (Bettelheim 1991, 159)

²⁷⁹ As with their real parents and the people of their home community, neither of these 'parents' does anything to stop Peeta and Katniss' participation in the Hunger Games. Despite being a ridiculous character, Effie is an archetypal 'wicked step-mother' right down to her 'pointy shoes' (57), she even 'hisses' (56) all her sibilants: gaudy and bright, swallowing the Capitol's ideology whole, she happily and unquestioningly 'prepare[s] [the pair] for slaughter' (90) and sends Peeta and Katniss into the arena; Haymitch is a former District 12 champion who is meant to mentor the pair in preparation for their ordeal in the arena and be 'the difference between [their] life and [their] death' (56), however he is a hopeless and inadequate drunk, and although he has a few reservations about the Hunger Games, he does not voice them; his advice to Peeta and Katniss is merely to '[s]tay alive' (68).

Many fairy tales, such as 'Snow White' and 'Hansel and Gretel', have ineffectual or weak fathers who are of little or no use to the protagonists.²⁸⁰

Bettelheim questions why fathers are portrayed in this way, whereas mothers are shown to be outright rejecting, and surmises that:

[t]he reason the (step)mother is depicted as evil and the father as weak has to do with what the child expects of his parents. In the typical nuclear family setting, it is the father's duty to protect the child against the dangers of the outside world, and also those that originate in the child's own asocial tendencies. The mother is to provide nurturing care and the general satisfaction of immediate bodily needs required for the child's survival. Therefore, if the mother fails the child in fairy tales, the child's very life is in jeopardy, as happens in 'Hansel and Gretel' when the mother insists that the children must be gotten rid of. If the father out of weakness is negligent in meeting his obligations, then the child's life as such is not so directly endangered, although a child deprived of the father's protection must shift for himself as best he can. (Bettelheim 1991, 206)

Katniss' first mother has failed to 'nurture' her, and her second 'mother' is complicit in abandoning her to her almost certain death; her first father has died, and her second 'father' is 'negligent in meeting his obligations'; Katniss and Peeta, therefore, must certainly 'shift for themselves' as best they can in the Hunger Games arena.

Before the actual Hunger Games themselves, the tributes are all taken to the Capitol to be glamourised:²⁸¹ they are given makeovers, kitted out in designer costumes and fêted like celebrities. In addition they are fed sumptuous meals to fatten them up for the Hunger Games; it is therefore possible to read the collective ruling body in the Capitol as the cannibalistic

²⁸⁰ Images of strong and protective fathers, when they do occur, are usually projected on to the figure of the huntsman in fairytales, such as in 'Red Riding Hood' and 'Snow White'. The huntsman is a better projection for a child than a king or prince because he dominates, controls and subdues wild, ferocious beasts; see Bettelheim. No huntsman steps in to save the day in 'Hansel and Gretel', however, and the children must get by on their own wits.

²⁸¹ I use the word glamourised in both its senses: as well as being physically made glamorous and attractive, the tributes are glamourised romantically and idealistically.

witch in 'Hansel and Gretel' who initially appears to be a perfectly gratifying mother figure, but in practice is actually fattening Hansel up for the oven.²⁸² Indeed, the Capitol itself appears to be as fantastic a place to Peeta and Katniss as the gingerbread house is to Hansel and Gretel: Peeta and Katniss can have anything they want at 'the press of a button' (79), and there are pages and pages given over to the loving description of food in the Capitol. Bettelheim writes that Hansel and Gretel, who are frustrated in their ability to find a solution to their problem,²⁸³ 'now give full rein to their oral regression', and the 'gingerbread house represents an existence based on the most primitive satisfactions' (Bettelheim 1991, 160):

The gingerbread house is an image nobody forgets: how incredibly appealing and tempting a picture this is, and how terrible the risk one runs if one gives in to the temptation. The child recognizes that, like Hansel and Gretel, he would wish to eat up the gingerbread house, no matter what the dangers. The house stands for oral greediness and how attractive it is to give in to it. (Bettelheim 1991, 161)

Katniss and Peeta eat till they can eat no more: the Capitol tempts them with the possibility of a life of unlimited food and luxury should they give of their best in the arena and win the Hunger Games; it urges them to give in to their 'primitive satisfactions' and endorse the venal and debauched life of the Capitol;²⁸⁴ it uses all the glamour at its disposal to show how 'attractive it would be to give in to it'. *The Hunger Games* parallels 'Hansel and Gretel' in signalling that:

²⁸² The threat of being devoured is the central theme in 'Hansel and Gretel', as it is in 'Little Red Riding Hood'. With the populace starving, this threat is also central to *The Hunger Games*; cannibalism has previously taken place in the actual Games themselves, and the Gamemakers have had to try and remove bodies before they have been eaten. Although 'cannibalism doesn't play well with the Capitol audience', there are still 'no rules in the arena' (173), and the attendant threat persists.

²⁸³ i.e finding their way home.

²⁸⁴ Further exemplified in *Catching Fire* when the drunken prep team offer Peeta and Katniss a potion to make them vomit so that they can 'keep eating' at a feast (*Catching Fire* 97); they duly refuse. Again note the Roman inflections here: at decadent Roman feasts the diners would make themselves vomit between meals so that they could eat more.

such unrestrained giving in to gluttony threatens destruction. Regression to the earliest 'heavenly' state of being – when on the mother's breast one lived symbiotically off her – does away with all individuation and independence. It even endangers one's very existence, as cannibalistic inclinations are given body in the figure of the witch. (Bettelheim 1991, 161)

However, Hansel and Gretel are young children duped by the wicked witch who had only pretended to be kind; whereas the much older Katniss and Peeta fully understand the Capitol's reason for fêting them and are fully cognisant of the facts of the Hunger Games. They do not, therefore, let themselves be '[c]arried away by ... greediness' or 'fooled by the pleasures of oral satisfaction which seem to deny all previous oral anxiety' (Bettelheim 1991, 161). Peeta and Katniss have to resist the temptation of the gingerbread house - the lure of the Capitol - if they are to retain their 'individuation and independence', for the aim of the Capitol is to have them give up their autonomy and unthinkingly kill each other for entertainment's sake.

Peeta is the first to voice his intention not to 'play the game' as it were; intent on not losing his own sense of self, he tells Katniss:

I want to die as myself ... I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I'm not ... I keep wishing I could think of a way to ... to show the Capitol they don't own me. That I'm more than just a piece in their Games. (171-172)

Whilst Katniss initially and pessimistically refutes his belief that any of them are more than just pawns in the Hunger Games, she does understand Peeta's nobility in determining to 'maintain his identity ... [h]is purity of self' (171) and feels slightly shamed and 'inferior' (171) that she has been concentrating, instead, on how to stay alive. Throughout the course of the

Hunger Games themselves, and after many misunderstandings, each saves the other's life, and they are soon interdependent. This is not to say that either loses their independence; arguably we could say that this would have happened had either killed the other, for then they would have been fulfilling the desires of the Gamemakers and the Capitol, for whom the 'real sport of the Hunger Games is watching the tributes kill one another'

(214).²⁸⁵

When there are only four tributes remaining, Katniss starts to realise that she could, in fact, be the successful victor in Hunger Games, and she begins to question what this would actually mean for her:

I allow myself to truly think about the possibility that I might make it home. To fame. To wealth. To my own house in the Victor's Village ... No more fear of hunger. A new kind of freedom. But then ... what? What would my life be like on a daily basis? Most of it has been consumed with the acquisition of food. Take that away and I'm not really sure who I am, what my identity is. The idea scares me some. (378)

Furthermore, Katniss foresees a very lonely life for herself:

I know I'll never marry, never risk bringing a child into the world. If there's one thing being a victor doesn't guarantee, it's your children's safety. My kids' names would go right into the reaping balls with everyone else's. And I swear I'll never let that happen. (379)

Questioning a future in which she will remain effectively powerless, and finally understanding Peeta's position about retaining his sense of self and not wanting to be a piece in the Capitol's games, Katniss realises that in order to hold on to her own sovereignty she will have to risk death after all, but by her own choice, not at the dictate of the Gamemakers. When she

²⁸⁵ Whilst Peeta and Katniss are both forced to kill in the arena, neither is shown to kill indiscriminately: Peeta kills only once, and this is ostensibly to end the suffering of a badly injured and dying tribute; Katniss kills three times: she drops a nest of venomous 'trackerjacks' on a group of tributes who are surrounding the tree in which she is hiding, resulting in the subsequent death of Glimmer; she kills Marvel, quite purposefully, in revenge for his killing of her friend Rue; and finally she kills Cato to put him out of his misery after he has been mauled by 'muttations'.

and Peeta are the only surviving competitors neither can kill the other, and they resolve, at Katniss' suggestion, to commit suicide by eating poisonous berries. This is something of a calculated risk on Katniss' part as she shrewdly realises that the Gamemakers, the Capitol and the watching world 'have to have a victor':

Without a victor, the whole thing would blow up in the Gamemakers' faces. They'd have failed the Capitol. Might possibly even be executed, slowly and painfully, while the cameras broadcast it to every screen in the country (418).

She calculates correctly, and they are prevented from eating the berries by a trumpet fanfare and declaration that they are joint victors. However, for Katniss and Peeta the suicide attempt was deemed a risk worth taking. As already detailed in Chapter One, Foucault explains how the ancient right of the sovereign 'to *take* life or *let* live'²⁸⁶ was replaced by the power of the social body 'to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death' (Foucault, 1998, 138); in this dystopian narrative, however, the development works in the reverse, and the power of the social body 'to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death' is seen to be replaced by the power of the sovereign (the Capitol) 'to *take* life or *let* live'. Although the Gamemakers may be deemed to have 'let' Peeta and Katniss live by declaring them victors, they could not make them take each other's life, and as such they have defeated the system. Additionally, Katniss and Peeta would have been happy, like Simon in *The Silver Kiss*, to go through with the suicide for they too were

²⁸⁶ Another link to Ancient Roman times, if a little tenuous, for Foucault writes: 'For a long time, one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death. In a formal sense, it derived, no doubt from the ancient *patria potestas* that granted the father of the Roman family the right to "dispose" of the life of his children and his slaves; just as he had given them life, so he could take it away' (Foucault 1998, 135).

putting themselves outside of any power structure, sovereign, social or political. For Foucault:

This determination to die, strange and yet so persistent and constant in its manifestations, and consequently so difficult to explain as being due to particular circumstances or individual accidents, was one of the first astonishments of a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life. (Foucault 1998, 139)

Katniss and Peeta have certainly 'astonished' the Capitol, and despite being outwardly lauded as joint victors in the Hunger Games, the Capitol makes it clear that it sees this as an act of rebellion, for which Katniss is held primarily responsible as it was she who was seen to suggest it.

Katniss' acts of defiance against the Capitol in the arena and on her subsequent victory tour lead the people of Panem to view her as the face of rebellion.²⁸⁷ To some extent this echoes the sentiment in 'Hansel and Gretel', for 'Gretel's importance in the children's deliverance reassures the child that a female can be a rescuer as well as a destroyer'.²⁸⁸ However, it must be remembered that it was Peeta who first sowed the seeds of rebellion in Katniss' mind: without his influence and questioning of the system she would have concentrated on simply surviving; furthermore, Katniss would not have survived herself without Peeta's help, and they are therefore shown to have been mutually dependent. This is again resonant of 'Hansel and Gretel', where each is shown to save the other, and:

suggests to children that as they grow up they must come to rely more and more on their age mates for mutual help and understanding. This idea reinforces the story's main thrust, which is a warning against regression, and an encouragement of growth

²⁸⁷ Albeit that this was never her intention and she is initially a rather reluctant figurehead. The subsequent novels, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*, however, see Katniss leading the rebellion to victory against the Capitol, ending a 75-year-long suppression. The novels also play out the by now obligatory adolescent love triangle between Katniss, Peeta and Gale.

²⁸⁸ For '[i]t is the females - the stepmother and the witch - who are the inimical forces in this story' (Bettleheim 1991, 164).

toward a higher plane of psychological and intellectual existence. (Bettelheim 1991, 165).

According to Bettelheim Hansel and Gretel develop into:

more mature children, ready to rely on their own intelligence and initiative to solve life's problems. As dependent children they had become a burden to their parents; on their return they have become the family's support, as they bring home the treasures they have gained. These treasures are the children's new-won independence in thought and action, a new self-reliance which is the opposite of the passive dependence which characterized them when they were deserted in the woods. (164)²⁸⁹

Much the same can be said of Peeta and Katniss who also return home as 'the family's support' with their extra food rations granted in perpetuity; however, although Hansel and Gretel have learned the importance of intelligent action, they are much younger children and, as such, they are shown to be ready to live happily again with their parents; by contrast Peeta and Katniss are adolescents who, having learned the importance of intelligent action and autonomy, cannot return to live happily in the family home. They have transcended their dependence on family and community to reach a higher stage of development and they are now revolutionaries.²⁹⁰

It's Just a FAYZ

There are no such high ideals at play in Michael Grant's *Gone*,²⁹¹ however, where the children of Perdido Beach,²⁹² are, of an instant, faced with the

²⁸⁹ As well as the literal treasures they have taken from the witch's house, of course.

²⁹⁰ And therefore psychosocially mature by Greenberger's measure; they are not turning their backs on family and community, but using their increased autonomy and power to bring about change on their behalf.

²⁹¹ *Gone* is the first novel in Michael Grant's YA dystopian science fiction book series; the other novels in the series are: *Hunger*, *Lies*, *Plague*, *Fear* and the concluding novel *Light* is due for publication in Spring 2013.

²⁹² Perdido Beach is a fictional town in California.

task of simply surviving on a day-to-day basis. In the blink of an eye, all adults are gone:

One minute the teacher was talking about the Civil War. And the next minute he was gone.

There.

Gone.

No 'poof'. No flash of light. No explosion. (1)

So begins *Gone*, where every person aged fifteen and over simultaneously vanishes from Perdido Beach causing confusion and chaos among the children. The town and surrounding areas are encased within an impenetrable dome,²⁹³ and many of the people and wildlife develop supernatural powers. The book, and subsequent series, has a huge cast of characters, but is mainly concerned with the power struggle between the protagonist Sam Temple and the antagonist, Sam's fraternal twin, Caine Soren.²⁹⁴ No adults remain in the dome, the survivors swiftly factionalise, and Perdido Beach rapidly descends into violent chaos with three different groups vying for supremacy.²⁹⁵ Although initially anarchic and disordered, the surviving teenagers do quickly realise that the responsibility for finding food and taking care of the younger children now falls to them, and each of the three groups undertakes to do so, for varying reasons: Sam and his

²⁹³The dome has a twenty-mile diameter and also encompasses a nuclear power plant, Coates Academy (a fee paying boarding school for privileged and 'difficult' children), a national park, and part of the ocean. In fact the dome is later found to be a 'bubble', or a sphere, which goes all the way round some distance under the earth. *N.b.* *Gone* was published a year-and-a-half before Stephen King's *Under the Dome*.

²⁹⁴ The boys have been separated at birth and initially neither knows he has a twin; their mother, Connie Temple, kept Sam and gave Caine up for adoption, her reasons for this are as yet undisclosed in the series. Caine, as his name suggests (from the biblical brothers Cain and Abel), is the 'evil twin', and although he never succeeds in actually killing Sam, he does make various attempts to do so.

²⁹⁵ Loosely: Sam and his friends, Caine and his cohorts, Howard and his henchmen; see below.

friends act out of altruism; Howard and his thugs merely display a heavy-handed mercenary zeal; but Caine appreciates that actively organising the community and restoring confidence is the most direct way to having himself installed as an unopposed leader. Perdido Beach is entirely cut-off, and the children left inside the dome²⁹⁶ have no idea what is going on in the outside world, or even if the outside world still exists.²⁹⁷ They are entirely on their own. Furthermore, the older teenagers soon learn that they too will ‘poof’²⁹⁸ once they reach their fifteenth birthdays; this is a pressing concern for Sam and Caine as their fifteenth birthday is imminent²⁹⁹ and no-one knows if ‘the poof’ means ‘death, disappearance [or] escape’ (426).³⁰⁰

In Braithwaite’s terms, *Gone* is a ‘survivor text’; that is, a text in which ‘the function of the disaster is to create a situation in which the young adult protagonist and other survivors of the disaster have to struggle with simply staying alive’ (Braithwaite 2010, 8). Braithwaite explains that a vast majority of YA ‘survivor texts’ produced in the Cold War years featured nuclear disaster ‘[b]ecause of the abruptness of nuclear disaster and the resultant capacity for it to be used to contrast before and after life, which is one of the key features of the sub-genre’ (8). *Gone* does exactly this;

²⁹⁶ The survivors name their territory inside the dome the ‘Fallout Alley Youth Zone’, or ‘FAYZ’ (98), because of an earlier nuclear accident which took place fifteen years previously. After they are encapsulated in the dome, life at Perdido Beach soon becomes expressed in terms of ‘before the FAYZ’ and ‘after the FAYZ’.

²⁹⁷ Sam thinks there may be a way through ‘the barrier’ back to their old world, but Astrid, Sam’s highly intelligent girlfriend, posits that the dome may in fact be ‘a new reality’, a ‘new universe’, and that they could be cut adrift from their old universe (344-345). At this point in the series they just do not know. Because the children have been plunged into this situation, intellectual uncertainty abounds; this contrasts with the bulk of YA dystopian fiction which tends to be set in a far more distant future, and shows the protagonists as having learned their ‘history’ from their elders. The teenagers and children of Perdido Beach therefore have a harder task, they have no idea what has happened to them, they must learn to survive and create some sort of society for themselves and by themselves.

²⁹⁸ The act of disappearing is variously described as to ‘poof’, ‘step out’, ‘bug out’ and ‘blink out’.

²⁹⁹ Rather than chapter headings, the book counts down the hours and minutes to the boys’ fifteenth birthday.

³⁰⁰ More intellectual uncertainty.

furthermore, with its contemporary setting, it does not set out to make a history of our present, as many futuristic dystopian novels do. *Gone* also differs from other narratives in that it does not seek to 'give some kind of general flaw in human behaviour or reasoning as the real cause of the disaster' (Braithwaite 2010, 8). Although nuclear failure is implicated, it is not utilised in the same way as in Cold War survivor texts: Perdido Beach's first radiation leak, fifteen years earlier, was the result of an accident caused by a meteorite, and the cause of the second meltdown, averted to some extent by Little Pete, is not made clear.³⁰¹ Despite the strange nature of the children's powers and, in some cases, mutations, which are presented as exciting, and, by turns, necessary or threatening to their survival (depending on who has what power), *Gone* does not really strive to preach about the dangers of nuclear power *per se*;³⁰² it does not, therefore, place the nature of the disaster first and foremost; the disaster has simply happened: the children must survive.

This nuclear 'backdrop' however, echoes that of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*; despite being set in the midst of an unspecified nuclear

³⁰¹ Human error is hinted at (rather than any flaw in behaviour or reasoning), but the final novel may provide further explication. Although set in and around Perdido Beach's nuclear reactor plant, this is a nuclear disaster text with a difference in that the 'disaster' is actually prevented from running its full course. Little Pete, Astrid's autistic younger brother, is later discovered to have thrown up the barrier as some sort of protective shield during the course of the meltdown at the plant. Little Pete is one of the many remaining inhabitants of Perdido Beach to have special powers. The meteorite that struck the power plant fifteen years ago caused a radiation leak, and some of the children born since that date have developed strange powers which are only now coming to light. With the exception of Little Pete, whose powers are diverse but difficult to fully interpret because of his autism, Sam and Caine have the strongest powers. Sam has the ability to shoot beams of energy and light from his hands; Caine is telekinetic and can move things with his mind.

³⁰² In fact, later in the run of novels it transpires that either alien DNA or an alien virus from the meteorite has been fused with both human DNA (from a plant worker killed in the accident) and the radiation leaked from the same first accident; it is this 'amalgam', given form and characterisation as 'the Darkness' in *Gone*, and named later in the series as 'the Gaiaphage', that accounts for the powers and mutations.

war,³⁰³ the nuclear threat does not really impinge upon the survival of Golding's boys who are marooned on an uninhabited island, and is, in fact, incidental to their story. *Gone* gives more than a passing nod to *Lord of the Flies* with its portrayal of children in a survival situation who try to govern themselves - Grant even names one of the streets in Perdido Beach 'Golding Street' – and, like Golding's novel, the central theme of *Gone* is the conflicting impulse toward civilisation, with everyone living by newly created rules in peace and harmony, and toward the will to power.³⁰⁴ One of the significant differences between *Lord of the Flies* and *Gone*, however, lies in the demographic of the survivors: Golding's survivors are all boys, and, crucially, they are all children under twelve years old, there are no teenagers; Grant's survivors are boys and girls of all ages up to the age of almost fifteen,³⁰⁵ with the main characters all being twelve and above. .

Immediately after they have been isolated by the dome Sam quickly becomes the natural, if reluctant, leader of the survivors in town. Sam is a true hero; prior to the FAYZ he had rescued a group of school children when their bus driver had a heart attack, and immediately after the FAYZ he attempts, but fails, to save a child from a burning building.³⁰⁶ Despite his

³⁰³ Golding wrote *Lord of the Flies* in 1954 at the height of the Cold War.

³⁰⁴ The 'will to power', a philosophical concept first propounded by Friedrich Nietzsche, describes what Nietzsche believed was the main driving force in humans, greater, even, than the will to live. Achievement, ambition and the striving to reach the highest possible position in life are all manifestations of the will to power. See Nietzsche (1973).

³⁰⁵ Arguably up to the age of just under sixteen, as throughout the series, which takes place over the course of almost a year, some of the teenagers learn how to defy the 'stepping out' process on their fifteenth birthday.

³⁰⁶ The child dies, and this is the first known death in Perdido Beach; many more deaths follow, both accidental and violent, and life in the FAYZ is very dangerous and very brutal. Indeed, the violence increases with each novel in the series. The striking cover art and paratext of the UK editions of all the books in the series highlights this, with the rider: 'WARNING! Contains scenes of cruelty and some violence' presented in cautioning chevrons; naturally this functions as both a disclaimer and a marketing ploy. The photographic covers of the USA editions, which feature impossibly glossy teenagers, are disappointingly anodyne by comparison.

natural heroism Sam is conflicted between the need to act like an adult, and the wish to remain a child, free from adult responsibility:

He was scared. And he was mad too. Where were the people who were supposed to do this? Where were the adults? Why was this up to him? He was just a kid. And why hadn't anyone else been crazy enough, stupid enough to rush into a burning building? (39).

Sam is another protagonist who has had to prematurely relinquish any dependence he may have had upon his parents,³⁰⁷ at first he struggles with his new found autonomy and powers, but the *Bildungsroman* formula of the series dictates that Sam will learn to handle his new-found responsibilities in a mature fashion. Astrid tells him that the younger children need someone to look up to, and it is apparent that Sam is that person: “They’re all scared like us ... There’s no one in charge, no one telling people what to do. They sense you’re a leader, Sam. They look to you” (49). Although Sam acknowledges the need for someone to step up and take control, he resents the responsibility of leadership: ‘The knot in his stomach was growing more painful. It would be a relief to walk out into the night. He wanted to get away from all those frightened faces looking to him, expecting something from him’ (51).³⁰⁸ Sam’s character, therefore, both mirrors and contrasts with that of Ralph in *Lord of the Flies*; Ralph is described as having ‘the directness of genuine leadership’ (*LOTF*, 21-22)

³⁰⁷ The same applies, of course, for all the children in Perdido Beach; however the younger children attach themselves to the older children and look to them for security and protection, and it can be argued that the situation is actually more scary and threatening for the adolescents, who are fully aware of the dangers of the situation.

³⁰⁸ Tired and scared of the responsibility of leadership, Sam does take off for a while with Astrid and his friend Quinn, ostensibly to explore the FAYZ and look for Astrid’s little brother Pete; when he returns Howard has taken control of the town by violent means, and Sam feels ashamed that he has run away from his responsibilities. In the second instalment, *Hunger*, Sam is appointed mayor, but by the third book, *Lies*, the Perdido Beach community have set up a town council to help relieve Sam of some of the burden; however they still want him as their figurehead and continually look to him for leadership. By the penultimate book in the series, *Fear*, Sam has a better grip on his own identity, and realises that he is, in fact, a soldier and not a leader; this comes as a relief to him.

and he too swiftly becomes the leader of the group; however, unlike Sam, Ralph actively courts this leadership and wins 'an election', despite the fact that 'what intelligence had been shown was traceable to Piggy' and that the 'most obvious leader was Jack' (*LOTF*, 18-19).

If Sam is Ralph's double, then Caine is Jack's. Caine is another natural leader, and when he sweeps down to the town in a convoy of cars from Coates Academy in a '[q]uasi-military' and 'well-rehearsed display' (139) to assume control of Perdido Beach, it is reminiscent of Jack's procession along the beach with his choirboys to take control of the group in *Lord of the Flies*. Caine, like Jack, exemplifies human nature at its worst when it is unfettered by a stronger society's rules; charming, handsome and charismatic, Caine finds it easy to obtain whatever he desires; although he is capable of acts of good, he is generally greedy, cruel and malevolent and appeals to the more primal desires in some of the Perdido Beach children. Caine is a megalomaniac; he displays an excessive enjoyment in having power over others and craves more of it: "How do you not see what an opportunity this is? We're in a whole new world. No adults. No parents or teachers or cops. Perfect for me. All I have to do is take care of Sam and a few others, and I'll have complete control" (509). When he first appears at Perdido Beach, however, Caine 'radiate[s] confidence, but without arrogance or condescension' and seems 'genuinely humble' (139). An eloquent and persuasive speaker he soon has the crowd on his side and has infused hope into the frightened children: "He's good" notes Astrid,

“He’s beyond good” (141).³⁰⁹ Although Sam and Astrid are ‘mesmerised by the performance’, they are also ‘sceptical’ (142), distrusting both the charm and the rehearsed nature of the display. Their fears prove grounded when Caine calls for a meeting in the church to further discuss his ‘plan’ (142) for Perdido Beach; this is another carefully orchestrated move which Sam recognises as having been meticulously planned and practised. Once in the church Caine takes up his position confidently at the altar and, sounding like a true statesman, outlines his plans for working together to ‘maintain’ and ‘organise’ life in the FAYZ until the ‘barrier comes down’; once again the listeners are ‘mesmerised’ (147). Caine’s benign façade does not slip until his assumed authority is challenged by Howard,³¹⁰ whereupon Caine causes the twelve-foot crucifix to tear free of the wall and land on top of Cookie, one of Howard’s henchmen, badly injuring him. This is an overt warning to the Perdido Beach community and, by symbolically using the crucifix to injure and maim, the message is clear: Caine is putting himself above God. Unlike Sam, Caine’s belief in his own autonomy and power is absolute.

If it is, as Bettelheim suggests, the function of traditional fairy tales to allow young children to grapple with their fears of the darkness of abandonment, death, witches, and injuries, in remote, symbolic terms, then so too does Teen Gothic fiction function for the adolescent reader.

³⁰⁹ In keeping with many dangerous historical world leaders, Caine is an effective and powerful rhetorician. Caine’s rhetoric is successful not only because of his personal charm, charisma and mastery of delivery, but because he is speaking at the right time; the group are demoralised and disorganised and are looking for someone to lead them out of their situation.

³¹⁰ Initially, Howard also regards himself as a potential leader of the FAYZ; however, he is none too bright, lacks Sam’s natural leadership abilities, and possesses neither Caine’s charm nor his intelligence. His only strength lies in the fact that he is marginally smarter than Orc and Cookie, his ‘henchmen’, and can manipulate them to do his bidding. Never a serious contender in the leadership stakes, Howard’s allegiances vacillate throughout the series; nonetheless he is not easily dismissed and even manages to get himself elected to the Perdido Beach town council in *Lies*.

Bradford *et al.* state that modern teenagers are all too used to seeing, through the global media, family displacement and child abandonment as outcomes of war, terrorism, natural disaster or poverty and argue that ‘the utopian enterprise endeavours to shake readers from their media-induced complacency by challenging them to see the world (past, present and future) from a new or different perspective’ (Bradford *et al.* 2008, 135); however, they neglect to recognise that the dystopian narrative, by contrast, constructs its readers not as complacent, but fearful: teenagers are not too old to retain a latent fear of abandonment, and I contend that novels such as *Gone* allow teenagers to ‘grapple with their fears’ in symbolic terms. Whether they are concerned with utilising either a utopian impulse or dystopian bent, however, these texts do have something in common: in the majority of them ‘there are no adult saviours, no guaranteed system of fair play, and no recourse to divine intervention’ (Bradford *et al.* 2008, 135).

There can be no adult saviours in *Gone* because there are no adults remaining; there is no guaranteed system of fair play because of the power struggles taking place between the disparate groups; and very soon the survivors realise that there will be no recourse to divine intervention. When Sam and his friends initially survey Perdido Beach after the FAYZ, they repeatedly express their belief that God has caused the FAYZ to happen: “‘It has to be God,” Quinn said. “I mean, how else, right? No one else could do this. Just make all the adults disappear?’” (28); Quinn also questions why God would have done such a thing: “‘What did we do? ... That’s what I don’t get. What did we do to piss God off?’” (28); and even the religiously devout Astrid “‘wanted to believe it was God doing it’” (134).

If God, for whatever reason, has caused the FAYZ, then the survivors rationalise that, by the same token, God would be able to intervene to save them. However, the group has no real idea why this has happened and soon moves on to questioning the motive, responsibility and reasoning of a non-specific 'they': "“They,” Astrid noted. “We’ve moved on from ‘God’ to ‘they’” (88). Significantly, the battle at the end of the novel between Caine and Sam’s respective groups sees the church, which Caine has already desecrated by his earlier act of tearing down the crucifix, almost completely destroyed. This symbolically stands for the annihilation of all the pre-existing adult-based power structures that the children of Perdido Beach have grown up under. They now completely realise that they have recourse to none but themselves, and the challenge is for them to become fully autonomous and self-governing individuals, as well as becoming psychosocially mature.³¹¹

After Caine has installed himself as Perdido Beach’s unopposed leader he calls himself mayor, takes over the mayor’s office ‘to the surprise of no one who knew him’ (159), and issues a list of ten ‘rules’³¹² for the community to live by. After ‘[f]ive days with no adults. Five days without mothers, fathers, big brothers and sisters, teachers, police officers, store clerks, paediatricians, clergy, dentists. Five days without television, Internet, or phones’, the survivors quickly accept ‘that, for now, at least, this was life’ (170). Caine is initially welcomed, because ‘[p]eople wanted to know that someone was in charge. People wanted there to be answers. People wanted rules’ (171). The FAYZ’s missing family, teachers, police

³¹¹ I am referring here to the adolescents within the group; the younger children are still dependent.

³¹² Caine stops short of calling them ‘commandments’ and decreeing himself a god; however he does anoint himself ‘king’ in *Fear*.

officers, paediatricians and clergy metonymically represent the now-absent state, schools, juvenile courts, medical clinics and churches which are conceived as sites of social administration or governance, and without which society is seen to fall apart. The surviving Perdido Beach community fast acknowledges the need for some form of government to stop themselves from descending into further anarchy and chaos, and, initially, there is no conflict between the community's impulse towards civilisation and Caine's will to power.

Most adolescents are required to study 'government'³¹³ to some degree in their higher education, and generally the 'perspective focuses on the rules, methods, and especially truths by which social institutions and individuals organize 'the conduct of conduct'' (Lesko 2012, 13).

Government can refer to any and all undertakings to shape, guide and direct the conduct of others, whether these be:

the crew of a ship, the members of a household, the employees of a boss, the children of a family or the inhabitants of a territory. And it also embraces the ways in which one might be urged and educated to bridle one's own passions, to control one's own instincts, to govern oneself. (Lesko 2012, 13)

To study government, therefore, is not only to examine the workings of social institutions, but to examine the 'rules, methods and truths' of students governing themselves. Once more, the language is didactic and restrictive, with the individual being 'urged' and 'educated' to 'bridle', 'control' and 'govern' oneself. Whilst *Gone* does portray some of the youngsters carrying out unbridled barbaric acts, its emphasis is on the majority of the

³¹³ In the USA teenagers are required to study modules such as 'Political Science', 'Citizenship' and 'US Government and Politics'; likewise in the UK modules in 'Citizenship Studies', 'Government and Politics', and 'Modern Studies' are taught in secondary education.

survivors' instinctive will and ability to self-govern both themselves and their community, without the need for an imposing higher authority; this is not something that they have to be taught, or dictated, to do. Once more this is a text that highlights the complementary development of autonomy and social responsibility. *Gone* depicts a community that innately desires social order as a whole, and, as such, could attract criticism that it is hardly transformative. Bradford *et al.*, for example, state that many 'contemporary texts' simply 'reinscribe conservative views and values embedded within narrative and discursal features' and argue that works of fiction which employ utopian or dystopian themes should have a 'transformative purpose' (Bradford *et al.* 2008, 6). *Gone* is 'transformative', however, in that it questions what it is to be an autonomous, individual 'adult', and it is therefore interesting that Grant has chosen fifteen as his 'cut-off' point for life in the FAYZ. Teenagers are in a totally conflicted state when it comes to regarding themselves, and having others regard them, as 'adult'. In the United States, the age of majority can be anywhere between eighteen and twenty-one, depending upon which state an individual lives in.³¹⁴ The age of majority is the threshold of adulthood as it is conceptualised and declared in law. It is the chronological moment when minors cease to legally be considered children and assume control over their persons, actions, and decisions, thereby terminating the legal control and legal responsibilities of their parents or guardians over and for them. Legally then, there is no recognition of adolescence, one is either a child or an adult, one is either deemed capable of self-government or one is not.

³¹⁴ The UK is also home to similar confusion. Whilst the age of majority is eighteen in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, in Scotland, under the 1991 Age of Legal Capacity (Scotland) Act, it is sixteen. The vast majority of countries, however, set majority at eighteen.

In real terms there are certain specific actions which a person who attains the age of majority is permitted to take which they could not do before. These may include entering into a legal binding contract, buying stocks and shares, voting, buying and/or consuming alcohol, driving on public roads, and marrying without obtaining the consent of others. To further complicate matters for the adolescent, however, the age of majority should not be confused with, to name but a few, the legal: age of sexual consent, marriageable age, drinking age, driving age, and voting age, all of which may sometimes be independent of, and set at a different age from, the age of majority. Teenagers may therefore be deemed old enough to earn money, pay taxes,³¹⁵ fight for their country, drive, and get married, yet may not be considered old enough to vote for their own government or to buy alcohol; indeed, the paradoxical permutations are endless.³¹⁶ By featuring adolescents under the age of fifteen, Grant is avoiding all the legal absurdities and inconsistencies that are inherent in any particular nation

³¹⁵ Certainly, in both the USA and the UK there is no minimum age whatsoever for paying taxes; any child, from infancy onwards, who has any form of income above the tax threshold, is required to pay income tax to their government, but denied a say in how that government spends those taxes until he or she reaches voting age, which, confusingly, may or may not be the same as their age of majority.

³¹⁶ Conversely, for example, adolescents may be old enough to vote, but not old enough to get married, depending on where they live. In the USA the age of sexual consent varies by state and is between sixteen and eighteen; the legal drinking age is almost exclusively twenty-one; the driving age varies by state and is between sixteen and twenty-one, the legal marriageable age is almost exclusively eighteen; the voting age is seventeen; and one can serve in the military from the age of seventeen. In the UK the age of sexual consent is sixteen; the legal marriageable age is eighteen, with the exception of Scotland where it is sixteen; the voting age in the UK is eighteen, with moves by the Scottish Government, at time of writing, to lower Scotland's voting age to sixteen. The minimum age for enlisting in the UK armed forces is sixteen. The UK is the only country in Europe which routinely recruits people aged under eighteen; those who sign on when sixteen or seventeen must serve until they are twenty-two. This recruitment of minors has been criticised by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, Parliament's own Joint Committee on Human Rights, and children's charities amongst others.

state's conception of adulthood and rendering them null and void.³¹⁷

Throughout the series, his 'underage' teenagers are seen to be capable of both individual self-government and wider government; they are shown to be able to survive, they see the need to establish various working parties in order to feed and care for themselves and the younger children, and they acknowledge the requirement of a set of guidelines by which to live. They are also variously shown to drink alcohol, smoke, take drugs, brandish guns, teach themselves to drive, and have sex;³¹⁸ these facts are neither particularly glamourised nor are they especially demonised; even their violence, be it mindless thuggery or necessary warfare, is shown to mirror the justifications of 'adult' violence (plausible or otherwise) when it comes down to questions of survival; in their attempts to govern themselves, therefore, Grant's adolescents are not seen to have any greater success, or make greater mistakes, than 'adult' society does.

Sambell argues that children's dystopian fiction is 'compounded by a perceived crisis in the nature of childhood, or, more accurately, in the confidence that adults still know best how to ethically inform and guide children's future lives' (Sambell 2004, 250). The majority of children's and YA futuristic fiction, she states:

forcefully explode[s] the 'myth of the innocent, protected child' (Jenkins 1998, 2) by presenting dark future worlds that radically critique adult ethical legitimacy. These worlds spell the death of childhood as a secure, cherished state, deliberately calling constructions of 'childness' and 'adulthood' into serious question. In

³¹⁷ Generally, in the western world, this 'wrangling' over legal conceptualisations of adulthood starts at the age of sixteen; see above footnote. Even Grant's protagonists who avoid the 'poof' on their fifteenth birthday will not be seen to reach sixteen (under the dome, at least), as the action of the entire series takes place over just under a year.

³¹⁸ Caine's girlfriend, Diana, is pregnant in *Plague*, and Sam and Astrid sleep together for the first time in *Fear*. When they first have sex, the boys are fifteen and the girls are fourteen and fifteen respectively. Diana has a baby daughter in *Fear*, whom the Gaiaphage inhabits to give itself form.

most children's science fiction to date this sense of perceived crisis surrounding the adult world has been rendered in extraordinarily negative terms, often with child characters pitted against a powerful adult regime. (Sambell 2004, 250)

This analysis is unquestionably fitting for *The Hunger Games*, where 'adult ethical legitimacy' is certainly critiqued, 'the adult world is rendered in extraordinarily negative terms' and the child/adolescent characters are 'pitted against a powerful adult regime'; *Gone*, however, rather falls betwixt and between its parameters. Whilst life in Perdido Beach certainly seems to portray the 'death of childhood as a secure, cherished state', and constructions of 'childness' and 'adulthood' are called 'into serious question', nevertheless *Gone* does not perceive the adult world 'in extraordinarily negative terms' and does not pit the characters against a 'powerful adult regime'; they are, in fact, pitted against each other on an even footing. *Gone* seeks to empower the adolescents by rendering them culturally 'adult' and showing them to be both as capable and as fallible as legal adults; rather than critiquing 'adult ethical legitimacy', the novel calls for adolescents to be considered as legitimate adults. *Gone* directly contests Sambell's assumption that '[r]omantic conceptions of childhood lead the children's author to represent childhood as an antidote to corrupt adulthood, as well as seeing childhood as being at the mercy of it' (Sambell 2004, 252). By 'disappearing' any characters that may legally be deemed 'adult' under a myriad of legal definitions, Grant removes all contemporary legal conceptualisations of 'adulthood' from *Gone* and challenges what it is to be adult; his protagonists are not 'emblem[s] of hope for the future, capable of transforming and transcending adult mores' (Sambell 2004,

252), but are fully autonomous and agentive adolescents in the here-and-now, capable of adult decision making, capable of having a say in how their world is run and equally capable of making a mess of it. Despite its fantastic setting, the issues in *Gone* are not futuristic but contemporary, it is not that adolescents want to ‘transform and transcend adult mores’, but that they want to be recognised as fully functioning adults, adult incompetency notwithstanding.

At the start of Caine’s rule, even Sam acknowledges that Caine is very good at establishing his authority: ‘Each time Sam had dealt with him, he came away impressed at the way Caine could act with complete confidence, as if he had been born to the job’ (171).³¹⁹ Order is imposed, an emergency communication system is set up, jobs are allocated and clean-up and search parties are in operation;³²⁰ but in a just a few days doubts begin to grow as it becomes clear that Caine rules by violence and fear³²¹ and wishes to dominate rather than lead. Caine only allows any of the survivors who have supernatural powers to use those powers if they are closely allied to him, and outlaws their use in the wider community,³²² as a result, when one of Sam’s friends, Bette, is found performing ‘magic tricks’

³¹⁹ Sam is initially relieved to relinquish all responsibility to Caine. Caine, recognising both the magnitude of Sam’s supernatural power and his natural ‘heroic’ appeal to others, appoints Sam as ‘fire chief’ in order to keep him close. Sam accepts the appointment, ‘[n]ot because he wanted to, but because so many other people seemed to want him to’ (169).

³²⁰ One of the more poignant incidents in the book is when Sam, Quinn and a much younger girl named Brooke, who together form ‘search team three’, find a dead baby in one of the houses. With the disappearance of its parents, the infant has starved to death. Sam is the only one of the group able to face up to the task of disposing of the body.

³²¹ Whilst the survivors who gravitate towards Sam become responsible for providing food, child-care arrangements and the setting up of a make-shift medical centre, Caine’s followers are more interested in the policing and juridical aspects of society, with particular emphasis on dealing out punishments.

³²² Caine is later discovered to have left many Coates pupils with their hands ‘plastered’ in blocks of concrete to prevent them from using their powers; they are fed from troughs when anyone remembers to feed them, and are subsequently starving, filthy and ‘stinking of [their] own bodily fluids’ (357).

(176)³²³ she is severely beaten and later dies of her injuries, this causes the group to begin to question the nature of Caine's leadership. After further adventure, misadventure and sub-plot, the community eventually splits into two camps with the survivors having to choose whether to follow Sam or Caine. Sam initially tells Astrid that he is scared of the 'rush', the 'huge scary rush' that his supernatural power gives him, and asserts that he does not want to be corrupted, and does '[not] want to be Caine'; he is, he professes, just a boy who 'want[s] to go surfing' (194). Later, ashamed of shirking his responsibilities, he admits that he is 'tired of avoiding the fight ... [and] ... tired of trying to run away' (347); he finally 'steps up'³²⁴ and takes the fight to Caine. Although *Gone* challenges perceived conceptions of adulthood throughout, nevertheless it still follows the *Bildungsroman* formula, and it is at this point in the novel that Sam is understood to have completely matured to adulthood, albeit that he is only on the cusp of his fifteenth birthday. The dichotomy of power between Sam and Caine lays the foundation for the rest of the novel and the entire *Gone* series, which goes on to question the nature of power and leadership and features many battles between the two camps.³²⁵ However, in order to stay in the dome

³²³ Bette could make her hands glow.

³²⁴ There are repeated references to Sam's reluctance to 'step up' in the early part of the novel. When he finally does 'step up', it contrasts nicely with the fact that he does not 'step out'.

³²⁵ Although it is this dichotomy between Sam and Caine that gives the series its most exciting face-offs and battles, as the series progresses it transpires that there is, in fact, a three-way split for power; Albert Hillsborough, despite having no mutant powers, increasingly becomes the most powerful and influential person in the FAYZ. In *Gone* Albert keeps the McDonald's open, feeding the survivors, until it runs out of supplies. He sees the necessity of having to incentivise people to work if they are to rebuild society, and acknowledges that they will not work for nothing. Albert therefore devises a new currency and subsequently creates an economy. He is highly respected, gets elected to the Town Council in *Lies*, and by *Plague* he is effectively running Perdido Beach and is regarded as even more powerful than Sam. Again, the text could be criticised for reinscribing 'conservative views and values', but Albert is no WASPish Harvard-educated economics graduate, he is a fourteen year-old African-American from a poor family who is culturally an adolescent, and legally a child.

and have these battles, Sam and Caine first have to find out how to defy the 'stepping out' process.

Caine's motives for wanting to stay in the FAYZ are clear, believing his powers are 'of a whole different order' (248) he sees himself as an unchallengeable leader, 'the most powerful person in th[is] whole new world' (509).³²⁶ "I don't want to die. And I don't want to suddenly find myself back in the world. I like it here in the FAYZ" (251) he tells Sam. In order to find out how to beat the 'poof', Caine orders his close allies Jack, Diana and Drake³²⁷ to restrain and film Andrew, one of the Coates' pupils who has disobeyed Caine's orders and whose fifteenth birthday is imminent. Like all the others who have 'stepped out', Andrew disappears in the blink of an eye, however, when they play back the slowed-down film frame by frame, a clearer picture of the process emerges.³²⁸ They see Andrew smiling, his ropes slipping, and reaching out as if 'for a hug' (380):

Andrew was clearly visible, smiling, happy, transformed, with arms outstretched. The thing he was reaching towards looked like a light flare, a reflection of something, except that it was an almost fluorescent green and all the lights had been white. ... It took a few seconds for the image to focus into the green cloud. It took several layers of enhancement before they could see what looked like a hole ringed by needle-sharp teeth. (381)

The group concurs that this 'thing' certainly does not 'look like something you'd be reaching out for', and agrees that Andrew 'was seeing something different':

³²⁶ Quinn (106) and Astrid (134) also make reference to the fact that they are now in a 'new world'.

³²⁷ Computer Jack is an easily manipulated technological guru who later defects to Sam's camp in *Plague*; Diana Ladriss is Caine's would-be girlfriend and chief *aide-de-camp*; and Drake Merwin is a psychopathic sadist who frequently challenges Caine's authority.

³²⁸ "It altered time somehow, accelerated Andrew's time," Jack said, thinking aloud. "So for Andrew, it was all lasting a lot longer than it was for us. For him it may have been ten seconds, or even ten minutes, although for us it was less than the blink of an eye" (381).

Diana said, “He didn’t just poof. He saw something. He reached out to it. That green thing, what looks like some kind of a monster to us, must have looked like something else to Andrew.”

“What though?”

“Whatever he wanted it to be,” Diana said. “Whatever he wanted so badly at that moment that he reached for it. If I had to guess, I’d say that Andrew saw his mommy.” (381)

Concluding that the ‘big blink’ is not something that just ‘happens’, but that ‘deception is involved’: it is a ‘trick’, a ‘lie’ and a ‘seduction’, the important question for Caine is whether or not it is possible to say ‘no’ and survive. Drake, however, has something else on his mind: “OK, I get the mommy thing. But I got another question ... What’s that thing with the teeth?” (381-382).

‘[T]hat thing with the teeth’ is, of course, ‘the Darkness’,³²⁹ the malignant entity that lies in the centre of the ‘bubble’, miles beneath Perdido Beach, seeking to control the survivors. Diana is only partially correct when she says that the ‘thing’ looks like what an individual would most want at the moment of reaching for it, but completely right when she says it is like ‘a seduction’. It is not that the individual conjures up a desired apparition, but that the Darkness, which is agentive, presumes that all of the survivors would want their mother and this is what it gives them; more often than not, the Darkness is correct, and the youngsters reach towards the apparition and ‘step out’. The motives of the Darkness are not made clear in *Gone*,³³⁰ but one can conjecture that it believes that by getting rid of anyone nearing

³²⁹ See earlier footnote.

³³⁰ It assumes increasing prominence, importance and threat throughout the series. In *Fear* it inhabits Diana’s baby daughter in order to give itself form; however readers will have to wait until the publication of *Light* until all is revealed.

the threshold of adulthood³³¹, it will find the remaining survivors easier to manipulate and control for whatever purposes it may require. Despite being agentive, there are, however, 'limits to the power of the Darkness, no matter how terrifying it might be ... and there [are] limits to what the Darkness kn[ows], as well' (329). The Darkness gets it wrong when it believes that all of the survivors will automatically reach out to their mothers.

Both Sam and Caine are particularly conflicted about their mother. Sam vacillates between desiring his mother and resenting her; he dreams about his mother and wants her back (124), yet feels a large amount of bitterness towards her because of the way she makes him feel about himself.³³² At one point in the novel Sam is trying to summon his powers in order to save the group when they are trapped by a group of coyotes in the miner's cabin; he looks for his anger:³³³

It was easy to find the anger. He was angry at so many things.

But for some reason, when he tried to focus on the outrage of this attack, his mind's eye did not call up pictures of the coyote leader, or even of Caine. The picture in his mind was of his own mother.

Stupid. Wrong. Unfair or him, even cruel.

³³¹ i.e. previously held conceptions of adulthood.

³³² Prior to the FAYZ Sam had witnessed a fight between his mother and his stepfather; not fully understanding the situation he had become frightened, and, mistakenly thinking that verbal aggression would lead to physical violence, had, in fear, used his supernatural power to burn his stepfather's raised hand off. His mother had covered up the incident at the hospital, but his stepfather left home thereafter with the result that Sam and his mother had to move to a 'shabby bungalow' in a 'decrepit neighbourhood', and his mother had to take on a 'low-paying job with lousy hours' (30). Sam feels both guilt and resentment; guilt that he has been the cause of the situation, and resentment towards his mother for making him feel that way: 'He didn't like it when she said that, about him being the man of the house. The man of the house now. Now. Maybe she didn't really mean anything by it. But how could she not?' (30)

³³³ When Sam initially discovered his powers, prior to the FAYZ, he thought 'it was fear that made the power work' (323) and kept them hidden. After the FAYZ, when he first feels the need to use his powers, he tries to call them up at will; however, he finds he cannot simulate fear. Astrid helps him to realise that 'anger is fear aimed outward', (323) and that Sam needs to be angry to summon his powers.

But still, when he reached for his anger, it was his mother he saw.
(387)

Later, Sam can still feel ‘the residue of rage at his mother’ and acknowledges that: ‘It was childish. Shameful, really. Wrong.’ He has been using his mother as a scapegoat, something which he readily acknowledges: ‘He needed someone to blame, and his anger had been building at his mother since long before the FAYZ’ (401). But mad as he is, Sam recognises that it must be worse for Caine: ‘I was the son she kept. He was the one she gave away’ (401).

Caine does indeed have ‘mommy issues’ (464), as Diana drily and succinctly puts it, and he understandably questions why his mother would keep one baby and give the other up for adoption.³³⁴ Whilst he too desires his mother, he also expresses rage and resentment towards her and, at the same time, is jealous of Sam: “‘You didn’t grow up not knowing who you were. You didn’t have to create yourself out of your own imagination, out of your own will’”. Sam, however, points out that he too grew up with ‘no explanation’ and ‘no truth’ (547), just like Caine. *Gone* culminates with the first of the many battles between the two boys and their respective supporters which take place throughout the series, and the final explosive showdown between Caine and Sam takes place at the exact moment they are due to ‘step out’. Both boys are suddenly faced with the vision of their mother beckoning to them and telling them that she can take them to a safe place. Sam, who does not know about the false temptation of the

³³⁴ In *Fear* it is hinted that the boys possibly have two different fathers (a biological possibility known, but not identified in the text, as heteropaternal superfecundation), and that their mother had always felt ‘uneasy’ about Caine. The publication of *Light* should, as its title suggests, throw some light on all the unanswered questions posed throughout the series.

Darkness, resists because he is angry at his mother for lying to him in the past, but more importantly because he sees the need to stay and fight to save Astrid and the others;³³⁵ Caine, who willingly wants to stay in the FAYZ and knows that what he is seeing is not real, still momentarily succumbs to the temptation of the illusion and seeks answers from it: “Why?” Caine asked in a small child’s voice. ... “Why him and not me?” (550). Their mother moves from gentle entreaty, pleading with ‘both [her] boys’ to come with her and ‘be a family’ (550), to angry demand, furiously commanding them to come to her; both boys, however, resist her possessive parental claim over them, realising that to succumb to the wishes of the mother would be to lose their new-found independence; withstanding all her appeals and commandments they assert their own autonomy: ‘I’m my own man’, states Sam; ‘[a]nd I was never yours’ (551), avers Caine, at which point:

The face of their mother wavered. The tender flesh seemed to break apart in jigsaw-puzzle pieces. The gently smiling, pleading mouth melted, collapsed inwards. In its place a mouth ringed with needle-sharp teeth. Eyes filled with green fire. (551)

Their mother is finally figured as a frightening *vagina dentata*, threatening to take them back into the womb and completely disempower them; it is

³³⁵ Initially Sam had wanted to turn his back on his responsibilities, now, however, he turns his back on the possibility of escape. Like Katniss who turned down the chance to run away from District 12 with Gale, and subsequently refused to kill Peeta and become the victor in the Hunger Games, Sam is therefore seen to have developed psychosocial maturity throughout the text. In the language of Greenberger, he is now willing to modify his personal goals in the interest of social goals; he is ready to form alliances with others to promote those social goals; and he is prepared to invest in long-term social goals by opting to stay in the FAYZ rather than allowing his own sense of self-interest to dictate his actions and prompt him to escape. These are autonomous choices that Sam makes; no-one forces his hand.

imperative to their autonomy that they resist.³³⁶ Once again this is a warning against regression, against losing the power and autonomy that they now have.

Sam and Caine, like Peeta and Katniss in *The Hunger Games*, cannot conceive of themselves returning to live happily in the family home. They too have transcended their dependence on family and the adult community to reach 'a higher plane of psychological and intellectual existence'; however they have achieved this by negotiating the balance between an emerging sense of self as a competent individual, and transformed, but continued, feelings of connection with significant others. Caine³³⁷ now wants to rule the community, and Sam feels responsible for protecting it from that rule.³³⁸ Once all the other adolescents in *Gone* learn how to refuse the 'stepping out' process on their fifteenth birthday it is up to them to decide whether or not to stay in the dome; the ones who elect to stay have, like Peeta and Katniss and Sam and Caine, learned the

³³⁶ This is another example of the depiction of the father as weak and the mother as evil that is present in many fairytales. As previously stated, despite being twins, it is believed that Sam and Caine have different fathers, neither of whom figures at all in the text. If the boys conceive of anyone as evil or rejecting, it is their shared mother who literally rejected Caine and figuratively abandoned Sam when the dome came down. Both boys remain conflicted about their feelings for their mother, however, and the Darkness reflects this conflict by vacillating between presenting itself as the benign, caring mother and the evil, threatening mother in a bid to coerce the boys to cooperate with it.

³³⁷ Although Caine is the antagonist, the trajectory of his psychosocial development is still the same, and, as I have already argued, the text does not set out to particularly romanticise children.

³³⁸ In *Gone* Sam's primary motive for staying in the dome is so that he can protect the others. As the series progresses, however, and the survivors make a life for themselves, he reluctantly admits that he would miss his power were it to disappear should the barrier ever come down; when he says this he can be construed as referring to not only his supernatural power, but his powerful place in the community and his newly conceived 'adult' autonomy. This goes for many of the survivors. Sam is caught out in a lie by Toto (who has the power to tell truth from lie) when he claims that he does want the barrier to come down, and his friend Dekka points out that he would not be the only one who did not want things to change: "There's kids who pray every night for all this to be over. There's other kids who pray every night that the barrier stays right where it is" (*Plague*, 291-293).

importance of intelligent action and autonomy.³³⁹ These adolescents are deemed ‘adult’ in a world where there are no adults to say otherwise.

What Country, Friends, Is This? Or: ‘Smart Boys Make Useless Men’

Todd Hewitt is another boy feverishly counting down the days in Patrick Ness’ YA futuristic dystopian novel, *The Knife of Never Letting Go*.³⁴⁰ Todd has been taught that a boy turns into a man at thirteen, and that this symbolises ‘the day you eat from the Tree of Knowledge and go from innocence into sin’ (228), but until now he has had no idea what this means. When Todd’s adoptive father Ben opens up his Noise and shows Todd the truth about what happens to boys on the day they become men, he is thrown into conflict about adulthood:

One month’s time is the first thing it says –
 And here comes my birthday –
 The day I’ll become a man –
 And –
 And –
 And there it all is –
 What happens –
 What the other boys did who became men –
 All alone –
 All by themselves –
 How every last bit of boyhood is killed off –
 And –
 And –
 And what actually happened to the people who –

³³⁹ Throughout the series some of the teenagers are still shown to elect to ‘step out’ and return to the arms of their ‘mothers’, despite not knowing what this will really mean for them; Bettelheim would have it that this is an act of regression.

³⁴⁰ *The Knife of Never Letting Go* is the first part of Patrick Ness’ *Chaos Walking* trilogy; the other novels are *The Ask and the Answer* and *Monsters of Men*.

Holy crap –

And I don't want to say no more about it.

And I can't say at all how it makes me feel.

I look at Ben and he's a different man than he always was, he's a different man to the one I've always known.

Knowledge is dangerous. (52)

Todd is the only boy left in Prentisstown, a small settlement on New World where all boys become men at the age of thirteen.³⁴¹ New World is a far-off planet which has been colonised for about twenty years by Christian settlers who 'left behind the corrupshun³⁴² and sin of Old World³⁴³ ... to start a new life of purity and brotherhood in a whole new Eden' (26).³⁴⁴

The planet's fledgling community has been struck by a previously unknown virus, endemic to New World, which results in all thought becoming audible³⁴⁵ and is described as an ever-present cascade of 'Noise': 'There ain't nothing but Noise in this world, nothing but the constant thoughts of

³⁴¹ There are no hazy conceptions of adulthood in New World and the state of adolescence is not recognised; childhood ends at thirteen and adulthood immediately begins as all hands are needed to farm the land.

³⁴² The novel is written from Todd's viewpoint in a first-person narrative; Todd has had no formal education and the text often employs the vernacular to express this, i.e. 'corrupshun'. As such it is reminiscent of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, one of the first novels in major American literature to be written in the vernacular. There is more to connect *Huckleberry Finn* with *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, however: Huck's struggle between his instinctive goodness and the corrupt values of society also provides the template for Todd's similar struggle; in addition, the rural setting, the presence of the river and the pursuit also recalls Huck and Jim's adventures as they flee, as well as bringing to mind Davis Grubb's *The Night of the Hunter*, with the Prentisstown preacher, Aaron, mirroring Grubb's reverend-turned-killer Harry Powell.

³⁴³ 'Old World' is presumably, but never explicitly stated to be, Earth.

³⁴⁴ New World has not, in fact, turned out to be an Eden; life remained hard for the settlers, crops failed, there was sickness and no prosperity.

³⁴⁵ Including the thoughts of animals, but excluding, as Todd later discovers, the thoughts of women.

men and things coming at you and at you and at you' (13).³⁴⁶ The Prentisstown settlement is entirely male, and Todd has been brought up to believe that the Noise was a warfare germ released by the Spackle, New World's native species, and that this 'weapon' killed all the women on the planet. He has also been brought up to believe that Prentisstown is the only settlement on New World.³⁴⁷

Although all thought is audible, the men can hide truths and put forward lies amid the cacophony of their Noise:

Cuz you can lie in the Noise, even when everyone knows what yer thinking, you can bury stuff under other stuff, you can hide it in plain sight, you just don't think it clearly or you convince yerself that the opposite of what yer hiding is true and then who's going to be able to pick out from the flood what's real water and what's not going to get you wet? (22)

At the outset of the novel, therefore, Todd is unaware that the way a boy becomes considered a man in Prentisstown is to kill another man, a rite of passage that the despotic Mayor Prentiss has devised. By making everyone '*complicit* in the crimes of Prentisstown' (448, emphasis in

³⁴⁶ Ness regularly indicates this Noise through the use of distinctive, overlapping, messy, chaotic and bold fonts to describe the layer upon layer of Noise that assaults the ear, see pages 21-23 for an example. Prentisstown's Noise is very aggressive and defensive: 'Cuz as me the almost-man looks up into that town, I can hear the 146 men who remain. I can hear every ruddy last one of them. Their Noise washes down the hill like a flood let loose right at me, like a fire, like a monster the size of the sky come to get you cuz there's nowhere to run. ... Here's what it's like. Here's what every minute of every day of my stupid, stinking life in this stupid, stinking town is like. Never mind plugging yer ears, it don't help at all ... And them's just the words, the voices talking and moaning and singing and crying. There's pictures, too, pictures that come to yer mind in a rush, no matter how much you don't want 'em, pictures of memories and fantasies and secrets and plans and lies, lies, lies' (20-22). Later Todd discovers that not all men's Noise in New World is quite so tortured.

³⁴⁷ Todd uncovers these untruths throughout the novel as he comes across other settlements when he is forced to flee Prentisstown. Not only are there other communities, but there are women; not only are there women, but they are immune to the Noise virus. The most shocking lie that has been fed to Todd is that the women were not killed off by the virus, but by their own kinsmen. Driven mad by their own Noise and the silence of the women, the men of Prentisstown, 'swayed by Mayor Prentiss and the preachings of Aaron, who used to say that what was hidden must be evil' (393), slaughtered all of the women along with any of the men who tried to protect them: 'They couldn't stand the silence. ... They couldn't stand women knowing everything about them and them knowing nothing about women' (392).

original), Mayor Prentiss can rid the town of any detractors from his autocratic rule and ensure the allegiance of the remainder of the community;³⁴⁸ this observance is also sanctioned by the town priest, Aaron,³⁴⁹ who repeatedly states the mantra: “If one of us falls, we all fall” (7). About a month prior to his thirteenth birthday Todd finds out that he has been lied to all his life. He is out in the swamp gathering apples with his dog, Manchee, when he detects a ‘hole in the Noise’ (13), a spot of moving silence, which, to Todd, ‘is impossible’. Ben and Cillian, Todd’s adoptive parents, immediately force Todd and Manchee to flee Prentisstown;³⁵⁰ because Todd is unwilling to go, and does not understand why he is being sent away, Ben ‘opens up his Noise’ (52) and shows Todd the full horror of what is required of him when he turns thirteen. Whilst searching for the other settlements Todd comes across the spot of silence again and meets a girl, who, he realises, is causing the silence. Although the girl says nothing initially as she is still in shock, Todd later finds out her name is Viola; Viola leads Todd through the swamp to her spaceship where her parents’ bodies are half-buried, and it is apparent that she has crash-

³⁴⁸Because of the slaughter Prentisstown has been isolated and outlawed by the rest of New World; it is illegal for any Prentisstown ‘man’ to set foot in any of the other settlements. They have all, unilaterally, been declared criminals and risk execution if they cross the swamp. Having realised the long-term implications of killing all the women, it is Mayor Prentiss’ intention to wait until the last boy in Prentisstown becomes a man (by his reckoning) and then to form an army and march on the rest of New World, which he intends to dominate.

³⁴⁹ Aaron is a fanatic; as Todd is the last ‘boy’ in Prentisstown and the entire town knows that he will resist the ritual because it is not in his nature to kill, Aaron makes it his mission that he should sacrifice himself and that Todd should kill him. Nigh on indestructible, Aaron appears many times in the novel taking increasingly extreme actions to goad Todd into killing him.

³⁵⁰ Ben and Cillian have always planned to get Todd away from Prentisstown before his birthday and before he learns the truth so that when he makes it to other settlements they can read his innocence in his Noise. Their predicament has been that because Todd is so young, they have had to wait until the very last minute so that he has the best chance of survival as they cannot go with him. Their hand is forced a month early by Todd finding the spot of silence and potentially uncovering all the Prentisstown lies which would then be audible in his Noise and liable to endanger him. Todd thinks that the silence means that the native Spackle, who he believed the colonisers had eradicated in a previous war, are back. He is wrong on both counts; the Spackle were never completely eradicated, and the spot of silence is not due to their presence.

landed on New World.³⁵¹ In yet another echo of the abandoned Hansel and Gretel, Viola and Todd become interdependent and begin travelling together through the swamps and forests; severed from his family and his community, Todd soon realises that he is in charge of his own destiny: ‘That’s the thing I’m learning about being thrown out on yer own. Nobody does *nothing* for you. If you don’t change it, it don’t get changed’ (110, emphases in original).

Following Braithwaite’s identification of sub-genres in YA post-disaster fiction it is apparent that *The Knife of Never Letting Go* is a ‘quest/adventure text’, as the scenario is created:

in which a particular quest or adventure can be played out. ... The nature of the disaster usually affects the type of quest or adventure in the narrative. This is true of survivor and social order novels as well, of course, but with quest/adventure novels the question is usually less a matter of survival or negotiation with a particular social order than it is with dealing with a task at hand. (Braithwaite 2010, 14)

Todd and Viola have the shared, yet distinct, quest of warning others.

Viola, who had been on board a scout ship as part of an advance party, must try to communicate with the other ships that are coming to settle in New World and warn them of the dangers that are inherent in the

³⁵¹ Ness has evidently named Viola after Shakespeare’s ship-wrecked heroine in *Twelfth Night* who washes up on the shores of Illyria. Although Ness’ heroine does not intentionally disguise herself as a boy, as does her Shakespearean predecessor, she too has to make her way in a world of men at the start of the novel. There is also some initial gender (not to mention species) confusion, again not because Viola is purposely disguised in any way, but because Todd has never seen a ‘real’ girl. Todd has seen girls ‘in the Noise of their fathers’ and in ‘vids’; these girls ‘are small and polite and smiley. They wear dresses and their hair is long’ (68). Viola on the other hand does not have long hair: ‘And she ain’t wearing no dress, she’s wearing clothes that look like way newer versions of mine ... and she ain’t that small, she’s my size ... and she’s sure as all that’s unholy not smiley’ (69). Even Todd’s dog questions what Viola is: “‘Spackle?’” Manchee barks quietly’. ‘So how do I know? How do I know it’s a girl?’ Todd asks, and he answers his own question: ‘I just know. I just do. I can’t tell you but I look and I see and I just know ... it’s there and she’s a girl’ (69).

environment;³⁵² and Todd must warn the other existing settlements about Mayor Prentiss, who plans to form an army and march on the rest of New World. Whilst Viola readily and clearly identifies her own quest, the same cannot be said for Todd. Although Ben has written on Todd's map that he 'must warn them' (139),³⁵³ initially he neither knows that there are other people to warn, nor what, exactly, it is he should be warning them about. He still does not know the entire truth about Prentisstown's history and does not know of the mayor's plans; Todd's quest consequently unfurls to both himself and the reader as the text progresses. Despite Todd being surrounded by Noise and 'informayshun' (391), he knows very little.

By figuring the Noise virus as the futuristic disaster, therefore, the text also offers comment on the contemporary nature of information. The Noise can be construed as a metaphorical Internet, broadcasting people's thoughts into the minds of those around them.³⁵⁴ When Todd is overwhelmed by this constant barrage of mental 'Noise' he likes to go to the swamp to seek some reprieve; although the swamp is not silent, the Noise of the animals there is less intrusive:

The loud is a different kind of loud, because swamp loud is just curiosity, creachers figuring out who you are and if yer a threat. Whereas the town knows all about you already and wants to know more and wants to beat you with what it knows till how can you have any of yerself left at all? (10-11)

³⁵² When Shakespeare's Viola washes up on the shores of Illyria asking: 'What country, friends, is this?' (*Twelfth Night*, 1.2), there is both hope and wonder in her tone; although Ness' Viola echoes this phrase when she asks of Todd: "'What is this place?'" (137), her tone is one of fear, and she knows immediately that she must warn the other settlers.

³⁵³ However, because Todd has had no real education he cannot even read Ben's message properly without Viola's help.

³⁵⁴ For Ness, the idea of the Noise, where everyone can hear everyone else's thoughts, 'is just the logical next step from the kind of world we live in today: texting, emails, messaging, the Internet. Information is everywhere, whether you want to hear it or not, and it's harder and harder to be a private person. I just went another step to wonder how hard it would be for a teenager at their most awkward age to have no privacy at all. It would be a nightmare really.' See Lovereading, 'Q & A with Patrick Ness'.

Todd's life is constantly scrutinised and he is continually assailed by information, conceivably this reflects the experience of contemporary adolescents. Information is absolutely everywhere today; in the Western world we are totally and constantly connected to each other by and through technology: texts, e-mails, voicemails, mobile phones, the Internet, the World Wide Web, Skype, CCTV etc., and there is no getting away from it.³⁵⁵ If there is a contemporary social critique embedded in the novel, then it is twofold: the text seems to question exactly how useful all this information is if the individual lacks the ability to analyse, sift and filter it all; and it also stresses our complete lack of privacy, when our every action is capable of being immediately broadcast to the entire world via camera phones, YouTube and Facebook. Both issues underline a disappearing wholly-owned sense of self and autonomy; as Todd asks: 'how can you have any of yerself left at all?' (10-11)

Todd has had little education as Mayor Prentiss has put an end to all formal learning, decreeing it as "detrimental to the discipline of our minds" (18). Having outlawed the teaching of reading and writing, the Mayor then had all the books in Prentisstown burned, 'every single one of them, even the ones in men's homes, cuz apparently books were detrimental as well' (18). Although Ben tried to teach Todd to read, the Mayor 'caught wind of it in [his] Noise' (19) and had Ben punished. This denial of education in Prentisstown allows the Mayor to exert further totalitarian control over the

³⁵⁵ According to Ness, in interview with Daniel Hahn: 'The world is already Noisy. Teenagers today have less privacy than anyone has ever had: everything they think is online; every stupid thing they've done has been filmed and put on to YouTube. I think that's costly – teenage years are when you really need privacy the most, when you're figuring out your boundaries and crossing them, usually. And so I just worried: what would it be like if you really had no escape, and if everybody knew what you were thinking? How awful that would be if you were a teenager.' See Hahn (2010).

community. The older members were either complicit in the original slaughter, or have been subsequently killed themselves for initially resisting and/or later questioning it;³⁵⁶ these executions are carried out by the boys who become men on their thirteenth birthday, and who do not possess the reasoning skills to question the information they have been fed. Despite all the information that is 'out there' in New World, lies can be hidden in 'plain sight' and disinformation is capable of being promulgated:

I know what yer thinking: how can I *not* know if all day, every day I'm hearing every thought of the two men who run my house? That's the thing, tho. Noise is *noise*. It's crash and clatter and it usually adds up to one big mash of sound and thought and picture and half the time it's impossible to make any sense of it all. Men's minds are messy places and Noise is like the active, breathing face of that mess. It's what's true and what's believed and what's imagined and what's fantasized and it says one thing and a completely opposite thing at the same time and even tho the truth is definitely in there, how can you tell what's true and what's not when yer getting *everything?* (42, emphases in the original)

If we were to substitute the idea of the Internet, social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook, or video-sharing sites such as YouTube for Todd's Noise in the above quote it becomes an easy matter to see how the contemporary adolescent may be rendered powerless rather than powerful by all the information that is out there: 'The Noise is a man unfiltered, and without a filter, a man is just chaos walking' (42), thinks Todd. For the contemporary teenager that 'filter' should be the developing adolescent mind which is shown to mature to adulthood by cultivating the skills of

³⁵⁶ Ben and Cillian were caught on the horns of a dilemma at the time of the Prentisstown slaughter; although they were not complicit in the slaughter, they neither joined the fight against Mayor Prentiss at the time, nor did they speak out against it at any point since. Ben refutes Todd's assertion that he and Cillian were 'innocent': "'We didn't fight", he says, "and we didn't die." ... "Not innocent at all"' (395). It is down to Viola to explain to Todd why Ben and Cillian could not have fought: "'They either die fighting for what's right and leave you an unprotected baby," she says, "or they become complicit with what's wrong and keep you alive." I don't know what complicit means but I can guess. They did it for me. All that horror. They did it for me.' (396)

enquiry and analysis. Adolescents should be encouraged to have enquiring, questioning and reasoning minds, rather than simply being accepting of the facts as they are initially presented to them, and the text seems to suggest that there is a danger of these skills being lost.

Knowledge is constantly presented as an area of conflict in the text. Ben tells Todd that 'knowledge is dangerous' (51), a phrase which Todd repeats to himself (52) when he learns of the rite of passage he is expected to carry out. However, Todd also comes to realise that his lack of knowledge is equally dangerous: 'The world's a dangerous place when you don't know enough' (142), and although on balance Todd and Viola are presented as equals throughout, at times Viola is more empowered because of her education and her experience: she can read, she can handle technology, and, importantly, she has been taught to question and reason. Viola questions Todd's lack of knowledge and his acceptance of the facts as they have been presented to him; she questions Prentisstown and New World's history, and she questions why the settlers on New World are not further along in their development. Todd's upbringing has been rather different; although surrounded by information, Ben and Cillian have attempted to keep Todd free from outside influence, 'as innocent as [they] could keep [him]' (396) a sort of Lockean *tabula rasa*,³⁵⁷ for the first part of his life. However, the price of Todd's innocence is ignorance and vulnerability.

³⁵⁷ *Tabula rasa*: a clean slate. The English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) used the term *tabula rasa* to describe the young mind in its uninformed original state before it receives the impressions gained from experience. This differs from Platonic or medieval stances which believed that there were inborn inequalities intrinsic to God-ordained hierarchies in society, church and state.

Ben and Cillian want Todd to grow up to be a free, rational and autonomous being, but see that the development of these qualities in him will be hampered by the imposition of the prejudices of the Prentisstown men, prejudices which propagate subjugation. The Prentisstown men, encouraged by the mayor, are now so enmeshed in their prejudice that they prefer to maintain the status quo rather than to question their deeds; they have ceased to consider whether their actions are the result of the rational and free action that is characteristic of autonomous individuals. Should Todd be subjected to these unquestioned beliefs and ways of being he will be oppressed rather than free to develop his own autonomy. This is why Ben and Cillian sought to protect Todd from the truth behind the Noise of the Prentisstown men for as long as they could, and they have long been planning Todd's escape so that he does not have the men's prejudices imposed on him when he, too, is forced to become a man. On the map that Ben gives Todd he writes: *'There are things you don't know about our history, Todd, and I'm sorry for that but if you knew them you would be in great danger. The only chance you have of a welcome is yer innocence'* (225). The sad irony, of course, is that Todd cannot read this message, and it has to be read to him by Viola; but it is this innocence, nonetheless that ensures he is not immediately killed when he reaches the other communities.

Although Todd is innately endowed to become a reasoning and autonomous being, as are all children, he is vulnerable to what his environment inscribes on him; Ben and Cillian have striven to keep Todd's mind clear of Prentisstown's malign influence as much as they can, and

they have to get Todd away from Prentisstown before he believes in the 'truth' of the ritual and is forced to kill to prove that he is a man. Mayor Prentiss ensures that he and his followers impose upon the growing boys of Prentisstown principles and practices that will increase his own power; this new generation is therefore vulnerable to the oppression of prejudice, as custom habituates them unthinkingly into compliance. "Smart boys make useless men" (61), Aaron tells Todd, and by denying the boys of Prentisstown an education and the opportunity to think for themselves, Mayor Prentiss and Aaron are denying them any autonomy and moulding them to their own purpose:

"You were the last," Ben says. "If he could make every single boy in Prentisstown a man by his own meaning, then he's God ain't he? He's created all of us and is in complete control."

"If one of us falls," I say.

"We all fall," Ben finishes. "That's why he wants you. Yer a symbol. Yer the last innocent boy of Prentisstown. If he can make you fall, then his army is complete and of his own perfect making." (397, emphases in original)

Todd is the Mayor's greatest challenge and he needs Todd, 'the last innocent boy', to be seen to be compliant and to fall. The Mayor's credo that 'if one of us falls, we all fall' is another terrible inversion of Christian belief. As one 'Body of Christ', where the 'body' represents a congregation or community, Christians believe that if one falls, then all fall, and that this is reflected on the entire Church; as such it is an encouragement not to 'fall'³⁵⁸ and to actively seek out opportunities to help others from falling. In Prentisstown, however, the credo has different meaning; it either takes on

³⁵⁸ *I.e.* fall into any kind of sin as defined by Christian teaching. 'The Fall' is a post-biblical expression for the doctrine of Adam's transgression and mankind's consequential inheritance of a sinful nature.

the form of a command: because Mayor Prentiss has fallen, then all must fall; or a threat: if one of the community should 'fail' to fall, then their whole enterprise (marching on New World) will fail. However it is guilt that ultimately underlies the obligation to fall; the men of Prentisstown have all fallen, and it is imperative to them that their whole community should fall so that there are no reminders of their guilt; any detractors from the rule are killed by boys who have been inculcated in this malign 'faith'. The original fall of Adam comes about because he disobeys God and eats from the Tree of Knowledge,³⁵⁹ and, as such, is a story warning against disobedience; obversely, Todd's 'fall' has been commanded by Mayor Prentiss and it is vital to Todd's developing humanity and autonomy that he resists.

As Todd and Viola travel together through New World, Todd constantly carries the hunting knife that Ben gave him which he had once hoped to receive for his birthday. Because the birthday now symbolises the day that he should become both a man and a murderer, the knife becomes an extension of this symbolisation to Todd, and although Todd 'never let[s] go of the knife' (62), neither does he use it when the opportunities present themselves, no matter how justifiable it would be for him to do so:

I could do it. No one on New World would blame me. It'd be my right.

I could just do it.

But a knife ain't just a thing, is it? It's a choice, it's something you *do*. A knife says yes or no, cut or not, die or don't. A knife takes a decision out of your hand and puts it in the world and it never goes back again. (83-84, emphasis in original)

³⁵⁹ Genesis 2-3.

Time and time again Todd refrains from killing, even when he is repeatedly provoked by Aaron, set upon by one of the Farbranch³⁶⁰ men, and threatened with capture by Davy Prentiss, the mayor's son. A fighter but no killer, Todd repeatedly hesitates from delivering a killing blow with the knife. Even though he would be completely justified in killing any of his attackers, Todd is subconsciously avoiding succumbing to Mayor Prentiss' will. Both the reader and Viola, who is witness to all Todd's skirmishes, can see what Todd cannot: he is striving to assert his own autonomy, and he must acquire the inclination to act on what is true and good for himself; Todd, however, believes himself a coward, and feels that the knife castigates him:

I'm still holding the knife. It rests there in my hand, shining at me like blame itself, like the word *coward* flashing again and again. It catches the light of both moons and my God it's a powerful thing. A *powerful* thing, like I'd have to agree to be a part of *it* rather than it being a part of me. (86, emphases in original)

Todd is conflicted by the knife: he wishes to become a man, able to wield the knife, but he does not want to become a murderer, he does not want to be wielded *by* the knife; he can neither use the knife, nor can he let go of 'power at the end of [his] arm' (121).

³⁶⁰Matthew, a Farbranch man, was originally from Prentisstown and lost his mother in the Prentisstown massacre; when he learns that Todd is from Prentisstown he tries to kill him. Farbranch is the first of the other settlements that Todd and Viola reach and this is where Todd meets a New World woman for the first time. Hildy is one of the two leaders in Farbranch, the other is her sister Francia; Farbranch is a matriarchal and benign society, but as Todd and Viola carry on in their travels they come across other communities in which the women are not held in such high esteem. Each settlement is shown to treat its women differently because of their 'difference': their immunity to the noise germ; in some it makes them benignly powerful, in some it makes them a threat to the men and the novel uses the examples of these different communities to explore gender roles and difference: '[F]or a while we all tried to live with it the best we could, found different ways to deal with it, different communities taking their own paths' (390). Explaining his decision to only have the men affected by the Noise germ, Ness, in interview, states: 'The books are all about difference. I think our biggest failing as a species is the inability to see difference as difference – It's either better, so we have to pull it down, or it's worse, so we can exploit it. Difference is rarely ever just difference'. See Hahn. Todd finds out the truth about the women's immunity from the noise germ from Hildy, but she chooses not to explain the truth about the Prentisstown slaughter to Todd, electing to keep him in innocence a while longer. Like Ben and Cillian she realises that if others hear Todd's knowledge of the slaughter in his Noise, they will be against him.

When Viola explains to Todd what they all know: “People can tell, Todd. We can see that you won’t hurt us. That that’s not you” (264), and urges him not to be the kind of man that Prentisstown wants, he is enraged rather than comforted by her words: ‘I don’t let go of the knife. I will never let go of this knife, no matter what she says, no matter how she says it’ (266). Todd sees it as a weakness in himself that he ‘can’t kill a man even when he deserves it’ and vows that this must change in order for him to become man: ‘It’s *got* to or how can I hold my head up?’ (268); his reflections over his failure to kill when he has had the opportunities lead to further self-recrimination and blame:

Cuz if I’d killed Aaron, he couldn’t’ve told Mayor Prentiss where he’d seen me last.

If I coulda killed Mr Prentiss Jr back at the farm, he wouldn’t’ve led the Mayor’s men to Ben and Cillian and wouldn’t’ve lived to harm Manchee so.

If I’d been any kinda killer, I coulda stayed and helped Ben and Cillian defend themselves.

Maybe if I was a killer, they wouldn’t be dead.

And that’s a trade I’d make any day.

I’ll be a killer, if that’s what it takes.

Watch me. (269)

Todd’s ‘fall’, when it comes, is unexpected and astonishingly shocking. Full of pent-up anger and rage, conflicted by his inability to deal the killing blow in even the most justifiable of fights, he then unjustifiably and violently kills

a Spackle in cold blood.³⁶¹ Despite feeling the Spackle's 'fear', 'terror and panic' flying out of his noise, despite realising that the Spackle is 'weaker' than him, and despite Viola begging him to stop and physically trying to pull him away, Todd launches a vicious attack on the 'scared', 'cower[ing]' and 'keening creature' in a horrific attack that takes place over four pages (272-275):

Cuz all I'm thinking ... all I'm thinking and sending forward to him in my red, red Noise are images and words and feelings, of all I know, all that's happened to me, all the times I've failed to use the knife, every bit of me screaming –

I'll show you who's a killer. (273, emphasis in original)

After the attack Todd is physically and repeatedly sick;³⁶² he tries to justify his actions to a shocked Viola, blaming the Spackle for his mother's death; Viola, however, possesses greater reasoning and questioning skills than Todd: "You idiot! You stupid fucking IDIOT! ... How many times have you found out that what you've been told isn't true? ... How many times?"

(276).³⁶³ Although Todd's 'fall' is not presented in a positive light - it is truly appalling³⁶⁴ - nonetheless, it is presented as the moment at which Todd

³⁶¹ He and Viola come across the Spackle who is sitting quietly at his campfire cooking fish; for Todd, however, this scene is totally incomprehensible: 'You might as well just crumple up the world I know and throw it away' (271). Todd has only just recovered from the shock of finding out that there are women on New World, now he discovers that the Spackle, who he believed were responsible for killing his mother, and who he thought had subsequently been eradicated from New World, also still remain. In a variation of the 'red mist descending', Todd's 'Noise turns red' (272) and he cannot make sense of anything other than still believing that this creature is responsible for the death of his mother.

³⁶² His killing of the Spackle haunts Todd throughout the trilogy.

³⁶³ Because he has been lied to about the existence of the Spackle and their culpability regarding the Noise germ, Todd's actions here are not determined by fact and his actions show his vulnerability to being influenced by the prejudices (and lies) of the Prentisstown men, which is what Ben and Cillian sought to remove him from. However, because of the nature of the Noise germ, they could not equip him with the necessary skills needed to allow him to reason with and question what he has been told is true. These are skills that Viola is shown to possess.

³⁶⁴ And is yet another example that contests Sambell's assumption about romantic conceptions of childhood. Although the reader can understand what drives Todd to kill the Spackle, the killing is, and remains, completely unjustifiable.

achieves self-awareness and knowledge, the point at which he, belatedly, acquires the inclination to act autonomously and to start deciding what is true for himself, and the text therefore questions the value of innocence if the price is ignorance; Todd's actions are based on the lies he has been fed all of his life.

Todd no longer sees the knife as symbol of his approaching manhood, but as 'a thing made of metal as separate from a boy as can be, a thing which casts all blame from itself to the boy who uses it' (292); he is so sickened by his actions that he cannot even use the knife to kill an unresisting turtle to feed himself and Manchee. However, he still remains conflicted and seduced by the presence of the knife:

The tip of it juts out and up like an ugly thumb and the serrashuns along one side spring up like gnashing teeth and the blade edge pulses like a vein full of blood.

The knife is alive.

As long as I hold it, as long as I use it, the knife lives, lives in order to take life, but it has to be commanded, it has to have me to tell it to kill, and it wants to, it wants to plunge and thrust and cut and stab and gouge, but I have to want to as well, my will has to join with its will,

I'm the one who allows it and I'm the one responsible.

But the knife wanting it makes it easier.

If it comes to it, will I fail?

"No," whispers the knife.

"Yes," whispers the wind down the river. (341, emphases in original)

The question is not entirely resolved in the novel. When Aaron hunts Todd and Viola down at the book's denouement, he forces Todd into another prolonged, vicious and bloody battle which graphically takes place over ten

pages (454-463)³⁶⁵ at the edge of a waterfall. During the fight Todd deliberately avoids using the knife several times and then it is knocked out of his hand when he falls; as the fight continues on, and Aaron hits Viola to further provoke Todd into killing, he feels the knife calling him:

Take me, it says –

Take me and use me, it says –

Aaron holds open his arms.

“Murder me,” he says. “Become a man.”

Never let me go, says the knife – (459, emphases in original)

Just as Todd is about to succumb to the seduction of the knife, however, ‘another hand is there first’ (461) and Viola picks up the knife and kills Aaron, who tumbles over the edge, ‘[t]aking the knife with him’ (463). Todd insists that he would have killed Aaron and was ready to do so, Viola insists that she could not let him, because then Aaron ‘would have won’ (466).

Todd’s interior monologue emphasises the doubts that still remain:

(But I woulda.)

(I was ready.)

(But the knife is gone.) (465)

And both reader and Todd are not quite sure if he would have delivered the killing blow.

Although Viola has saved Todd from being seen to do Aaron’s bidding and from becoming a ‘man’ by Prentisstown’s standards, she herself is distraught that Aaron has made her ‘fall’, and is extremely upset and distressed by the fact that she ‘*wanted* to kill him’ (467, emphasis in

³⁶⁵ Todd’s ready bravery and ability to fight is never questioned in the text.

original), and Todd realises that he must '[s]ave her like she saved [him]' (467):

“Here’s what I think,” I say and my voice is stronger and thoughts are coming, thoughts that trickle into my Noise like whispers of the truth. “I think maybe *everybody* falls,” I say. “I think maybe we all do. And I don’t think that’s the asking.” ... “I think the asking is whether we get back up again.” (468, emphasis in original)

Todd realises that we are all fallible. *The Knife of Never Letting Go* does not necessarily posit an immediate connection between suitable education and appropriate cultural conditions on the one hand and truth, virtue and happiness on the other, but had Todd been brought up to question and reason, had he not had ‘truths’ imposed on him, then he would at least have had an opportunity to develop autonomously, and to develop a questioning attitude before now. Belatedly Todd realises that he has to permanently reject what experience has so far imposed on him because these beliefs cannot withstand the scrutiny of reason.

Todd, who has lost his ‘parents’ twice over: first his birth parents, then his adoptive parents,³⁶⁶ has not been encouraged to develop autonomously; his birth parents have died and his adoptive parents have been prevented by higher forces from aiding his development. Prentisstown has imposed its version of the ‘truth’ on Todd and this has certainly hampered his ability to develop a questioning attitude and impeded his development, however, it has not prevented it entirely, and through his attachment to, and adventures and experiences with, Viola he is presented with different opportunities to develop his own sense of self and autonomy . With Viola’s help Todd finally learns to question and reject

³⁶⁶ As has Caine, in *Gone*.

the beliefs he has previously held because they do not withstand the scrutiny of reason; conversely the now more mature Todd helps Viola to question the meaning of their respective 'falls' by pointing out that although the falling is serious, what is more important is how one deals with it thereafter.

In the past, Todd has placed too much emphasis on the perceived belief that he will become a man on the day that he turns thirteen; Viola points out that this is a confused notion at best, because New World has a thirteen-month calendar compared to Old World's twelve-month calendar, and by her reckoning he is already over fourteen years old; Ben, too, points out that despite there being sixteen days left till Todd's birthday, by his actions he has proved that he is already a man, and has been 'for a good while now' (399). Todd also learns that to be a man it is not necessary to be infallible by one's own terms, and that if one falls, then one must get back up again and carry on. Finally, Todd must have the confidence to deem himself a man by his own reckoning. Todd and Viola therefore move forward as fully autonomous individuals, which is what Hildy hinted at back in Farbranch when she told them: "Ye've gotta be the ones in charge of your own destinies, don't ye?" (170)

Conclusion

The texts studied here all depict adolescent protagonists negotiating the balance that Baltes and Silverberg describe between an emerging sense of self as a competent individual on the one hand, and transformed, but continued, feeling of connection with significant others on the other, and

this emerging sense of self and autonomy is shown to be accompanied by an equally increasing awareness of their own personal power. In contrast to Trites, who finds that any gain in adolescent power in YA fiction is ultimately repressed and reinscribed within existing power structures, I find that Teen Gothic fiction does not demonstrate the protagonists' growing 'acceptance of their environment', if anything, quite the reverse, as all the protagonists are shown to take control of their own destinies and, in due course, change their environment: Peeta and Katniss become revolutionaries, effecting change in Panem; Sam and his cohorts overcome adversity and rebuild society in Perdido Beach; and, despite the ending to *The Knife of Never Letting Go* seeming devoid of hope,³⁶⁷ Todd and Viola, by the trilogy's end, manage to save New World both from the newly self-appointed 'President' Prentiss' tyranny and from imminent civil war with the Spackle.

I contend that Teen Gothic texts do not endorse the sentiment that adolescents must separate from their parents in order to grow, but depict, instead, the latent and little-acknowledged fear that adolescents have of losing their parents. All the protagonists discussed lose their parents suddenly and are plunged into difficult situations; whilst they are shown to ultimately overcome this loss and gain an increasing sense of self and autonomy, this is not achieved by independently going forward in a state of complete self-reliance, but by forming new relational ties and undertaking greater social commitment. When the protagonists have the opportunity to

³⁶⁷ Viola is shot by Mayor Prentiss' son Davy; when Todd and Viola reach Haven, the large settlement that they had always been heading for, they find that Mayor Prentiss and his army have got there before them and have, in fact, always been one step ahead of them. Mayor Prentiss renames Haven New Prentisstown and installs himself as President of New World. The book ends suddenly and the reader does not know whether Viola survives.

return to their family, for example in *The Hunger Games* and *Gone*, they refuse to do so not because they have been in any particular conflict with their parents,³⁶⁸ but because they have successfully become autonomous individuals and to return now to the family fold would be regressive. The texts have therefore addressed a fear, and shown that it can be overcome.

Teen Gothic fiction is again shown to be a far more empowering genre than mainstream 'realist' fiction; these protagonists are shown to be teenagers who have learned their place in the power structure, and it is a position which most certainly does not have to be modified.

Trites argues that authors themselves become authority figures in adolescent literature, manipulating the reader in to assuming 'subject positions that are carefully constructed to perpetuate the status quo'; I counter that all the adolescents in the Teen Gothic texts presented here question the status quo: they question the 'traditions' of their respective societies, and they question what it is to be adult.

³⁶⁸ Although there are tensions between Katniss and her mother, and Sam and his mother, they are regarded as 'normative' conflict, that is to say they are not extraordinary.

Conclusion

According to Trites, 'adolescent literature seems to delegitimize adolescents ... even though the surface intention of most YA novels is ostensibly to legitimize adolescence' (Trites 2000, 83). She argues that adolescent literature is an institutional discourse which 'serves to simultaneously empower readers with knowledge and to repress them by teaching them to accept a curtailment of their power' (140). In this thesis I have argued that in literature written in the Gothic mode for adolescents the reverse is true. Teen Gothic texts bestow upon the adolescent an alternative viewpoint which allows them to see the world in a different way and crucially allows them to escape the didactic and instructive nature of 'realist' texts. Teen Gothic fiction forestalls the determination of issues 'deemed to be relevant' to adolescents by institutional discourse, and, by opening up an alternative window through which to view the world, allows adolescents to explore, question, and decide for themselves what it really means to be a young adult in contemporary society. Teen Gothic fiction is therefore a far more empowering genre than mainstream 'realist' fiction: it is a genre that does not seek to remind adolescents of their place in the power structure and does not make them give up the subject position of culturally marked adolescent.

I have shown how adolescent sexuality in Teen Gothic fiction is portrayed in positive terms, unlike depictions of adolescent sexuality in 'realist' texts which generally show the teenager to be disempowered by the consequences of their sexual actions. On the contrary, the metaphorical

depictions of sexual desire studied in Chapter One were all, ultimately, positive, and I argued that Teen Gothic fiction allows teenagers to reappropriate their desire from institutional discourse.

In Chapter Two I argued against death being the 'ultimate and unviolable authority in adolescent literature', and disputed the notion that adolescents can only be considered mature when they define themselves in terms of their own death. I demonstrated that 'misrepresentations' of death in Teen Gothic fiction function to represent the ambiguous nature of adolescent understandings of death, and that Teen Gothic fiction yet again presents us with adolescents who do not succumb to institutional discourse.

Finally, in Chapter Three, I explored the nature of power and autonomy in Teen Gothic fiction, and argued that the genre offers the adolescent a new kind of *Bildungsroman* that is, once more, far removed from the institutionalised didacticism at play in 'realist fiction'. Rather than depicting adolescents who are shown to have grown to accept their environment, Teen Gothic fiction presents adolescents who challenge the *status quo*, take care of their own destinies and change their environment.

It has been my aim in this thesis to open up the field of Teen Gothic fiction to wider scrutiny than it has so far been exposed to, and to highlight the many themes and issues that are contained within the genre. Teen Gothic fiction does not begin and end with the female-oriented *Buffy* and *Twilight*, and I would argue that by prioritizing *Buffy* and *Bella*, critics are actually constructing the 'teenager' (and a specifically female one at that) in a rather limited and self-fulfilling way. I would argue that the critics are

perhaps as guilty of 'shaping' and 'producing' the culture as McCallum argues the authors of YA fiction are, because, by focussing exclusively on these two texts, and the area of 'dark romance' in general, and neglecting to give equal attention to other areas, they too are 'determining what issues are deemed to be relevant to young people'.

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