

Fictions of Adolescent Carnality

Sexy sinners
and delinquent deviants

Lydia Kokkola

John Benjamins Publishing Company

Fictions of Adolescent Carnality

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Volume 1

Fictions of Adolescent Carnality. Sexy sinners and delinquent deviants
by Lydia Kokkola

Fictions of Adolescent Carnality

Sexy sinners and delinquent deviants

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For Masja, who has inspired every aspect of my professional life, and
for Kirsti, who has inspired me in everything else that I do.

With love to you both,
Lydia.

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Introduction

*Being a teenager was just something
you got through to be an adult ...
everything good seemed to happen
when you were grown up.*

*I didn't realise I was a teenager, you
see. That's the funny thing, you know.
There weren't teenagers in those days.*

Anonymous quotations from people who were in their teens in the late 1940s and early 1950s (in Everett 1986:9–10)

In the mid-1980s, the BBC aired a documentary series charting the history of the British teenager. This history spanned a period of just three and a half decades, and presented the 'teenager' as a post-war invention. The quotations above, taken from the book based on the series, reveal a shift from regarding adolescence as something one *does* – “something you got through” – to being something one *is*: “I didn't realise I was a teenager”. Already by the mid-1980s, 'being a teenager' had become such a normalised phase in our understanding of human development that a documentary series could present a time when people aged 13–18 were not treated as a separate 'species' as sufficiently curious and unusual to merit a TV series. In the three decades that have passed since the series was aired, many of those who grew up without 'realising' they were adolescents have entered what the Victorians termed 'second childhood'; when the elderly return to a state of being dependent on adults for basic care. The cultural memory of a time before adolescence was a temporary identity is now primarily sustained by academics, and in another three decades there will be no-one who remembers a time when adolescence was not taken for granted. In everyday speech, thought, legislation and behaviour, adolescence is a 'natural' category. Its rigidity, in combination with its recency, makes only one thing clear: Western societies' overwhelming acceptance of a life stage between childhood and adulthood must be serving some important social function(s). If it did not, the boundaries between adulthood and adolescence would be neither so emotionally fraught, nor so rigorously defended.

What is it that we *do* when we treat teenagers *as teenagers*, that is, as a separate category of 'human'? My 'we' here is all-encompassing as, at the moment, I am

suggesting that all ‘we humans’ are in on the game of adolescence (I shall restrict my use of ‘we’ in a moment, but first hear me out). The rules of the game allow teenagers to behave badly, to rebel and break the rules of ‘adult’ behaviour, to be subject to extreme mood swings, to be stressed and anxious, to wear particular kinds of clothes, listen to particular music, to roam around in groups or ‘gangs’ and to be incapable of resisting carnal desire. In short, it is a period of carnival when the normal rules of human behaviour – with which adults and children must comply – are suspended. It is a period of *sturm und drang* which is emotionally wearing but which offers enormous creative potential. It is a time when identity issues are foregrounded and its successful completion is marked by the formation of a stable identity and acceptance of adult responsibilities. We play into this ideology as children, as adults and as teenagers in a myriad of ways ranging from marketing special clothing and music, accepting unacceptable behaviour, longing for the freedom from rules (if we are children or adults) or longing for stability (if we are teenagers). No-one seems to be exempt: academics who are fully aware that adolescence is a social construction still worry about the stress teenagers are under and seek out literature that might model helpful ways to negotiate the problems they face.

A story that recently dominated the British press can serve as an example. In September 2012, a thirty year old British school teacher, Jeremy Forrest, left his job, his wife and his children in order to run away to France with Megan Stammers, his fifteen year old pupil. The couple were caught on camera holding hands as they boarded the cross-channel ferry, and interviews with Stammers’s friends and indeed Stammers’s own text messages revealed that Stammers perceived her relationship with her teacher as volitional and pleasurable. The press coverage (which resulted in the pair being apprehended in France) focussed on the violation the Sexual Offences Act 2003 which proscribes sexual relationships between people aged over 18 and those under 18 where the former is in a position of trust, *even if the relationship is consensual*. The fifteen year age gap, which would have had no legal significance had Forrest been three years older, was pivotal in launching the international police enquiry and in the media storm that blew up around the couple’s movements.

As I avidly read the multitude of articles which appeared on this story, desperately pretending I was conducting research for this book, I came face to face with many of my own assumptions about adolescents, and they are not noble. As an academic who reads about these topics, I was armed with the knowledge that, until 1875, the legal age of consent for girls in Britain was twelve and was only raised to thirteen in a series of Acts of Parliament 1875–1885 (Nelson 2012:6). Had Forrest and Stammers eloped in the Victorian era or earlier, they would have caused a scandal, but the scandal would have been more about the breach of

marriage contract than the ages of the couple. (The scandal surrounding 15 year old Lydia Bennett's elopement with George Wickham in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is resolved when she becomes Lydia Wickham.) In 2012, Stammers's age was paramount; her unacceptable behaviour could be forgiven because she was too young to know better, whereas Forrest was a depraved man who preyed on young girls entrusted in his care.

I scoured the web in search of reporting that overlooked Stammers's bodily autonomy, her right to feel and express her carnal desires. The more I read, the more I felt concerned for Stammers. Although I felt confident Forrest genuinely cared for her and would endeavour to keep her safe, I felt smugly confident that the relationship would not last. Unlike most first romances, the end of her relationship would be splashed across the international media (I was reading about her life from my home in Sweden), and I pitied her for being too innocent to realize that a story like hers would spread like bushfire through the international media. If she wanted to become someone other than 'the teenager who ran away with her teacher', she would have to change her appearance, perhaps her name, and move to a new town. And there it was: *too innocent*. Although I was very consciously refusing to read Stammers as a victim and attempting to read her as a desiring subject, I needed her to be incapable of comprehending the consequences of her actions. To be fair, I thought Forrest also miscalculated how the press would cover the story, but I considered him more ignorant (OK, I'll admit it, I thought he was stupid) than innocent: he *should* have known better. I wanted to read Stammers as a girl so caught up in the flurries of first love and lust to understand the consequences of her actions.

I have never met Stammers, although she really exists, she is as much a fictional character to me as Lydia Wickham. Yet her story inspired me to feel concern, but my concern was shaped by the belief that she was incapable of thinking and behaving like an adult, and that her youth had left her vulnerable. I was more concerned about the impact of the media frenzy (in which I was participating) than her relationship with her teacher, and was shunned in coffee table conversation for expressing this belief. But we all agreed that, at fifteen, Stammers was not capable of making rational decisions and the law needs to protect youngsters from themselves as much as from unscrupulous adults. The word on the street and in the staff-room is clear: people under the age of eighteen cannot be held accountable if they make seeming irrational decisions about their carnal desires because they are not yet capable of making informed decisions about their behaviour. Apparently we all agree on this matter except that I don't think 'we' do.

It is time to unpack this 'we' who agree that adolescence is a discrete phase in human life. As my earlier reference to the age of consent attests, the belief that 15 year olds are incapable of making informed decisions about how to act on their

carnal desires is an historically specific belief. In the Victorian era, the visible presence of child prostitutes on the street was a subject of much debate amongst child labour reformers, and were so ubiquitous, they found their way into literature for adults and children alike (Nelson 2012:6; Thiel 2008:52–4 & 60–1 and Kokkola, Valovirta & Korkka 2013). “While reformers publicized the sexual vulnerability of girls more often than that of boys, the newspapers and reform literature of the day nonetheless made plain that the young of both sexes could be found amongst the ranks of prostitutes and victims of sexual assault including incest” (Nelson 2012:6). Without wishing to denigrate the important work of the reformers and their success in introducing legislation to protect those most at risk, it is also worth noting that by focusing on victims of others’ carnal desire, the desiring teenage subject can remain invisible.

Nelson’s study draws attention to the fluidity of age as a construction in the Victorian era by examining children who behave in an adult manner and the reverse figure: adults who behave as children. Her study highlights the centrality of money and sexuality as the defining features of adulthood and childhood. Noting that money is more frequently used to indicate the maturity (or lack thereof) of male characters and sexuality is more frequently used to indicate female age inversion, she arrives at the unexpected conclusion that sexually precocious girls’ behaviour was often condoned in Victorian literature. It is worth noting that the figures Nelson discusses are either child-like adults or adult-like children; they are *not* something in between, they are *not* adolescents.

In the history of adolescence, 1904 stands out. This was the year when G. Stanley Hall, the first American to hold a doctorate in psychology and the founder of the American psychological association, published *Adolescence: Its Psychology* (see Cart 1996:4–7 for a fuller discussion). Hall declared adolescence to be a “separate state”, which by the 1920s came to be understood as a separate generation (*ibid.*). One of Hall’s students was Margaret Mead, who was charged with determining whether the *sturm und drang* Hall had determined was a characteristic feature of adolescence was universal or American. Mead’s study, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) is today often discussed as an example of the problems anthropologists face when conducting fieldwork, and how easy it is to interpret behaviour through one’s own pre-conceptions. But although Mead’s description of the idyllic lives of the Samoan peoples may have been inaccurate, her conclusion that the behaviours we associate with adolescence are not universal human traits remains unrefuted. One has only to think of the need to legislate against child labour (and how often these laws are broken), the presence of child soldiers in Idi Amin’s army and the variety of ages given in age of consent laws even within a region like the European Union to recognize that adolescence is not and never has been a universal state.

Although there have always been persons aged between 13 and 18, it was only during the twentieth century that extended education leading to a delayed entry into working (adult) life became common in the wealthier parts of the world. At the same time, the general rise in living standards brought about the emergence of a new sub-culture and consumer class: the adolescent. Michael Cart provides a lively, helpful overview of the history and problems surrounding the terms for describing teenagers, adolescents, young adults or “adults in training wheels” (1996:4). His review takes him back to the American Civil war, and he cites Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* as being the first young adult (or perhaps ‘little adult’) novel. Nevertheless, he observes, it was not until the start of the twentieth century that psychologists started to define adolescence as a separate state. Admitting that these studies are “anomalously early”, Cart concurs with other critics that adolescence is a social category that has existed for less than sixty years (*ibid.*). In that short time, it has become so integrated into our ways of speaking, thinking and behaving that it is commonly perceived as a ‘natural’ category which is intimately intertwined with the category of ‘childhood’.

The history and ideology of childhood was first brought to public attention by Philippe Ariés’s (1962) in his now classic study of the emergence of childhood in the sense that we think of it today. Although much criticised and modified since its appearance half a century ago, Ariés’s (1962) central claim that childhood is primarily a social category, and only secondarily a biological category has been integrated into most studies of children’s literature ever since. Some two decades after the publication of Ariés’s historical revelations, Jacqueline Rose was to integrate these findings with psychoanalysis to ask *why* childhood is so important to adults in the Western world. Rose (1984) argued that the myth of innocent childhood is “central to the well-being of adults” (Reynolds 2007:90). Her analyses showed how child figures are weighed down with layers of adults desires.

Rose refers only to Anglophone works this may have exaggerated the significance and character of the innocence needed for adult well-being. In her study of the imagery of childhood, Anne Higonnet observes that

Absolute distinctions between child and adult leave [teenagers] stranded on a very uncomfortable boundary. How can children possibly become adults from one instant to the next? The English and American cultures which above all others have glorified the ideal of childhood innocence deal badly with adolescence.

(Higonnet 1998:194)

Higonnet’s comment speaks to the heart of the dilemmas I investigate in this study. Anglophone cultures, I shall argue, “deal badly with adolescence” because maintaining the *sturm und drang* of adolescence is as important to the well-being

of adults as childhood innocence. Indeed, they are part and parcel of the same phenomenon.

Although the upheavals we associate with adolescence may seem a far cry from the idolization of the innocent child, my first conjecture is that, by exaggerating the turmoil of adolescence, the myth of the innocent child can be preserved or even exaggerated. If all that threatens the Romantic belief in childhood innocence can be siphoned off, and dismissed as something which is not child-like, then the purity of childhood can be maintained. The adolescent is not a child, but is also not an adult. I do not find it coincidental that Ariés was able to open our eyes to the constructed nature of childhood at precisely the historical point that adolescence was establishing itself as a separate social category. By configuring adolescence as a period of *sturm und drang*, the periods of time on either side of the teenage years – childhood and adulthood – appear stable and less stressful. By emphasising the turmoil of the teens, larger cultural aspirations of preserving the notions of childhood innocence and adult maturity are well served. In making this statement, I am not claiming that adolescents' movement towards autonomy and finding a place in the wider society are actually stress-free, but I am suggesting that issues such as identity formation are presented as being greater problems for teenagers than they are for children moving away from the home environment and into the school environment or for adults negotiating their combined roles as parents, workmates, lovers, friends and perhaps the carers of their elderly parents. All phases of the human life bring their own challenges. By exaggerating the *sturm und drang* of adolescence, adults privilege adulthood as a period of balanced maturity and maintain the Romantic myths of childhood long past their 'sell by' date.

My second conjecture is that this need to maintain adolescence as a stress-filled buffer zone is particularly dominant in the Anglophone world. Anyone with even a passing knowledge of Nordic culture and children's literature, for instance, will react negatively to some of my claims about how childhood and adolescence are conceived and negotiated in both literature and social practice. In Nordic children's literature, carnal desire can still form a platform for negotiating the transition from adolescent to adult, but the rules of the game are not quite the same. For instance, it seems to me not a coincidence that, in her review of 36 novels depicting pregnant teens, the novel Diane Emge (2006:24) picks out as offering "exceptional awareness of the possible consequences" of abortion is *Mia Alone*, by the Swedish author Gunnel Beckmann. This is also the only translated work in Emge's English language corpus. Without wishing to trivialise Beckmann's achievements, I would, however, claim that – when seen within the context of Swedish fiction for adolescents – *Mia Alone* does not seem quite as "exceptional" in its willingness to address teenage sexuality. As the work of Österlund (2005) and Franck (2009)

attests, Swedish adolescent fiction and Swedish society have a far more liberal view of adolescent sexuality and carnality than most Anglophone works. Danish children's literature is perhaps even more liberal than Swedish, as ideas that are hard for many adults to grasp can be presented in formats that are accessible to young children. Oskar K and Lilian Brøgger's *De Skæve Smil* ['The Lopsided Smile'], for instance, is a picture book marketed as a children's book (although the author and illustrator claim it is for adults) in which the protagonist, a dog (the hound of death), meets aborted foetuses who explain why they were aborted. At the other end of the spectrum, in languages I do not speak and have little access to (such as Persian and Urdu), colleagues at conferences assure me that literature of the kind I discuss here is simply not available.

In order to demonstrate these very different views of what does and does not constitute sexual behaviour, this project was originally planned to incorporate works written in or translated from languages other than English. I also planned to refer to works depicting adolescents but intended for adult readers as this underlined the constructed nature of adolescence. Sadly, these contrastive aspects of my project have been left for articles which will follow this study, and here my second conjecture has become a caveat. Quite simply, the size and wealth of the material was too great for a single study. Even by restricting my material to the Anglophone world, I have only been able to scratch the surface of how necessary the *sturm und drang* of adolescence is for the well-being of adults in the various countries and cultures of which the Anglophone world is comprised.

Higonnet's rhetorical question about how children can be expected to become adults overnight relates to my study of sexuality, and here I should clarify that the aspects of sexuality I focus on are carnal desire and the act of sex whether desired or not. Issues such as gender identification, gender performance, sexual orientation and so on are only discussed as they relate to the central theme of carnality. This is not because I consider these other topics irrelevant, on the contrary, the existing work into these areas underpins much of my thinking on carnality. However, my primary interest in sexuality is the ways in which it is used to symbolize a boundary crossing.

The language we use to describe the first time one has sex often signals boundary-crossing behaviour. Lakoff and Johnson's ground breaking study, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), drew our attention to how the context in which words appear (collocations) form metaphors that affect the way we think. For instance, they drew attention to the similarities between the ways in which the words associated with time and money are used; we 'spend' both time and money, we may be 'short' of both or we may 'waste' both. As a result, the idea that 'time is money' is constantly reinforced through our word choices. The words and phrases used to describe the first time a person has sexual intercourse (whether desired or not)

indicate that Anglophone society regards this as life changing experience: 'the loss of virginity', 'popping the cherry', 'the end of innocence' and so on. These expressions signal an activity that is a one-off event that does not allow for a return to pre-sex state. More specifically, expressions such as 'making a man' or 'making a woman' out of a person signals that this life-changing experience specifically marks an overnight transition between childhood and adulthood in a way that is nonsensical. Other sexual boundary crossings, such as cross gender play or dressing, are not considered absolute, but a single act of penetration is elevated as though it were a life-altering experience. For instance, Laurie's sexual encounter with Rosie under the hay cart marks the the end of Laurie's childhood, and thus the end of the novel in Lee's *Cider with Rosie* (1959).

'Life-altering sex': it sounds wonderful, doesn't it? A pleasure not to be missed, but I would hazard that it is rare, and fortunately so. Rape certainly qualifies as 'life-altering sex'. The trauma of rape divides the victim's life into 'before' and 'after'. Indeed, one way in which trauma is defined is through its capacity to split the victim's life in this way, but what does it really mean to say that a non-traumatic sexual encounter were 'life-altering'? A sexual encounter might be self-revelational (for instance, it might reveal that one's sexual orientation is not as one thought or that one is no longer in love with one's regular partner); life-altering it is not. And to claim that teenagers' first, often unsatisfactory or fumbled, sexual experiences can turn them into adults 'overnight' defies all logical reasoning. And yet the consummation of carnal desire is consistently presented as though it had the power to transform children into adults.

My third conjecture – that sexuality is used to symbolise the border crossing between adulthood and adolescence – is hardly original. Roberta Seelinger Trites's seminal study of the power relations between adults and teenagers, *Disturbing the Universe* (2000), includes a chapter on how genuine concern for the well-being of young people and the hierarchical power structures underlying adult-adolescent relationships intertwine to result in texts which are primarily concerned with controlling youngsters' libidos. Trites notes that with each of the sites of power struggle she has identified, the youngster begins by breaking (or at least challenging) the adult world by encroaching upon adult-defined sources of power. For instance, the teenage character has sex for the first time. Since sexual activity is deemed adult, teenagers who are sexually active are perceived as demanding adult power for themselves. The teenage characters are then punished for their encroachment on the adult world, and suffer the calamitous consequences of premature entry into the adult world: the end of the relationship, sexual violence, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and, of course, death. The frequency with which such unhappy outcomes arise from early sexual experimentations in literature is vastly greater than their frequency in real world settings. In the novels Trites discusses,

the fictional character is then socialised into adopting more culturally acceptable forms of behaviour. Thus Trites is surely right in her assertion that literary representations of adolescent sexuality are primarily intended for the didactic purpose of controlling youngsters' libidos, and thereby patrolling the borders of adulthood. They are only secondarily intended to reflect the world as it is.

More recently, Kimberley Reynolds has suggested that "writing about sex, sexuality and relationships between the sexes [is] one of the most radically changed areas in contemporary children's literature", and if one restricts one's concerns solely to the depiction of carnality, there are indeed grounds for agreeing (Reynolds 2007:114–5, although see Kokkola 2011a). Using Melvin Burgess's novel, *Lady: My Life as a Bitch* (2001), as the starting point for her argument, Reynolds claims that "children's literature participates in shaping – it does not merely reflect – changing attitudes to young people" (2007:114–115). This radical change, Reynolds argues, is so recent that she does not dispute Trites's findings, published just seven years earlier. Reynolds accepts that Trites's model was accurate for works produced at the time Trites was writing, but argues that, since the turn of the millennium, there has been a dramatic transition from coercive didacticism to "in-your-face prose" (Reynolds, 2007:122). For Reynolds, "the area of greatest change is not about how much sex is taking place but the importance attached to it and the strategies for writing about it" (2007:122). As Reynolds develops her argument, it becomes clear that one of the key changes is that carnal desires of teenagers are not consistently curtailed: Sandra, the protagonist of Burgess's *Lady: My Life as a Bitch*, delights in her permanent metamorphosis into a dog as this allows her to be as promiscuous as she pleases.

Since the start of the third millennium, we have seen the publication of works on topics that would have been unthinkable when Rose originally published her thesis on the innocence of childhood. These include adolescent prostitution (in Judy Waite's *Game Girls*), exchanging sexual favours for popularity or drugs (in Noel Clarke's *Kidulthood*), and enjoying sexual violence (in Meyer's *Breaking Dawn*). In exploring these works on adolescent sexuality, I am not suggesting that there is a linear development from the coercive to the radical. On the contrary, the coercive tradition continues to be alive and well, also in works containing radical elements (Kokkola 2011a, 2011b). However, I am claiming that a detailed study of the ways in which adolescent sexuality is presented in works intended for young readers reflects changes in the ways society negotiates adolescence, and that the emergence of 'radical' adolescent fiction depicting sexually active adolescents signals an underlying shift in how the social categories of childhood, adolescence and adulthood are conceived.

Although this is a literary enquiry, in the sense that the materials I examine are all novels or short stories, the root phenomenon with which I am concerned is

social. Literary works, as one of the means by which human beings represent their world, provide materials for those investigating social phenomena, culture and ideologies (Schlant 1999). The almost exclusive use of novels to analyse the phenomenon of adolescence needs some vindication. This study would undoubtedly have been enriched by including analyses of popular music culture, magazines, television series and other cultural artefacts, which are only referred to briefly here. A full examination of these types of media and their ideologies would be both valuable and timely. However, the focus on literature makes it possible to develop and deploy very precise tools with which to probe beyond the most obvious, superficial presentations of adult-adolescent relations. As Ernestine Schlant argued, literature functions as a “seismograph of a people’s moral positions” (1999:3) that responds on levels that may be beyond the authors’ conscious awareness. In other words, the need to limit the study to one medium is offset by the opportunity to access the underlying cultural ideology in depth.

For most critics working in this field, the terms ‘adolescent’, ‘youth’, ‘teenage’, ‘YA’ and ‘young adult’ fiction or literature are roughly synonymous, but I find this lack of distinction deeply problematic for my current purposes. The term ‘young adult’ (and its abbreviation YA) shifts the position of the boundary zone between children and adults by cutting out the liminal zone of adolescence altogether. Since I am precisely concerned with the permeable but inflexible border between adulthood and adolescence, I find the term ‘young adult’ unhelpfully confusing and ambiguous.

The term ‘young adult’ was originally coined around 1820 to denote people in their twenties who were leaving higher education and beginning their careers and families (Aronson 2001, 2002). This was also the period of the bohemians in Paris, whose determination to separate themselves from the rest of civilised society through dress codes, tastes in music and the other arts, use of language and sexual behaviour. These early connotations of bohemian lifestyles have rubbed off on the ways in which adolescence is perceived. Adolescents also mark themselves and are marked through precisely the same choices.

The application of this the term ‘young adult’ to a type of literature did not take place until the late 1950s, when librarians became aware of “a special kind of library client whose needs could no longer be adequately served either as a child or as an adult reader” (Shaffer in Cart 1996:6). This new category of readers was comprised of the children of World War Two veterans, children whose parents had created a level of comfort and time for leisure reading unknown to previous generations of people in their teens. Librarians initially responded to the need to provide reading material for these readers by selecting texts from the general (adult) shelves that were likely to appeal to these young people. Isaac Asimov and J. R. R. Tolkien were some of the first to be placed on separate shelves for ‘young adults’

(Aronson 2002, Cart 1996). Note that the librarians' problems were essentially practical: what books would these people be likely to want to read and where should such books be shelved? The early use of the term was wholly accurate: the books labelled YA were simply novels chosen from the general stacks which might be of interest to younger readers, rather than being specifically written and marketed for this age range. It also indicated that the primary readers of these texts were unlikely to enjoy browsing for books in a physical environment that was modified to suit the needs of young children. 'Young adult' bookshelves were more likely to be placed in adult ('normal') libraries or inbetween spaces which encouraged a transition into the mainstream library. As a separate body of texts produced with these young people in mind became available, YA literature became a standard category of its own, positioned in shelves of its own.

Aronson (2002) charts this development from the YA bohemians of France to the emergence of a literature of their own. He observes that during the 1970s, the YA novel perfected itself as a commercial product, and in this process a "curious thing ... happened to them. Though labelled YA, they have become the province of increasingly younger readers. ... As they say in the magazine world, no 17-year-old would read *Seventeen*" (Aronson 2002:3). And this leads me to my quibble with the term 'young adult'. Books written and marketed for 12–14 year olds are labelled as YA literature, which suggests their readers are 'young *adults*' thereby obliterating the existence of the phase of adolescence and marking the onset of adulthood at, or even before, puberty. If everyone categorised these books as YA literature, I could not reasonably argue a case for exploring the adulthood/adolescence boundary through an examination of such works. However, as I noted above, most critics do not distinguish between the use of YA, teenage, adolescent and juvenile literature, and those who do use the term rarely refer to the readers of these works as young adults. So although I will use the terms YA/young in quotations, I will refrain from using this confusing expression elsewhere in my text. The other common terms used in this context are used interchangeably. I also use 'children's literature' in both quotations and my own text in the Anglophone sense to refer to writings intended for readers who are not adults.

Teenage fiction, like writings for young children, crosses a boundary: it is literature written by adults but intended and adapted for a younger readership. It is a means by which adults can communicate with their offspring about their hopes, beliefs and fears for the future. It is a tool for transmitting the ideology of those in power (adults) to those who will soon be endowed with power (adolescents). As such, the teenage characters in these novels are not simply reflections of what adults think adolescents are actually like, but rather a means by which adults can express their hopes, beliefs and fears about what teenagers could and might be like, and what the wider social implications of this might be.

The vast array of novels depicting teenagers who are or have been sexually active reveal that many adult writers are deeply concerned about the on-set of carnal desire, and connect these desires with the *sturm und drang* of adolescence. The books they produce are also very often intended to educate young readers: to offer them warnings and to present successful navigations through this stress-filled period. They could quite reasonably be read as educational advice. In her study of just three novels depicting pregnant teenagers, Anna Altmann offers a valuable proviso on the problems of treating such fiction as a form of sex education:

These are works of fiction, not case studies or sermons. By limiting my discussion of them to what they say about sex and teenage pregnancy, and by limiting the discussion even further by approaching it as a societal question rather than as a question of plot, I do not mean to suggest that these novels should be read as parables in a program for sex education. ... But it is illuminating to examine how the messages that may be taken from these novels fit into the available contemporary discourse on adolescent sexuality ... Certainly these novels contribute to the moral climate in which girls learn ways to live their sexuality. (Altmann 1995:21–2)

The novels and short stories in my corpus are not as exclusively directed towards girl readers as Altmann's three novels (which are included in the corpus), although the romance element does mean the majority are marked as being intended to appeal to female readers. However, like Altmann, my focus on the theme and the way I primarily address aspects of carnality as social issues are not unconnected to sex education. For although literature should not be confused with "parables in a program for sex education" (*ibid.*), literature for the youth has always been a means by which adults attempt to educate and guide young people. The fiction I discuss is not intended as sex education, even though it may well fill that role for some readers.

Unfortunately, the popular press and even some well-meaning critics have responded to the works I discuss as though they were educational guides. More specifically, there seems to be a wide-spread fear that teenage readers will automatically wish to emulate the characters. However, it is naïve beyond credibility to assume that young readers will automatically fall into the identification fallacy, and adopt the same affects as their fictional counterparts (see also Nikolajeva 2010a:185–202, 2010b). They may, they may not, just as adult readers may or may not feel empathy for a character. And there is really no respectable research that has categorically established that young readers are more likely to emulate behaviours or emotions they witness in fictional contexts than older readers. On the contrary, Nikolajeva (2010b) has shown that many texts are written in ways that make identification unlikely. And this is certainly true of many of the narratives I discuss within this study. Although there is clearly a didactic intent behind many of the narratives in the corpus, we should not be naïve in our assumptions about how these messages are received.

The problem with non-fiction sex-education books, as Lissa Paul points out in her article ‘Sex and the Children’s Book’, is that “Until recently there has been only one exception to the ‘instruction and delight’ rule of children’s literature: books on sex education. Sex education is not about delight. Or toys. Only instruction – and the more clinical the better” (2005:222). With a few noteworthy exceptions (e.g. Mayle 1978 or see Campbell 1979 and Nelson and Martin 2004 for overviews), Paul’s claim seems to be supported. When confronted with clinical texts in which men insert their penises into women’s vaginas in order to release sperm and create babies, one really cannot be surprised that so many teens turn to alternative sources of information. Gossiping with peers is probably the most common and easily available source of information available to the average teenager, but the quality of that information is a source of concern for liberal and conservative adults alike.

The best place for sex education has been a frequent topic of debate, with school and home as the main options. The key flaw in the argument that parents should be the ones to tell and guide their children about all aspects of carnality and desire is that to do so effectively would infringe on the incest taboo. Whilst parents may be well equipped to deal with advising their offspring on the social niceties of dating behaviour, a survey conducted by the National Communication Association in 1998 unsurprisingly revealed that sex was the subject both parents and the adolescents felt “least comfortable talking about” (in Levine [2002] 2003:142). This is partly due to the very simple problem that it is extraordinarily difficult to describe a physical or emotional event without revealing personal experiences. Teachers and parents cannot describe the sexiness of sex without revealing something of their own feelings, preferences and experiences, and youngsters cannot ask about the sexiness of sex without revealing their own interests. “Chalk it up to the incest taboo: children don’t want to know about their parents’ sex lives and, from the moment they might conceivably have a sex life, they usually don’t want Mom and Dad to know about theirs” (Levine [2002] 2003:143). Levine cites an anecdote in which a Zimbabwean delegate at a conference suggested that sex education is better left to the “aunties”: someone close to the child, but not too close.

The aunties of the twenty first century are numerous: the internet, films and TV, peers, pornographic materials of all kinds and literature. The quality of these materials is as varied as their form and, like Levine, I oppose blanket judgment on any form solely on the grounds of its format. The anonymity of the internet is usually cited as a potential source of danger for the curious adolescent, but Levine’s comments on the value of sites such as *Go Ask Alice* run by Columbia University resonate with the positive potential of anonymity. She cites a query from a boy which is “unaskable in person”: whether it is acceptable to ejaculate in his girlfriend’s mouth and how to talk about this topic with her. This is simply not the

kind of question many youngsters could pose to their parents, nor would many reply as frankly and helpfully as 'Alice' (Levine [2002] 2003:148).

Whilst literature for and about adolescents rarely deals with such practical sexual concerns, it does have enormous potential for contextualisation and providing 'truthful fictions':

Because so much of sexuality resides in the interstices between the body and what can be said about it in a textbook, these inventions are also the truth. Children need two kinds of information: the "facts" and truthful "fictions," the stories and fantasies that carry the meanings of love, romance, and desire.

(Levine [2002] 2003:150)

In *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?* (2010), Blakey Vermeule argues that much of the appeal of literature and our willingness to engage with fictional characters depends on the possibility of obtaining social information without having to reveal anything about ourselves in exchange. In her adaptation of Vermeule's study for children's literature, Nikolajeva (2011) comments on the significant educational implications of Vermeule's study. In the context of sex education, literature offers adolescents a private place where they can learn about the sexiness of sex without asking either party to reveal much about themselves. It also offers an ideal site for indoctrination, as writers connect the sexiness of sex with images of teenagers in turmoil. It is not simply that adults wield more power in this arena, by presenting carnal desire as a source of adolescent angst, the myth of the troubled teen can be perpetuated.

Ideologies of adolescent carnality: An outline of the study

For this study, I have created a corpus of about 200 novels and short stories written in English since the second world war and available in more than one English speaking country featuring teenage characters who are (or have been) sexually active. All the works included in the corpus had distributors outside the country in which they were produced. When relevant, I shall endeavour to situate the works in their original socio-historical context, but my main goal is to form generalizations which transcend national borders. For although I cannot, in any formally acceptable sense, follow the reception of these novels in the various different countries I discuss, I have taken their availability throughout the Westernised Anglophone world to indicate that the publishers, distributors, booksellers as well as those buying the books have considered the attitudes expressed in the narratives suitable for the country in which they were bought. So, rather than arranging my findings in terms of nationhood or chronology, I have arranged them thematically to suit my argument.

All the books contain sexually active teenage characters, although defining precisely what counts as ‘sexual activity’ has been difficult. In practice, it has been determined pragmatically in terms of my overarching goal of examining adult-adolescent relations through literary representations of carnality. I have, for example, excluded traditional fairy tales, even though they often touch upon issues of relevance to my concerns. For instance, the onset of sexual desire in *Little Red Riding Hood*, the fear of sexual desire in *The Frog Prince* or *Iron Henry*, domestic violence in *Bluebeard* and incest in *Donkey Skin* (see Warner 1993, 1998, Zipes 2006) have been excluded because they were produced prior to the celebration of adolescence in the mid-twentieth century and because they were not primarily composed as works for teenagers. However, I have included works like Margo Lanagan’s *Tender Morsels* which draw on the fairy tale tradition in their presentation of adolescent sexuality, and also fantasy works such as William Rayner’s *Stag Boy*, which is clear in its presentation of carnal desire, but does not – strictly speaking – contain sexual acts.

Another significant category I have largely excluded is the teenage romance, by which I mean those like the novels in the *Sweet Valley* series which do not lead to more than kisses. As the title of Linda Christian-Smith’s classic study of this genre – *Becoming a Woman through Romance* – reveals, the romance genre and its conventions profoundly affect the ways in which sexuality and the transition from adolescence adulthood is negotiated. “Romance colours the way in which sexuality is presented in adolescent romance fiction. It promotes sexuality as something magical, mystical, and loving that happens to girls” (Christian-Smith 1990:30). Christian-Smith’s comment foregrounds the passivity of girls in many romances; romance is something which happens *to* them, not something in which they are actor. Moreover, they remain *girls*, they are not the angst-ridden teenagers with whom I am concerned.

I have also excluded texts in which all the characters remain virgins, with a few noteworthy exceptions. My corpus does include Maureen Daly’s *Seventeenth Summer* (which, first published in 1942, is the oldest work in the corpus) in which the protagonist is still a virgin at the end of the novel. I chose to include this in part due to its historical significance. More importantly, Angie Morrow’s sexual awakening and carnal desires are represented through metaphors as she reflects on her physical environment as well as her responses to Jack. Even more significantly, Angie’s decision not to accept Jack’s proposal of marriage, her autonomous decision to go and study and live an independent life all signal that the emergence of her carnal desires has enabled her to transition into adulthood. Moreover, Angie’s hidden recognition that her sister is having sex with the man she is dating and her muted awareness of homosexuality are all signs of her transition from childhood to adulthood.

My definition of what constitutes a sexual act is also broader than President Clinton's and apparently that of Jennifer Hubert, who argued that *Up in Seth's Room* by Norma Fox Mazer "was revolutionary for its time, not because the characters went all the way, but because they didn't" (2002:108). In this novel, the 15 year old protagonist, Finn Rousseau, performs fellatio on her 19 year old boyfriend, Seth, and so only remains a virgin according to a very limited understanding of carnal desire. (One apparently shared by Cart who calls this choosing "*not* to be physically intimate" [1996:202]; emphasis original). This study includes novels where sexual acts are not limited to the 'penis-in-vagina' variety. Indeed, in the majority of the novels, readers are left without much sense of the precise details as to what has taken place. What readers witness is the transformational impact of carnal desires.

Many of the novels included in the corpus are 'problem novels'. 'Problem novels' became acknowledged as a genre in the late 1970s and became popular from the early 1980s (see Cart 1996:64–6 and *in passim*). These are novels that place a social issue at the centre of the plot, this is then the 'problem' that needs to be resolved. The term is derogatory. As Michael Cart helpfully surmises: "think of it this way and you'll understand the problem with the problem novel: It is to young adult literature what the soap opera is to legitimate drama" (Cart 1996:64). Sex is very often the 'problem' requiring resolution and it swiftly became one of the most popular topics within this genre. And because sex is *the* problem, carnal desire is separated from the rest of the teenagers' lives. In this sense, sex does indeed become a problem as it is decontextualized from the total well-being of the young person. After the commercial success of Ann Head's *Mr and Mrs Bo Jo Jones* in 1967, a host of texts appeared on the themes of teenage sex and pregnancy. Cart cites evidence that four out of five of bestselling books sold through Xerox Educational Publications in 1970 were on these themes (1996:193).

A key problem with the problem novel lies in the term 'problem' itself: a problem implies that the issue can or should be resolved. Although well intentioned, problem novels often inadvertently imply that aspects of identity – for instance, the character's ethnic heritage or sexual orientation – are 'problems' the character has to struggle with, and come to terms with. The problem was situated in the domain of the individual and not in the surrounding (racist, homophobic) community. In other words, the overarching 'problem' of the problem novel is that the teenager is filled with angst about an aspect of their lives they cannot control; and the resolution of their angst signals the on-set of adult maturity. The problem novel genre is a celebration of the myth troubled teen.

The corpus includes numerous examples of narratives where the characters' carnal desires are the 'problem' that needs to be resolved. This is particularly true of the novels featuring gay and lesbian characters in the corpus. Again, like Daly's

Seventeenth Summer, the oldest novel in the corpus to feature a same-sex desiring protagonist – Donovan’s *I’ll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip* – from 1969 contains no more explicit sexual activity than a few kisses and caresses, at least on stage (the boys do spend the night alone in an apartment). For GLBTQ (gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transsexual, queer/questioning) narratives, the recognition of same-sex carnal desire was considered sufficient for inclusion in the corpus, even if those desires are not acted upon. For as Foucault noted in *The History of Sexuality*, during the twentieth century same-sex desire has changed from being something that one *does* to being something that one *is*. The impact of same-sex desire on identity formation is more important to this study than whether or not the desiring teens are sexually active. However, I have excluded novels such as Woodson’s *The Notebooks of Melanin Sun* in which the same-sex desiring couple are the parents of the protagonist as these reveal nothing about the role of carnal desire in transitioning from adolescence to adulthood.

Describing victims of sexual abuse as ‘sexually active’ is a deeply distasteful formulation. I have, nevertheless, included a fairly large number of works depicting children and teenagers whose first sexual acts are not volitional. As already noted, rape and other sexually traumatic acts create linearity of time: before and after the abuse. This linearity, as Nikolajeva showed in *From Mythic to Linear*, is associated with adulthood, whereas childhood is associated with ‘mythic’ or circular time. Furthermore, the sexually abused child is what Higonnet terms a ‘knowing’ child: the sexually abused child knows things about adult sexuality most adults do not know (and often do not wish to know). The vast majority of the characters in these novels are, however, teenagers who have sex of their own volition with other teenagers.

As the size of my corpus already indicates, my goal is to not to provide in-depth analyses of each novel or short story, but rather to paint an overview of this topic using the broad strokes of generalisation and colouring in the gaps with a few more detailed examples. I have deliberately chosen to discuss some books in more than one context to demonstrate the frequency with which many of the ideas I discuss surface and, more importantly, to avoid giving the impression that the narratives could be rigidly classified. My generalisations are based on a large corpus, but I cannot and do not claim that my selection is random, comprehensive or, in any other formal sense, fully representative of all works published on this topic. My generalisations, strictly speaking, only apply to those books listed as being part of the corpus in the reference list (other fictional works, such as works for adults or classic romance, are listed separately).

The first two chapters of this study function as a map and compass for the rest of the enquiry. In the first chapter – *Sexuality as Power: Adolescents and Power* – I provide the historical background on the emergence of Adolescence as a discrete

period of life, and then trace the connections between this and attitudes towards adolescent carnal desires, concluding a brief discussion of how the 'transformation' of child into adult following the loss of virginity has been depicted in literature for teens. This map is then opened up with a compass drawn from Trites's observations on how adolescent sexuality functions as a site for negotiating adult-adolescent power relations and Reynolds's claim that there has been a marked shift in how these relations are handled. *The Calamitous Consequences of Carnality* is arranged in terms of the 'punishments' meted on adolescent characters who defy adult prohibitions and give reign to their sexual desires. Unplanned pregnancies are one of the more common outcomes and is discussed in depth, but consideration is also given to damaged relationships, sexually transmitted diseases and death. Although I do support Reynolds' assertion that a radical change is taking place in adolescent fiction depicting sexually active teens, I also show that literature for the young maintains its conservative standpoint.

The chapters that follow each take up different tropes for depicting adolescent sexuality and considers their implications for adult-adolescent power relations. Given that carnal desire is depicted as a threat to this power balance, queer theory offers subversive potential. *Queer Carnalities* begins with what I think we can now call 'traditionally queer' subjects: gay and lesbian teens. However, queerness is not synonymous with same-sex desire; queer theory embraces other inversions of the power-desire balance. In a study of Victorian literature, Claudia Nelson places age within the context of queer studies: "Arguably, since age constantly changes, while gender was presumed to be fixed and deviant sexuality a matter of criminality, illness, or innate difference, age might seem to be inherently queer from the outset or so universally fluid as to be unqueerable" (Nelson 2012:11). I use novels depicting consensual sexual relationships between adults and adolescents to question whether age is perceived as fluid. The novels depicting adult-adolescent consensual pairings challenge the view of the teenager as less powerful than the adult and so offer a queer revision of age relations. The chapter concludes by foregrounding the reader who may deliberately read 'queerly', refusing to accept the power relations presented in the text.

The Beastly Bestiality of Adolescent Desire starts with a discussion of connection between animals and early depictions of gay and lesbian sexuality. This blurring of the boundaries between animal and adolescent desire implies that adolescents' carnality is considered so deviant it is not even human. The chapter continues with an examination of fantasy works in which the teenage characters' sexual encounters take place whilst in a state of metamorphosis, and concludes with a discussion of Lynne Reid Banks's *Melusine*, which uses metamorphosis to express the impact of sexual abuse. Abuse, particularly incest and rape, are at the centre of the following chapter, *The Abjection of Abused Adolescents*. My focus here is on how sexual

abuse renders the adolescent body so abhorrent it becomes an object of fear. We are encouraged to look away rather than bear witness.

As this outline suggests, the majority of the works discussed maintain the view that teenagers should not express themselves through their carnal desires. Nevertheless, in each thematic category, incidences of empowered teenagers can be found. Teenagers who are empowered by parenthood, teens who subvert the heteronormativity of texts by producing queer slash fan-fiction, hypersexual teens who revel in carnal pleasure and, thankfully, the occasional teen for whom sex is only one part of the larger project of growing up.

Adolescence, innocence and power

Sexuality as power

“Childhood and innocence”, Marah Gubar observes, “have not always been inextricably linked” (2011:122). Nevertheless, the two concepts have become so tightly linked, that evidence which contradicts this view is often ignored or dismissed. Children and adolescents play no part in forming the myth of childhood innocence, yet they are constantly judged by adults according to their ability (or inability) to conform to these conventions. As Reynolds asserts: “in Western culture at least, entry into adulthood involves subscribing to the cultural myth of childhood” (Reynolds 2007:91). This is so, not least because it is only by subscribing to the one (childhood) that the other (adulthood) can exist: as concepts, they exist only in relation to one another. It is also a power relationship, which as Foucault explained, is maintained as discourse:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. (Foucault [1977] 1991:61)

Foucault's insights into the ways in which power structures are normalized through everyday discourse reveals how much of our thinking reflects uncritical presuppositions and beliefs.

These beliefs have become part of what the Marxist critic, Louis Althusser (1970) terms an ‘ideology’. Althusser was primarily concerned with how uncritical responses to class affect human behaviour, but his ideas have since been developed to examine other implicit belief systems, such as those related to race, gender, religion and so on. I use it here to refer to the implicit set of beliefs about adolescents and adolescent behaviour held by Westerners in the latter half of the twentieth century. This use of the term ‘ideology’, like Foucault's ideas of discourse, is closely related to matters of epistemology: the ways in which we think about the world affect what we know about it. Most of the time we are not consciously aware of our belief systems, and may only become aware that such thinking is not inherently ‘natural’ or ‘self evident’ when we are confronted by a society or person holding a different implicit set of

beliefs and we are forced to articulate and justify our belief system. Current ideologies about adolescence may be becoming visible at this particular historical moment because they are being renegotiated. This is analogous to the emergence of childhood studies at the point at which adolescence was establishing itself.

Althusser drew attention to the ways in which such internalised belief systems result in self-policing. He showed how a social structure such as the 'family' functions as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) (1970). By this he means that we revere the ideal of 'family' to such an extent that we will go to great lengths to present our families to the world in accordance with that ideal, and hide those aspects of our family life that do not resonate with this ideal. Equally, the social structure of adolescence means that adolescents can be criticised for dressing, speaking and behaving in ways that are 'too childish' as well as being chastised for being 'too adult'. The familiarity of both these everyday expressions – 'too childish'; 'too adult' – is indicative of how commonplace such thinking has become. Even though adolescents have played no part in determining what constitutes age-appropriate behaviour, they are treated in accordance with this ideology and ultimately contribute to its maintenance.

Foucault's point that adhering to these ideological constructions "produces things ... induces pleasure, forms knowledge" ([1977] 1991:61) is evident in the discourse of childhood innocence and adolescent angst. As Neil Postman observes, "The idea of childhood is one of the greatest inventions of the Renaissance. Perhaps its most humane one" ([1982] 1994:xii). It is precisely the belief in childhood innocence that has allowed for the protection of the child from being burdened with responsibilities (such as earning a living) and allowed for an extended period of preparation of adulthood (in the form of education) and the freedom to play and experiment with life choices before making the kinds of choices that will have a long term impact on their lives.

The notion of childhood innocence, with its inherent onus on adults to take responsibility for and protect children, has had very positive social outcomes. As a result, Anne Higonnet cogently argues, the belief in childhood innocence has become "sacred":

Many people care deeply about the image of childhood. It is not safe to analyze the sacred, especially not when the sacred has shown its fallibility. If the Romantic ideal of an innocence defined sexually and psychically still protects children, however partially or problematically, it will inevitably seem dangerous to undermine that ideal or even put it in its historical context, and danger can provoke angry reactions. (Higonnet 1998:13)

These "angry reactions" are important signs of how deeply we care about our children. And like Higonnet (1998), Kincaid (1992, 1996, 1998) and Levine (2002), I

fully expect this study to spark “angry reactions” as I seek to place both childhood innocence and the elevation of sexual experience in their socio-historical contexts.

Suggesting that children are not innocent, sexually or otherwise, is not the same as suggesting that children do not need to be defended. On the contrary, “the myth of the innocent, natural child establishes a clear hierarchy which actually robs children of their agency rather than celebrates it” (Applebaum 2010:43). That is, the same construction that protects children can also disempower them: “by claiming childhood innocence to be a natural as opposed to a ‘constructed’ state, adults can safely ignore the power imbalance between themselves and children” (Giroux 2000:5). Maria Nikolajeva has termed this power imbalance *aetonormativity*: “(Lat. *aeto-*, pertaining to age), adult normativity that governs the way children’s literature has been patterned from its emergence until the present day” (2010a:8).

The power that adults wield in relation to the children in their care is not an unmitigated good. Like Postman, I will hold up my hand to be counted amongst those who regard the invention of childhood as an admirably humane invention, but it ceases to be humane when children can be punished for behaving like human beings. Carnal desire is as basic a human need as the need for physical shelter. Nevertheless, it has been singled out and reviled as though it were antithetical to all that we value in childhood. This has not always been the case and nor is it true for all societies. If we place the construction of innocence in its socio-historical context, we will see that it has only recently become associated with carnal desire.

The first half of this chapter is an attempt to place notions of childhood innocence and adolescent *sturm und drang* in a socio-historical context. Historical overviews of how the child has been constructed (e.g. Postman 1982, Kincaid 1992, 1996; Higonnet 1998) and how these constructions are evident in literatures written for the young (e.g. Shavit 1986, Trites 2000, Reynolds 2007) are abundant. Although I do not assume that all my readers will be familiar with these works, it is not my intention to simply rehash here the deeply nuanced arguments expressed so well elsewhere. I hope to provide sufficient direction for those less familiar with this discussion to orient themselves to the field as I focus on the following questions:

1. How did the notion of ‘innocence’ become limited to sexuality and sexual innocence?
2. How does the assumption of the child’s sexual innocence manifest itself in literature?
3. What impact has the assumption that sexual innocence is a natural state have on sexually active adolescents?
4. How is this assumption of sexual innocence manifested in literature for the young?

These questions are expressed as socio-historical problems, although I seek answers from socio-cultural artefacts: literature for adolescents. During the course of my enquiry, I shall constantly be returning to these topics, as I attempt to understand how the well-intentioned desire to protect children has resulted in the vilification of carnal desire. I conclude the chapter by discussing novels depicting the loss of virginity on-stage to illustrate my points more clearly.

From innocence and experience to the sexual innocent

In the Anglophone tradition, histories of childhood inevitably make reference to William Blake's conception of childhood in his illustrated poetry collections *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. Other reference points from the Romantic era include Wordsworth's *Prelude* and *Nutting*, from which point histories often jump to the Enlightenment era to discuss the writings of Rousseau and Newbery before making their way to the 'Golden Age' of childhood in the Victorian era. This hop-skip-jump method of summarising three centuries' worth of material has become so ubiquitous as a means of 'situating one's study', despite the very unfortunate way in which it smoothens differences and presents a more unified view of childhood than is perhaps fair. Since my only interest in this discussion is to demonstrate that our obsessive belief that sexual desire is incompatible with childhood is historically specific, I have chosen not to regurgitate the entire history of Anglophone childhood. Instead, I jump directly between two touchstones: the poetry and illustrations of William Blake and the childhood genre paintings of the Victorian era.

Numerous editions of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* were produced by a laborious process that involved hand-tinting the illustrations. As a result, no two volumes are identical (Ackroyd 1995:9). More curiously, the order in which the poems were presented varied to such an extent that some poems (such as 'The Little Boy Lost' and 'The Little Boy Found') were actually shifted from *Songs of Innocence* to *Songs of Experience* and vice versa; movements which indicate that these two "contrary states of the human soul" were not necessarily diametrically opposed, but rather complementary parts of a whole (Blake: subtitle). The misconception that Blake conceived of these two states as being polar opposites is presumably based on the pairs of poems such as 'Infant Joy' and 'Infant Sorrow' which contrasts the joys and sorrows of infancy, supposedly from the child's point of view. 'Nurse's Song' is the title of two poems, one of which appears in *Songs of Innocence*, and the other in *Songs of Experience*. The nurse in *Songs of Innocence* delights in the sounds of children playing outdoors, and the poem celebrates the nurse's pleasure in watching and hearing her child charges surrounded

by nature. In *Songs of Experience*, the nurse's mind is clouded by suspicions, and the children's laughter is interpreted as whispering, and their games are dismissed as a waste of youth. Both poems are presented as being the adult nurse's perspective, which again indicates that innocence and experience are qualities of the soul, and are not related to either the children playing outside the window or the age of the nurse.

Blake depicted childhood as a time of heightened perception, imagination and vulnerability. These aspects of childhood innocence continue to live on in today's perception of the child. Blake's conception of innocence did not, however, extend to the notion of sexual innocence. As a follower of Emmanuel Swedenborg, Blake would have been concerned that a preoccupation with preserving one's body would result in a neglect of the human spirit. For this reason, an excessive interest in sexual activity could be thought of as damaging to one's soul, but so too would excessive restrictions on sexual desire. In 'The Garden of Love' the freedom to love sexually is associated with innocence and a free spirit; the "priests in black gowns" limit the speaker of the poem's innocence as they "bind[...] with briars my joys and desires". This suggests that, for Blake, uninhibited carnality can help the individual maintain innocence until well into adulthood.

So for Blake, innocence and experience were not diametrical opposites, nor were they connected to the age of the person whose soul is being described. For Blake one could be *both* a child *and* experienced. The quality of innocence, for this influential – albeit not immediately acknowledged – Romantic, could be extended into adulthood. The nurse in *Songs of Innocence* still responds to the children with innocence. The source of change is not so much in experience itself, but in the response to that experience. In terms of carnal desire, it is not so much whether or not one is sexually active but how one responds to that experience. Childhood is certainly not presented by Blake in terms of a lack of sexuality. The centrality of virginity in today's conception of the innocent child cannot be dated back to the Romantic era, which again suggests that sexual innocence serves some larger social function that has arisen *after* the Romantic period. Although Blake clearly laments the ways in which society can force the child's spirit to wither in the face of grinding poverty, dehumanising institutions and so on, he laments them *as children*. This may seem obvious, but as I shall shortly show, sexually active adolescents are often treated as though they were no longer youngsters.

To sum up, Blake's views of childhood did not explicitly present innocence as an exclusive property of the child, nor did they primarily suggest that innocence could be defined in terms of lack of sexuality. That these beliefs became so firmly fixed after this date suggests that they must be serving some social function. Anne Higonnet traces the steps by which innocence has been intimately linked to the body, more specifically, the child's body. Although her arguments are based around

the power of visual images of childhood, particularly those produced in the Victorian era, her arguments are of no less relevance to literary scholars. She argues that perceptions of the child were primarily constructed through visual images. One of the first points she makes is that: "To a great extent, childhood innocence was considered an attribute of the child's body, both because the child's body was supposed to be naturally innocent of adult sexuality, and because the child's mind was supposed to be blank" (Higonnet 1998:8). According to this logic, the desire to touch and gaze upon the child's body is not sexual because the child has no knowledge of carnal desire. Given the amount of care a new-born infant requires, this desire to gaze upon the infant's body does seem to have a biological element. However, at some unspecified point, adult gaze becomes unnecessary to the child's well-being, although the desire to gaze may linger on in the adult. When gaze no longer serves the well-being of the child, the nature of the adult desire to gaze is called into question. When Marina Warner argues that "It's we who have lost innocent eyes, we who can only be ironical children" (1994:59), she draws attention to how adult gaze has been projected onto children with salacious intent (see also Kincaid 1996, 1998). Like Nabokov's paedophile, Humbert Humbert, we turn the table and claim that it is the child who incites this desire.

This connection between innocence and the body goes some way towards explaining why *sexuality* should be considered the opposite of innocence, rather than any other possible binarism. After all, Blake's initial opposition of innocence and experience does not place sexuality centre stage; for Blake, sexuality is just one of the many experiences and adult may have had and which may or may not have led to the loss of innocence.

So how did innocence become a bodily function? Higonnet's answer focuses on the pervasiveness of visual images of the child, and suggests that development of photography, with its assumed neutrality, played a critical role in this process. Her argument was developed in the mid to late 1990s when digital cameras were rare and the ways in which images could be manipulated through photoshop were not such common knowledge. Widespread awareness of how manipulative photography can be has highlighted everyday understanding of how images purveying childhood innocence are constructed, commercialised and valued by society. It is easier today to recognise the veracity of Higonnet's argument: visual depictions of innocence are heavily reliant on artifice. The same is true of literary depictions of innocence.

Piecing these ideas together, it is possible to see how we have become fearful of the desiring teen. On the one hand, as the care of the young has extended beyond infancy until well into adolescence and parents are expected to care for their children throughout their school years and into tertiary education, adults have been 'trained' to regard those past puberty as 'children'. Yet gazing at a clearly

desiring body awakens concerns about how innocent the adult's desire to gaze really is. My argument is that this need to care for the teenagers as though they were children in the same sense as a seven year old, and the recognition of the teenager's carnal desires provokes a profound schism. Fully recognising the teen as a desiring individual who is capable of creating a family of her own and recognising the continuing responsibilities involved in preparing a teenager for life in contemporary society is not an easy task. The simplest solution is to reject the carnal cravings as inappropriate: they mark the end of childhood before the youngster is ready for an independent life. The simplest way to express how inappropriate these desires are is to scold the desiring teen for failing to behave like a child.

Nevertheless, a study of visual images of childhood alone does not fully explain how and why innocence should have been defined so exclusively as a bodily function, and so rigidly placed in opposition to sexuality, especially since this opposition is not viable. "In practice, rigid oppositions between childhood innocence and adult passion, particularly sexual passion, are difficult to maintain" (Higonnet 1998:10). To find the connection, we must revisit the socio-historical background of the post-Romantic eras in order to discover the new values with which today's views of childhood are consonant.

The emergence of innocence and the romanticisation of the child

The best, most comprehensive overview of the development and manifestation of Romantic notions of the child, its development and its continuous impact on children's literature to date is Roni Natov's study, *The Poetics of Childhood* (2003). This study presents a wide ranging examination of the historical circumstances and cultural manifestations of Western, Romantic notions of the child from the late eighteenth century to the late twentieth century. Natov also shows how views of the evil child, the child in need of correction, psychoanalytical views of the relationship between child and mother and many other features of childhood all relate back to the notion of the Romantic, innocent child. Since Natov's review so comprehensively describes the historical circumstances which shaped Romantic views of childhood, as well as presenting lucid analyses of the cultural, especially literary, manifestations of those views, I shall simply summarise those aspects of both the history and production of the Romantic, innocent child that are most relevant to this study.

The single most important historical prerequisite in Natov's (and Ariès's) account of the development of childhood is the increased wealth arising from the industrial revolution. Quite simply, it was only once a family's economic independence was no longer reliant on child labour that the leisure time contemporary views of childhood demand became possible. Conversely, the continuing absence

of wealth in developing countries today, and its association with child labour and early marriage, highlights the dependency of childhood innocence on economic stability. Increased wealth also led to increased sanitation, an improved diet and other basic improvements in living conditions which decreased the infant mortality rates (and also the numbers of women dying in child birth). As a result, there were more children around and the divisions amongst the population became more subtle. Whereas earlier only members of the clergy and aristocracy were literate and could enjoy leisure time, the emergence of the middle classes – especially those who made their fortunes in trading with the ‘new world’ – led to education and leisure becoming more widespread. Widespread literacy obviously had great implications for the book publishing industry (e.g. Paul 2011). This was also the era of Enlightenment ideas, and the era in which the nation states were formed. The nationalistic Romantic movements across Europe were highly influential in the formation of the Romantic child: the child was depicted as the inheritor of a nation and as the founder of a brave new world. These hopes for the future were tied to other aspects of the child, such as lack of knowledge and experience.

Childhood is a site of differentiation. In order for childhood to exist, it has to be possible to define children as a separate group. In his provocative discussion of the emergence (and disappearance) of childhood, Neil Postman (1982, 1994) suggests that childhood is created through differences in what children and adults know. The knowledge gap, Postman cogently argues, emerged and declined largely as a result of changes in technology. Whilst he deliberately exaggerates the importance of the printing press, telegraph and television to make his point clear, his basic argument is hard to refute. He argues that childhood essentially emerged as a difference between the kinds of knowledge that could be gained through literacy. Postman notes that literacy is a skill that takes time to develop, and so the emergence of the printing press and resulting widespread literacy separated the world of adults from that of children in ways that were eventually to lead to children being considered a separate category of person. Knowledge of the banking industry, for instance, cannot be gained without literacy. (Postman also argues that childhood is disappearing because of technology: television, the internet and digital technology have collapsed the boundaries between what adults know and what children know.) Once knowledge had become established as a source of difference, even the kinds of knowledge that did not require literacy – such as carnality – became defining features of adulthood. For Postman, adult knowledge is comprised of ‘secrets’ which adults should not divulge to children. Childhood is dependent on sheltering the child “from adult secrets, particularly sexual secrets” (Postman [1982] 1994:9).

Blake and the early Romantics differentiate between adults and children on the basis of experience and lack of experience rather than knowledge and lack of

knowledge. Given their emphasis on the reactions to experiences (which implies knowledge), the distinction may seem to be splitting hairs or simply irrelevant. In the context of sexuality, however, the difference between experience and knowledge is significant; one can *know* a great deal, but this is not the same as *experience*. The feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz notes that the distinction remains true regardless of how sexually experienced one might be. Memories of “‘what happened’, or movements, setting, gestures, behaviour may be open to reminiscence, but the intensity of pleasure, the sensations of voluptuousness, the ache of desire have to be revived in order to be recalled. In this case, there is not recollection or recreation, but always creation, production” (Grosz 1995b:286). When carnal experiences are transformed into the written word (or film or pornography for that matter), the core of the experience cannot be narrated. It is kinaesthetic knowledge and so cannot be passed on as cognitive knowledge. The text can only take the reader so far, the reader’s experiences and memories may enable further infilling, but neither language nor memory can infill the kinaesthetic or mental responses of one body to another. When writing for adolescent readers, who may well be wholly inexperienced, adult authors can attempt to bridge the gap between cognitive knowledge about and kinaesthetic experience of carnal desire by providing access to the thoughts and emotions of characters and so on, and as a result provide insights into the mind and prepare the youngster for experience better than any other medium. Ultimately, however, literature cannot provide kinaesthetic experience, only cognitive knowledge and, more importantly, attitudes.

The attitudes expressed in these novels may be of more significance than the knowledge it imparts. As Grosz points out, carnal knowledge is kinaesthetic and affective knowledge, not cognition. She also points out that: “‘how-to’ books on sexuality presume a certain principle of the performance of a chore or task, not the uncovering of desire, which cannot be summarized, put into a formula or learned by rote” (Grosz 1995b:285). Novels have more potential to address the “uncovering of desire” by viewing the experience from within the mind of the experiencing character. This is not the same as knowledge, but is more likely to address the sexiness of sex than most reference books on sex education or parents or even peers. For Neil Postman, this is a problem.

Postman laments the fact that children watching television today know more about adult secrets that youngsters living in the pre-industrial era did: “Not even the ten-year-old girls working in the mines in England in the eighteenth century were as knowing as our own children” (Postman [1982] 1994:97). Yet although ten year olds today may *know* more about sexuality than ten year olds living three centuries ago, they are not likely to be more experienced. The same cannot be as confidently stated about sixteen year olds. No reliable statistics on the dates of first sexual experiences are available from the pre-industrial era, but the age at which

people married and/or had their first children indicates that pre-industrial sixteen year olds were considerably more sexually experienced than their peers when the concept of adolescence took off in the 1950s. By the end of the twentieth century, the situation had changed again. Writing on *The Sex Lives of Teenagers* in 2000, Lyn Ponton explains that

Both boys and girls are entering puberty at least two years earlier than previous generations. This means they are ready for sex physically, but not emotionally or cognitively. Not only are teens having their first sexual experiences earlier than previous generations, at an average age now of sixteen, but they are taking greater risks in this area, with consequences that include sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy, and pathological relationships, among others. (Ponton 2000:3)

Ponton links adolescent carnality with threats it poses to both the individual and society, and these views resemble those expressed in fiction for teens. Her historical contextualisation covers the generations who are parenting teens at the start of the third millennium, but if our historical contextualisation takes us back to the pre-industrial era, we can see that teenagers have had their first sexual experiences at this age before. The emergence of Romanticism in the interim period has altered our views of the significance of the age at which they become experienced.

Postman's argument that differentiation grew out of the spread of literacy logically implies that childhood is irrevocably bound to middle class values, and thus that working class children are somehow less 'child-like' than their more privileged peers. (I shall return to the issue of class as I show how sexual experience can prove a route for under-privileged youngsters to successfully negotiate improvements in their living conditions later in this volume.) Childhood is a middle class construction, but this does not mean it is without value. Noting the artifice in the construction of childhood is not the same as dismissing the positive impact Romanticism has had on society and the way we think. On the contrary, it is only by honestly acknowledging the constructed quality of childhood that we can preserve its strengths whilst acknowledging the need for change to accommodate on-going social developments.

Postman's argument has been criticised, not least for his nostalgia and desire to prevent *The Disappearance of Childhood*. Other critics regard changes in the nature of childhood as inevitable and attempts to retain an outmoded image of childhood are as meaningful as King Knut's attempts to prevent the tide from rising. Critics such as Anne Higonnet are at pains to emphasise how dramatically the sociocultural setting has changed since the early modern period which gave rise to the emergence of childhood. Higonnet claims that "We are living through a major change in our culture's understanding of childhood. But ideas about childhood have changed profoundly before" (1998:8).

Anything that was invented once can be invented again. The image of childhood created in the eighteenth century has run its course, and is now being replaced by another way of picturing childhood. Many people have noticed how radically the image of childhood is changing, but this change is virtually always understood as a distortion or even perversion of true, natural childhood. Such negative interpretation depends, however, on a conviction that the childhood we already know is eternally and universally valid, a conviction disproved by the evidence of history. The eighteenth century did not suddenly discover real childhood; it invented a childhood consonant with new values. (Higonnet 1998:193)

Natov's study corroborates this observation, but also emphasises how the legacy of eighteenth century views can easily lead to the situation where children who do not behave according to adult expectations formed several centuries ago are regarded as being less like 'proper' children than their peers who behave in more traditionally 'child-like' ways.

Both Natov and Higonnet demonstrate that a crucial shift took place during the so-called 'Golden Age' of childhood, i.e., from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The shift was not so much in the nature of the idealised, Romantic child as the naturalisation of these views. So where the early Romantics expressed their views about childhood in adult to adult contexts (such as in the poetry of William Blake and William Wordsworth), those writing from the Golden Age of Childhood onwards apply their beliefs to actual children. Romantic beliefs that children are inherently imaginative, pure and have an affinity with the natural world ceased to be a clearly marked, nostalgic rendition of an idealised child and became a description of what children really *are* like, or worse still, *should* be like. The multitude of ways in which notions of the Romantic child have splintered, Natov cogently argues, seem to develop as if they were 'corrections' which could restore children of today to an innocent state that existed in some unspecified, nostalgic past. Paradoxically, however, the numerous responses to childhood innocence serve to fix the idea in a rigid form.

A brief summary of the key features of the Romantic view of the child is timely. Firstly, the Romantic child is considered to be closer to heaven than the adult because she has spent less time under the corrupting influence of the world. This purity is expressed through the child's seemingly greater affinity to the natural world (as represented by both rural landscapes and animals) than to the urban, modern world inhabited by most middle class adults of the mid nineteenth century. The child (like the rural peasant) reminds the adult of what has been lost in the search for modernity, but also enables the adult world to admire its own progress. The child also becomes a source of entertainment as she is imbued with greater powers of imagination, perception and insight into matters which relate to the non-worldly world. These Romantic children lack the cynicism and guile which

weighs down the adult world, and so offer adults a nostalgic reminder of how much they have changed since they were themselves children as well as a sense of hope that their children will inhabit a better world than they do themselves. Indeed, buying into the Romantic view of the child demands that adults accept that they have a responsibility to protect children from the worldliness of the world.

The shift in the second half of the nineteenth century to which Natov and Higonnet allude is the shift towards placing these idealised demands directly onto the child. As a result, a child who does not behave in accordance with the description above can be admonished for failing to behave appropriately. Higonnet cites Kate Greenaway as a central figure in this shift, but I think we can see this more widely across the first Golden Age of children's literature. This is the shift between adults viewing the child in Romantic terms and addressing the child directly as a Romantic being. Greenaway's images are not just *of* children, they are also intended to be *for* children. Although this distinction is, as Barbara Wall (1991) has demonstrated, highly problematic Higonnet is undoubtedly right in her observation that by the latter half of the nineteenth century, Romantic notions of the child had become so naturalised that it had changed the ways in which children were treated and addressed. That is, from this point, real children were expected to live up to social norms created by adults, and became subject to disapproval or punishment if they failed to do so.

The expectation that children should live up to adult idealisations of what they *should* be like is a central theme of this study. Why the ideal view of the child elevates sexual innocence so much still needs explanation. Higonnet's study of images of childhood from this era, however, reveal that it was at this point when *sexual* innocence emerged as a defining feature of childhood. When combined with Postman's discussion of the centrality of a knowledge differential in the creation of childhood, we can see sexual innocence emerging as a defining feature of childhood only a few decades before the historical changes that were to bring about the emergence of adolescence.

The emergence of adolescence

Adolescence emerged as a separate, ideological category in the Westernised Anglophone world towards the end of the nineteenth century. In America in 1890, only 7% of what we would today refer to as adolescents (people aged 14–17) were in full time education. The vast majority, 93% of that age range's population, was at work alongside adults and younger children (Postman [1982] 1994:xii). Although many would have been apprenticed to learn more skilful trades, the vast majority were engaged in work that required fairly low levels of skill. Without wishing to suggest that full time education is *not* work, employed youngsters do not tend to

be classified as 'children' because they do not conform to Western beliefs that paid labour and childhood are compatible. Moreover, these youngsters were working directly alongside the adults, and although the tasks they performed were often adjusted for physical strength and experience, they shared the same working conditions. They were little men and little women; they were not adolescents as we know them today.

The socio-historical circumstances which gave rise to the birth of the adolescent did not appear during the Second World War itself, but rather during the period of affluence that followed. The parents of youngsters in the 1950s had lived through the great Depression of the 1930s and the Second World War. They wanted to offer something better to their children than they had known themselves. Instead of sending their teenage children off to work as apprentices, the vast majority of the post-war generations' parents could afford to keep their children at school, with the result that this new generation was more highly educated than their parents. Not only were these teenagers more literate than previous generations, they had more spare time and they had more money behind them. Governments also recognised the importance of having an educated workforce, and so compulsory education was extended throughout the Western Anglophone world.

In the twentieth century, the United Nations defined childhood as existing between birth and the age of eighteen, and so legally adolescents are classed as children. Even though well-known phenomena such as how the on-set of AIDS reducing average life expectancy in countries such as Namibia to the mid-thirties (meaning that individuals are orphaned much younger), the child labour statistics for India and the young soldiers in Idi Amin's army suffice to demonstrate that the UN's 'definition' is more an optimistic expression of hope than a reflection of global reality, the twentieth century saw a consolidation of child-adult differences. During this century, childhood in the Western world became increasingly proscribed by law, separated by social practice and elevated by the media.

The increased separation between adults and children during the twentieth century was partly made possible through the emergence of the buffer zone of adolescence; a period when one is not a child, but is not an adult either. The historical timing is evident in the literature produced for the young. The first 'Golden Age' of Anglophone children's literature occurred during the Victorian era, and was primarily intended for readers aged 9–12 and focussed on pre-pubescent characters. The Second Golden Age of Children's Literature, unsurprisingly, occurred as the numbers of people in fulltime education after the minimum school leaving age swelled. During the twentieth century, the first books specifically intended for teenagers were written and, by the end of the century, quality literature for teenagers depicting adolescent characters was available in abundance. In literature for younger children, adolescents appear as ideals to which young children

should aspire. In the literature that was supposedly their own, however, they were policed by the adult desire “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” (Trites 2000:83). As Trites demonstrates, this is especially true in the depiction of death and adolescent sexuality.

Sexual innocence and the fear of the knowing child

The history of childhood and adolescence demonstrates that neither are ‘natural’ categories, but does not clarify why the quality of ‘innocence’ – more specifically, *sexual* innocence – should have become such a defining feature. Anne Higonnet’s study of visual images of childhood shows how innocence increasingly became expressed as a bodily property, rather than a quality of mind. This is important because if a property is assumed to have a biological derivation, then it may be regarded as being ‘natural’. In much the same way that the presence of a womb was deemed a cause of ‘hysteria’ for Victorian medics, and so ‘explained’ why women were ‘naturally’ more prone to hysterics, then if childhood innocence can be located within or attributed to the child’s body, then it can more easily be accepted as being ‘natural’ rather than merely ‘social’.

There are biological differences between adults and children, not all of which can be dismissed. Quite simply, infants cannot survive without the aid and care of adults. Nevertheless, once an individual is capable of walking, talking, feeding and defecating alone, the need for care becomes increasingly arbitrary. If young children were not capable of working, there would be no need for laws prohibiting them from doing so. But, if the qualities of the child elevated by the Romantics – purity, innocence, imagination etc. – can be treated as bodily properties, then they are more easily integrated into our belief that childhood is a ‘natural’ state long past infancy. Moreover, conflating childhood innocence with sexual inexperience has another biological logic behind it: the on-set of puberty can easily be treated as a ‘natural’ end to childhood. Even though the on-set of puberty takes place earlier than it did a few generations ago, achieving physical maturity requires time and so puberty provides a tangible means of differentiating adults from children. Given that puberty is subject to both social and historical variation, we should not be so naïve as to believe that these biological changes are absolute and unconnected to social pressures, even though they are irrefutable. By elevating carnal desire and sexual experience as *the* area of knowledge (as opposed to, for instance, social communication skills or knowledge about digital media) which separates children from adults, childhood can be preserved *ad infinitum*. Furthermore, by focussing

on a basic human need, the sex drive, the illusion is created that such differences are 'natural'.

So what is innocence and what does it mean to declare it a bodily property? Marah Gubar notes how often innocence is sexualized and asks whether there is "something about innocence as a concept that makes it especially open to association with its opposite?" (2011:121). Drawing heavily on the work of Kincaid, Gubar's conclusion is that "Innocence is all about what you lack (guilt, guile, knowledge, experience) or what you cannot do; etymologically, *innocens* means 'not harming' (being unable to injure anyone)" (*ibid.*). And since innocence is about *lack*, a single absence of lack results in the loss of innocence (see also Kincaid 1992, 1998:51–72). This would account for the magical belief that a single sexual encounter can bring about the end of childhood and miraculously transform the fumbled individual into an adult.

This magical on/off thinking is deeply engrained in our thinking, and it is damaging our youth. For instance, since carnal desire has become a shorthand reference for all aspects of childhood innocence, the pubertal youngster experiencing sexual feelings for the first time not only receives no guidance on how such feelings might be managed, but can be rebuked and reviled for refusing to be a child. My point may become clearer if I compare it with another emotion which is incompatible with the Romantic view of the child: rage. Young babies experience rage, they scream and cry and allow others to know how they are feeling. Toddlers throw themselves to the floor, kicking, screaming and revealing their feelings to the world. Gradually children are socialised into (more or less) acceptable ways of expressing their rage. Rage is never an easy emotion to deal with and/or direct in productive ways, but it is a valuable and unavoidable emotion. The child who is filled with rage may be disciplined for failing to express her emotions according to socially sanctioned norms, but she is still considered a child. Indeed she is likely to be forgiven for expressing her rage 'inappropriately' because of her age. The pubescent youngster experiencing carnal desire does not meet with such understanding; she is disciplined and/or shamed for failing to be a child, but she is rarely advised on how to express her feelings appropriately. Neither child nor adult, the desiring teen has helped to sustain the Romantic view of the child beyond its expiry date.

The huge difference between expecting children to be innocent and expecting adolescents to be rebellious is that children are protected by beliefs in their innocence but teenagers can be punished and maligned by the negative stereotypes surrounding adolescents: they have become scapegoats for disappointment surrounding the dissolution of Romantic beliefs about the nature of childhood. Indeed, I argue that adolescence has emerged as a discrete period in the development of a mature personality partly as a continuance of the othering of the child, and is thus intimately interconnected with the on-going 'crisis' in Western

perceptions of childhood. The crisis is *not* that children today are actually less innocent than their contemporaries were half a century ago, but rather that the notion of childhood innocence is inherently problematic in and of itself. As Rose demonstrated so cogently four decades ago, childhood innocence is the product adult desires which are projected onto children (see also Higonnet 1998:194 and Kincaid 1992, 1998). In this process, the quality of innocence is no longer a way of responding to the world as it was for the early Romantics, and nor has it remained within the confines of adult-adult communication. It is a demand that is placed upon children. By treating childhood innocence and carnal desires as binary 'opposites', the on-set of sexual feelings during puberty becomes the ideal target for policing the boundaries of adulthood. All the evidence which signals that children are not as 'innocent' (i.e. imaginative, curious, beautiful and charming) as they are held up to be can be ignored and shifted into a separate category: adolescence. A child who behaves in 'knowing' ways can be reclassified as a teenager, thereby retaining the purity of the child. The fairly recent emergence of the term 'tween' (for a person who is *between* childhood and adolescence) is a continuation of this process.

Adolescence has been constructed as a period of *sturm und drang* precisely in order to bolster the Romantic view of the child, and to prevent it from crumbling under the onslaught of counter-evidence. Biologically (and thus 'naturally') adolescence is marked by pubertal changes and the onset of sexual desire. Historically and sociologically we know that the age at which such changes take place is partly dependent on environmental factors, and so adolescence is just as artificial and constructed as childhood, but it is neither less pervasive nor less powerful than the Romantic view of the child. Socially, Karen Coats describes adolescence as "a crisis of identity" (2004:137), "an in-between time" when adolescents "challenge the borders of identity, trying to become adult without becoming adulterated" (Coats 2004:142). Expressed in this way, Coats supports a view of identity as something which is pre-existing. Adulthood, childhood and adolescence are expressed in everyday speech as pre-existing categories which an individual must negotiate in order to take on an identity. The borders are defined and sufficiently rigid that encountering them will shape the form of the adult that emerges. Equally, expressed in this way, identity becomes something like a ready-made suit. One can try on a fairly wide range of models for size, and perhaps make small adjustments to make them fit better, but the basic selection available exists prior to the adolescent's identity quest.

My ironic tone reflects my scepticism about such views. This is fuelled by my personal experience of having been an adult now for several decades and knowing numerous other members of this category. I neither consider myself to be, nor have I ever met another adult who was free from shifts in identity. The assumed

fluidity of adolescent identities and the assumed fixity of adult identities are social constructions, not biological imperatives. The construction of adolescence as a period of strife, uncertainty, angst and fluidity all serve to support beliefs in the purity of childhood and the stability of adulthood. The price for imposing these beliefs on the adolescent is largely paid for by the teenage population, who are treated as delinquent deviants when they express their carnal desires.

Imposing the imperative of sexual innocence on adolescents

In all three volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault drew our attention to the ways in which Western ideas about sexuality rely on notions of deviance in order to elevate 'normality' (see also Foucault 1999:167–200 & 231–290). Trites develops this to suggest that "teenage sexuality is defined in terms of deviancy" (2000:87). Postman cites a research study which revealed that already by 1976 some 55% of America's 19 year olds were sexually active (in Postman [1982] 1994:137), and the proportion of sexually active teenagers has increased since then. And although fully reliable figures are unlikely to be obtained, it is fair to say that presenting an activity in which the majority of the target population is engaged as 'deviant' is nonsensical. The distinction between labelling the behaviour deviant and labelling the person engaging in the behaviour deviant is negligible. In this way, the adultriarchy has its cake and eats it. Adolescents are deemed to be non-adult because they do not engage in adult behaviour, but if they do engage in adult behaviour, that behaviour is deemed deviant and therefore non-adult.

Suggesting that teenage sexuality is marginalized or abnormal may, in the face of the current onslaught of revealing, skimpy clothing and sexually overt music videos, seem self-evidently wrong. I do not suggest that there is absence of information available on this subject. On the contrary, adolescents at the start of this millennium are deluged with an overload of information. Indeed, the very quantity of information about sexual matters distracts attention from its low quality. As Foucault noted, "What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the secret*" ([1978] 1990:35).

In speaking about 'the secret' adults adopt a significant power position. They control the discourse. Postman argues that this is highly beneficial. He argues that childhood can only survive so long as the knowledge gap is maintained. In order to preserve childhood, Postman argues, we *should* keep secrets from children. The "knowledge gap" this creates is *the* defining feature of childhood (Postman [1982] 1994:28). Drawing on the work of Elias, Postman discusses a variety of topics on which a knowledge gap between adults and children were created:

as the concept of childhood developed, society began to collect a rich content of secrets to be kept from the young: secrets about sexual relations, but also about money, about violence, about illness, about death, about social relations. There even developed [a] language of secrets – that is, a store of words not to be spoken in the presence of children (Postman [1982] 1994:48–9)

Not all things that form knowledge gaps between adults and children can sensibly be referred to as ‘secrets’ in common parlance. The intricacies of inland revenue are not generally considered to be secrets, but they do create a knowledge gap as adults generally assume that children will be uninterested in this topic and unable to comprehend the complexities of the system. For the purposes of defining children as group who are unlike adults, however, taxation laws contribute to the othering of the child, but not as successfully as sexuality since many adults also struggle to comprehend the collection and dispersal of taxes, but few are virgins.

The problem arises when adolescents are perceived as behaving in ways that encroach upon adult territory revealing that they are able to negotiate the knowledge gap. Appelbaum’s (2010) study of science fiction for adolescents reveals that much of the technophobia expressed in these novels comes from adult fears that their children know more than they do. In terms of emotional development, as my example of rage above illustrates, children are typically praised for learning to mimic adult forms of expression. In other contexts, as Giroux observes, “children, asked to shoulder enormous responsibilities, often respond by mimicking and emulating adult behaviours, which they are then condemned for appropriating” (2000:19). When adolescents express carnal desire, they are indeed ‘condemned for appropriating’ adult behaviours. They are forced to operate within the (adult controlled) discourses which use strategies to render them deviant or abnormal. Effectively, it is impossible to transition between the ‘normalcy’ of childhood and the ‘normalcy’ of adulthood without traversing the ‘abnormality’ of adolescence.

So how can adolescent sexuality be treated as deviant when the behaviour itself is no different from that of adults? Adolescents are by no means the only group whose sexuality is marginalised. Foucault argues that all sexual behaviour is regulated for the purposes of controlling and repressing the masses. He distinguishes between ‘sex’, which he treats as being synonymous with copulation, and ‘sexuality’ which is a discursive construct ([1978] 1990:68–9). He argues that the separation of these aspects of sexual behaviour in Western cultures has arisen as a means of regulating citizens. I suggest this is especially true of adolescent sexual behaviour: it is not so much copulation that disturbs aetnonormativity, but rather that the adolescent has dared to enter the adult domain. This can be rationalised if copulation results in parenthood, thereby rendering the teenager more caregiver than in need of care. The high numbers unwanted pregnancies in

adolescent fiction undoubtedly serve to warn, scold or frighten teenagers into at least using contraceptives but preferably refraining from sexual activity altogether. They also reveal adult authors' fears of an end to childhood, particularly if this end seems premature. In writing about adolescent sexual acts, adult authors construct a discourse of teenage sexuality as being abnormal, fearful and typically abusive.

As has already been noted, adolescence has been characterised by associations with trauma, difficulty and distress. By associating adolescent sexuality with pain and punishment whilst adult sexuality is portrayed as a source of pleasure, adolescents are rendered deviant. (This linking together of sexuality and pain is a topic to which I return in the following chapter.) A more subtle means of identifying how adolescent sexuality is rendered deviant is to seek out places where authors struggle to portray this aspect of humanity. Whilst some authors attempt to convey the richness of human sexuality with a metaphorical palette of colours, others prefer to take the stoical path of functional medicine. Accuracy of representation is not, as such, my central concern, but rather the ways in which the information simultaneously reflects and shapes the boundaries between groups of people. When numerous authors writing about the same topic (adolescent sexuality) all deploy the same forms of repressive strategies, then although quite possibly unintentional from any given individual's point of view, we may be accessing a culturally imposed ideology about what is and what is not acceptable to write for young people. By observing trends which occur across numerous titles, we can investigate the social ideology underlying the text.

My contention is that (adult) authors struggle to depict situations in which the adult – adolescent binarism collapses. Teenagers expressing their carnal desires are a specific instance of this phenomenon. As adults, authors are endowed with a responsibility to maintain the status quo, that is, the situation in which adults are empowered at the expense of the adolescent 'other'. If they do not, the work is unlikely to be accepted by publishers and booksellers, not to mention the book buying (adult) public. Yet, by choosing to depict sexually active teenagers for young readers, they are more likely to be open to the possibility of negotiation. After all, no-one is forcing authors to write about this aspect of human experience. Nevertheless, these self-selected writers are caught between the desire to represent adolescent sexuality as honestly and realistically as they can within a society where the dominant ideology is that adolescent sexuality is deviant.

In *Disturbing the Universe* (2000), Trites showed that, with a few notable exceptions, the result was that even in texts where authors overtly set out to create the image of adolescent sexuality as being 'normal' (Judy Blume's *Forever* is Trites's apt example), the result is often the reverse.

Teenage characters in YA novels agonize about 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. But for many characters in YA novels, experiencing sexuality marks a rite of passage that helps define themselves as having left childhood behind. (Trites 2000:84)

By offering sex as a route to negotiating adulthood and then presenting the outcome as a loss, adult authors offer adolescents a highly ambivalent view of carnal desire. These mixed attitudes are passed on: “while children are active agents in their own construction of the world, they come to understand themselves in the mirror of what others have constructed as a world” (Leavitt 2006:125 in Applebaum 2010:99). The mirror teenage novels hold up, as Trites observed, suggests that sexuality is something to “agonize about” and then be punished for. The sexually provocative adolescent is perceived as presenting herself as ‘knowing’ adult secrets and thus entitled to share adult power. How sustainable such forms of power are is another matter, but the perception of a challenge to the aetnonormative world order is sufficient to adult wrath.

This focus on adolescents’ pain is not confined to their carnal desires. Kim Reynolds (2004) comments on the prevailing trend to portray adolescence as a period of turbulence during which individuals struggle with issues of power and identity. And although Reynolds would be the last to advocate facile happy endings, she is unquestionably correct in her identification of a preoccupation with the conflicts involved in maturation (see also Aronson 2002). This trend indicates a disturbing ideology of adolescence, particularly as we are aware that such belief systems tend to be self-fulfilling. That is, if teenagers are surrounded by a belief system that emphasises strife, they are more likely to perceive themselves as being in a state of conflict than they would if other options were more clearly visible. In her later work, *Radical Children’s Literature*, however, Reynolds was to observe that a “radical” change had taken place since the start of the twenty-first century and that carnal desire no longer belonged exclusively to the domain of adulthood. She also argued that literature for children and adolescents had played a significant role in this change.

There has been a shift in how adolescents’ carnal cravings and the consequences of their desires are depicted in the literature for teens, and this volume will gradually expose many aspects of the change. However, fiction for youth is still largely conservative and the changes we shall see are by no means consistently towards a radical rethinking of the power struggle underlying depictions of adolescent desire. On the contrary, in the final section of this chapter, I examine literary

losses of virginity – comparing books written in the late 1960s or early 1970s with those written in the third millennium – to demonstrate that the magical thinking that sex can turn a child into an adult has actually increased.

The end of innocence: Literary losses of virginity

One of the very few sex education books to discuss the sexiness of sex, *Will I Like It?* by Peter Mayle, opens by pointing out how

a lot of sex, as advertised in books, plays, films, TV and magazines, conditions us to expect sexual perfection. If our own first efforts don't measure up, we get disappointed and discouraged, and maybe even start to think there's something wrong with us.

There's nothing wrong at all, except that real life is seldom as well-organized as fiction. (Mayle 1978:2–3)

Writing at the point when the 'sexual revolution' was starting to enter the bedrooms of the majority population, Mayle was surely right in his comments on the sexual sophistication of the fictional worlds of screen and print. However, in 1978, there were very few depictions of sexually active teenagers in fiction written for adolescents. And, unlike music videos for teens which rapidly began to develop along the lines Mayle describes, when fiction depicting sexually active adolescents began to emerge, few adolescents would have had cause to worry about 'measuring up' to the standards set by literary sex, but some might have wondered why one might want to do something so unpleasant. These books of the 1980s were not only influenced by adult concerns about loss of innocence; they were also influenced by concerns surrounding the spread of HIV/AIDS. In 1978, three on-stage depictions of adolescent sexuality that have since touchstones in the field were available: Judy Blume's *Forever* (1975), Norma Klein's *It's OK If You Don't Love Me* (1977) and, in the UK, Aidan Chambers's *Breaktime* (1978).

Of the three, Blume's *Forever* is probably the most well-thumbed. Kath and Michael's relationship forms the bedrock of Trites's explanation as to how adolescent sexuality forms a site in which adult-teen power relations are played out. Her arguments are countered by Reynolds, who argues that "Katherine and Michael have been providing good role models for more than two generations" (2007:120). Nearly four decades after it was first published, *Forever* does still stand out for its willingness to depict various sexual activities in sufficiently accurate detail for teen readers to be able to envisage and replicate for themselves. Trites describes it as "a self-help manual to help teenagers learn more about sex" (2000:88). Unlike the sex-education manuals discussed by Paul (2005), *Forever* provides detailed

accounts of Kath's emotional and physical responses to Michael following their relationship from their first meeting over a fondue through their first kisses and fondlings to mutual masturbation, penetrative sex (in various positions) and eventually the end of their relationship. It "includes plenty of unglamorous details" (Reynolds 2007:120) which give the novel a refreshing realism after the kind of perfection Mayle mentions in his above cited guide to sex, *Will I Like It?*. The evening Kath and Michael have penetrative sex for the first time, Michael ejaculates prematurely which brings their first attempt to an unsatisfactory conclusion. In an obvious snipe at Zindel's *My Darling, My Hamburger* (in which the sex education teacher, Miss Fanuzzi, suggests that girls wishing to "stop a guy on the make [should] ... suggest going to get a hamburger" [*My Hamburger*, p. 6]), Blume's couple simply go out for hamburgers and come back and try again. This time they are successful, but the experience is so disappointing that Kath is left thinking "I'll never have to go through the first-time business again and I'm glad – I'm so glad it's over! Still, I can't help feeling let down. ... But Michael is probably right – this takes practice. I can't imagine what the first time would be like with someone you didn't love" (*Forever*, p. 116).

Kath and Michael do go on to have more sexually fulfilling experiences, and Blume's practical guide to 'practice makes perfect' has doubtlessly calmed quite a number of teens who, as Mayle suggests, assume that they are doing something wrong when their sexual chemistry does not match the streamlined success of adult romance fiction and film. Overall, however, the novel does indeed send the mixed message that "Kids are freer about sex than they were prior to the 1970s, but they still end up getting hurt. In this discourse, sexuality is at once liberated and repressed" (Trites 2000:82). Kath's loss of virginity is characterized by a decided lack of enjoyment, and her thoughts on how much worse it would have been if she had not been in love with Michael send the clear message that sex is often painful and unpleasant, and only bearable if you really love the person you are having sex with. And it is this depiction of first time sex, and not Klein's sexually confident *It's OK If You Don't Love Me* or Chambers's intellectual *Breaktime*, that becomes standard in novels from the 1980s onwards. In both the latter novels, it is the boy's first time but not the girl's (the reverse is true in Blume's *Forever*).

Klein's depiction of female sexual autonomy is still remarkable, even when judged by twenty-first century standards. Jody is no Kath. She knows what she wants and she ensures she gets it. She is not co-dependent and is fully willing to satisfy her sexual needs with a boy she knows is not in love with her. As the title of novel suggests, she does not need to be in love in order to enjoy sex. Unfortunately, this is also her down fall. Her relationship with Lyle, the first boy she really loves but the second boy she has sex with, ends because she has sex with her ex-boyfriend, just to show off her body and how much she has developed sexually. In

the musings that follow, however, Jody shows no signs of regretting either that she enjoyed sex with her ex or that she told Lyle the truth when he asked, only sadness that Lyle could not accept her the way she is. Overtly feminist, the novel ends with Jody convinced that "It's not that I think the only relationships worth anything are the kind that last for all time" (*It's OK*, p. 202), which offers a refreshing antidote to the novels which present the end of a relationship as punishment for losing one's virginity.

Jody's independence, her willingness to accept responsibility for her actions and her capacity to arrange her own and others' lives so that she can fulfil her sexual desires makes the novel stand out, yet even she admits that "it's hard to admit that sex is something you want to do or might do" (*It's OK*, p. 60). Like Kath and Michael, Jody and Lyle communicate exceptionally well. They are able to discuss whether or not to have sex, how they feel about each other and contraception. Although not quite as detailed as Blume, Klein's couple have to negotiate their way through premature ejaculation (in both directions) and 'practice' quite a few times before they achieve 'perfection'. Their first fully successful sexual encounter contains a number of surprising details. Firstly, the couple are both aroused as a direct result of beating Jody's sexist father and his friend at tennis and the admission that Jody, who experiences orgasms so easily during foreplay, finally experiences an orgasm with Lyle as they have sex on the bathroom floor. Klein's admission that revenge and anger can play a role in carnal desire is not repeated in any of the other novels or short stories in the corpus.

The novel does contain elements which resemble those in *Forever*, which Trites identified as revealing the wagging finger of the adult, the difference lies in their presentation. Whereas Kath's mother is the one to point out that "you can't go back to holding hands" (*Forever*, p. 93), Jody herself muses that "Having done it, even just the dozen times or so with Whitney, it's hard to go back to an earlier stage of development, as it were" (*It's OK*, p. 97). Sex does result in an unplanned pregnancy, albeit not Jody's but Lyle's sister and her husband. And sex is ultimately the reason why Lyle and Jody split up. However, the spirit of the novel is liberatory and celebratory.

The practical realism of Klein and Blume is not evident in Chambers's *Breaktime*; the novel Reynolds describes as "Probably the most intellectually and aesthetically interesting book about a teenager's first sexual experience" (2007:118). The novel pays homage to Joyce's *Ulysses* in both form and content. As a result, it is also the most intellectually challenging account of the loss of virginity in the corpus, which is probably why – unlike the works by Blume and Klein – it has never been banned or vilified on the grounds of its sexually explicit content. For although *Breaktime*, like *Ulysses*, includes depictions of the protagonist masturbating as well as having sex, these accounts are far from transparent to the uninitiated.

For instance, the description of Ditto masturbating whilst looking at a picture of Helen, his former classmate, and the woman with whom he later loses his virginity, is easy to interpret for anyone who has experienced desire and even more so for those who are familiar with Joyce's classic. However, for inexperienced readers, Chambers's increasingly incoherent stream of consciousness monologue is decidedly opaque.

Her of course, the picture is of her ... those legs what legs what tits and a face to go with them a bit knowing though and maybe that's what held me back though it doesn't now you brute but this letter now maybe all the time she was waiting was wanting was after it me me her after it was she me her me her legs breasts skin face legs o legs her her her there there there there there there.

and it's all over my frigging shirt and my hanky's in my pocket in me trousers on the frigging floor
(*Breaktime*, p. 19–20)

In this way, Chambers protects his young readers from knowing more than they want to know. What they understand from this text depends more on what knowledge (both literary and sexual) they bring to the reading experience than on what actually appears on the page. Immediately afterwards, we learn that Ditto is a virgin and that he is embarrassed by his own masturbating (or 'self-abuse' as it is termed in his thoughts).

The account of Ditto and Helen's first, full sexual experience is no less challenging as Chambers represents the event as a pastiche of three different texts, each vying for readers' attention, and each allowing readers to select their own path. Formally, this is achieved by dividing the page into two columns. The one on the right is an easily comprehensible extract from Dr. Spock's *A Young Person's Guide to Life and Love* (1970), in which the venerable paediatrician describes how "lips, tongue, hands may make loving contact with lips, tongue, breasts or genitals" (in *Breaktime*, 123), whilst in the left hand column Ditto describes his experience of making precisely such contacts with Helen's body. Ditto's narration is further divided so that the normal script focuses on Ditto's cognitive understanding of the sexual activities, whilst the sections in italics represent his emotional and physical responses as he initially resists and then enjoys his first full sexual encounter with Helen.

I grasped at her. For a fearful
enjoy enjoy enjoy enjoy enjoy enjoy
moment she was gone. But then
shut it words are like boulders
was back up again.
thoughts are like broadsides fired
And naked.

more surely or
more pleasurably
than by genital
intercourse. For most
couples, however, the
ultimate desire is
for intercourse, in

against my body pleasure why?

As I was

o why? o sylvan wyesdale

And as eager

is this what makes body

As blind

is this the howdyado the I'm all

As grasping

right jack the deflowering of ditto

which the man

inserts his erect

penis into the

woman's vagina. Her

labia and vagina have

been made more moist

than usual by her

excitement, so

the penis can slip in more easily.

(*Breaktime*, p. 124)

As Reynolds wryly observes, "*Breaktime* can hardly be described as a titillating novel. Its point is to stimulate the mind rather than the body", more specifically, the literary sensitive and widely read mind: "the intellectual demands of Chambers's book have always prevented it from appealing to a mass readership" (Reynolds 2007:119). Yet, despite Reynolds' claim that "after nearly thirty years, it is also dated", *Breaktime* remains a 'radical' work of adolescent fiction for its willingness to engage with young readers in such an intellectually demanding fashion (*ibid.*).

Breaktime also stands out for its presentation of sexual pleasure between two teenagers who do not pretend they are in love or even committed to continuing their relationship after this encounter. Trites praises Chambers for his portrayal of female agency from a male perspective in the scene quoted above. Whilst I agree that this is both unusual and effective, I find myself disappointed in that Ditto's lacks emotional engagement; a trope that pervades depictions of heterosexual sex from a male perspective throughout the corpus. The narrative shift to Helen's perspective shields the reader from knowing what is taking place in the mind and heart of Ditto (the boy). As if to underline this feature, Ditto explains "And then there were no more words no more thoughts Nothing but movement body of Flesh on flesh on Mouth and hands and legs and thrusting driving wild relief felt during her high long scream" (*Breaktime*, p. 126). The absence of words, thoughts and even feelings during sex seems to me to be common in depictions of male heterosexuality. As I will show in the chapter on queer sexualities, gay teens are depicted as experiencing emotions – albeit often ones of fear, shame and confusion – whereas heterosexual youths are deprived a literature which expresses their feelings. Fortunately in *Breaktime* neither Ditto nor Helen suffer for their sexual pleasures (although it should be admitted that the novel ends just ten pages after the couple have had sex). Sadly, the openness and liberal thinking which inform these "post-pill pre-AIDs" (Reynolds 2007:118) novels from the 1970s was to wane sharply with the emergence of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s.

Given the intimate connection between fiction intended for teens and the desire to protect and prepare youngsters for the world outside, it is perhaps not so surprising that the elements found in the above mentioned novels which were to survive the sexual and cultural clamp down of the ensuing era were the acceptance that adolescents are sexually active, the awareness of the need to talk to them openly and, somewhat incongruently, Blume's insistence that you won't like it the first time and you'll end up being hurt. The resulting mixed message which simultaneously represses and liberates adolescent sexuality was, as Trites points out, to dominate novels of the 1980s and 1990s.

Trites illustrates her claims with reference to Francesca Lia Block's *Dangerous Angels* sextet, also known as the *Weetzie Bat* books after the protagonist of the first novel who appears throughout the series. Block has been praised for her presentation of aspects of adolescent life that are often censored, including drug taking, eating disorders, sexual and physical abuse, and, of course, teenage sexual relations both straight and gay. Indeed, the quantity of Block's writing about sexual matters distracts attention from its coercive quality. For instance, it is noteworthy that her collection of erotic short stories, *Nymph*, is officially classified as a work for adults, even though its format resembles her other works so closely that the publishers are also marketing it for adolescents. The only significant difference between *Nymph* and the *Dangerous Angels* sextet is that the former never judges or censors its characters. Trites contention, which I fully support, is that even liberal authors like Block struggle when the adult-adolescent binarism collapses. They use narrative techniques and plot elements which denigrate adolescents for behaving in ways that are 'too adult'. For instance, *Weetzie Bat* begins with Weetzie and her best friend, Dirk (who is gay) going 'duck hunting' (i.e. trying to pick up men). Weetzie goes home with a singer, Buzz, who handcuffs her to the bed and rapes her. Dirk picks up a guy at a sex store and goes back to his apartment where "Dirk had awakened, looked at the unfamiliar face, and gone home fast" (*Weetzie Bat*, 10). These and other disastrous relationship experiences lead the pair to conclude that "Love is a dangerous angel" (*Weetzie Bat*, 11), the phrase that became the title of the series.

Given that the series' title is a warning to teens that love hurts, it should not be surprising that each of the novels contains numerous overt warnings about the dangers of sexuality, and yet the inclusion of so many calamitous consequences in novels that otherwise seem so liberal in their views does seem decidedly contradictory. On the one hand, high school aged Weetzie and Dirk do meet the men of their dreams and form settled, long term relationships whilst maintaining their connection to one another and embracing extended family members such as Witch Baby, the daughter of Weetzie's husband by another woman, as part of their

family.¹ But this happy scenario is set against the dawn of the AIDS crisis (although neither the virus nor the disease are ever named), which badly affects Dirk and Duck's circle of friends. The daughters, Witch Baby and Cherokee Bat, suffer as a result of their sexual desires becoming depressive, possessive, and damage their relationships with one another.

In the second novel in the sextet, Weetzie Bat and her husband leave their daughters at home whilst they go off to make a film. Whilst their parents are away, Cherokee and Witch Baby form a band with Cherokee's long standing love interest, Raphael, and Angel Juan, who later becomes Witch Baby's first lover. This novel primarily focuses on Cherokee's sexual awakening. Coyote, who has been appointed the girls' temporary guardian in their parents' absence, recognizes Cherokee's desire and warns her that "sexual relations ... can drain us" (*The Goat Guys*, p. 211). He urges her to be careful and protect herself, but Cherokee assumes he means she should use contraceptives and protect herself from STDs. Coyote responds that "There is a power, great power ... You do not understand it yet" (*The Goat Guys*, p. 211), which makes Cherokee want to shout "I'm a woman already and you want to keep me a child. You want us all to be children" (*The Goat Guys*, p. 212). This exchange is decidedly on the side of the adolescent who feels put down by the adults around her, who warn her against becoming sexually active without really offering any explanation as to how this power might damage them. She does, however, correctly identify that the root cause of the problem is an adult-adolescent power struggle.

Fittingly, and in line with Trites's thesis that this struggle is tied to adults' need to preserve their belief in childhood innocence, Cherokee and Raphael recognize how their 'loss of innocence' has negatively affected their connection to one another:

"Remember how when we were really little we used to have the same dreams?" Cherokee whispered.

"It was like going on trips together."

"It stopped when we started making love."

"I know."

(*The Goat Guys*, p. 250)

Time and time again, the end of virginity marks the end of childhood, and with it the end of idyll, innocence and happiness. Fictional teenagers are forced to suffer for their decision to have sex (or for placing themselves in risky situations which result in sexual abuse).

1. In the most recent addition to the series, *Necklace of Tears* (2005), depicts Weetzie, now in her 40s, separated from her husband and estranged from her daughters. After a magical time-out period in an LA hotel, she returns to her husband and rebuilds her relationship with her family on a more egalitarian basis.

The horror of the AIDS crisis contributed to the maintenance of strategies of repression in adolescent fiction throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The focus on HIV rather than more common, and easily curable, sexually transmitted diseases suggests to me that disease is primarily a punishment. Only after the turn of the millennium did 'radical' children's literature emerge, to present characters who were as liberated as Ditto and Jody, but decidedly less genuinely knowledgeable and less emotionally involved. In the noughties, loss of virginity is presented as something troubling and disempowering, even when the couples appear to be empowered by their decision to have sex.

In her examination of the 'hybrid children' born in Marjorie Blackman's *Noughts and Crosses* and Stephenie Meyer's *Breaking Dawn*, both published in the twenty-first century, Clémentine Beauvais (2012) observes that, although the sexual experiences of both couples were mutually desired, in both cases, the events are take place against a backdrop of violence. Sephy and Callum's love making takes place whilst Sephy is being held captive by an extremist 'nought' unit headed by Callum's brother, Jude. Bella wakes up after her wedding night to discover she is covered in bruises and feathers as Edward has not managed to fully control his immense vampire strength. Both couples comprise of virgins, but unlike Blume's and Klein's couples, they appear naturally gifted in this area, and their experiences are pleasurable. Nevertheless, both Sephy and Bella suffer as a result of their loss of virginity, and both conceive children. Callum's sufferings are even more extensive: he executed on the orders of Sephy's father. Only Edward gets off lightly, 'suffering' only from pangs of guilt. Pairings across the Catholic-Protestant divide in Irish novels like Joan Lingard's *Kevin and Sadie* series (1970–1976) and Kate MacLachlan's *Love My Enemy* (2004) are also evoke images of violence alongside the emergence of sexual desire, even though both novels evoke the potential of sex to act as a "medium for the transcendence of inherited prejudices" (O'Sullivan 2011:101). They are all 'punished' for being sexually active.

The blending of violence with the loss of virginity that Beauvais' observes, as well as the virgin-to-mother conceptions trope I discuss in the following chapter, are surprisingly common in the corpus and are not restricted to fantasy settings. Pat in Josephine Kamm's *Young Mother* (1965) conceives her child after her drink has been spiked by an older, married man at a party. And far from expressing compassion for her daughter's date-rape, her mother criticizes her for getting herself into a risky situation. Two decades later, Teresa in *Someone Else's Baby* (1990), conceives her daughter under almost identical circumstances. And Liz's virgin-to-mother conception in Paul Zindel's *My Darling, My Hamburger* (1969) is preceded by an attempted date-rape although, like Kamm's novel, from the same period, it was produced before the term was in wide circulation. And even those who have sex purely of their own volition do not necessarily enjoy the experience. Lana, in

Dyan Sheldon's *And Baby Makes Two* (2000), provides an account of her loss of virginity is divest of both pleasure and passion: "there was this little jolt of pain and Les's eyes moved around like he was having some sort of fit, and then he rolled on his back" (*Baby Makes Two*, p. 57). In fact, Lana is so ignorant about sex, she doesn't even realise that they have had sex until Les asks her whether she thought it was great too.

Associating the loss of virginity, even when mutually desired, with violence and pain underscores the view that teenagers should curb and control their sexual desires or expect to suffer. The blaming of the date-rape victims in the early novels by Kamm and Zindel is an extreme version of this view, and one which, thanks to the work of feminists working to eradicate violence against women, might not be published today. Nevertheless, blame is implied when female characters who fail to curb their sexuality die (e.g. Janey in Lanagan's *Touching Earth Lightly* [1996] and Fern in Waite's *Game Girls* [2007]).

The violence evident in the, otherwise celebratory, romances by Blackman and Meyer are overtly concerned with the racially segregated societies in which couples live, but are also indicative of an ambivalence towards the sexually active teens themselves. The accidental conception of children from these single, sexual encounters is rendered acceptable by the mothers' overwhelming love for their fetuses, and willingness to bring the child to term even at the expense of the father's life (*Noughts and Crosses* [2001]) or the mother (as we have known her, in *Breaking Dawn* [2008]). The children, girls in both cases, are both, as Beauvais observes, celebrated as examples of 'hybrid vigour': hope for a future which is not possible in their grandparents rigidly defined worlds. In contrast, the children of the date-raped girls are removed from view: Pat's son and Teresa's daughter are adopted, and Liz has an abortion. The difference between these early novels and the series produced in the noughties suggests that a cautiously liberal attitude towards the offspring of teenage parents is emerging, but the abhorrence of adolescent carnal desire continues.

To be fair, the corpus does contain rare examples where this desire is contextualized within the larger project of growing up. In *The Catalogue of the Universe* (1985) by the New Zealand author, Margaret Mahy, Angela's main problem is that she does not know who her father is. Tycho's main problems revolve around family tensions arising from his elder sister's troubled marriage and his brother's unemployment. The pair's mutual attraction surfaces as a counterpoint to difficulties experienced elsewhere. The carnalities which are foregrounded in the novel are adult: the supposed² extra-marital relationship that results in Angela's birth and

2. Towards the end of *The Catalogue of the Universe*, readers learn that Angela's father was not, as she had always been told by her mother, married, but is simply a confirmed bachelor.

the unplanned pregnancy which leads to Tycho's sister's unhappy marriage. Set within the protagonists' wide ranging set of concerns, the development and fruition of their mutual desire seems healthily proportionate; sexuality and carnal desire are neither a problem nor a matter of identity, they are simply part and parcel of growing up. However, the novel does contain a scene which illustrates how stereotyping functions in heterosexual contexts render adolescent sexuality deviant. Angela is attractive; her red hair, slim build and long legs draw attention from strangers as well as Tycho. Indeed, the main hurdle the couple have to overcome is Tycho's belief that he is physically too unattractive to interest a girl as beautiful as Angela. On the night they do get together, Angela feels she has to 'come out' about her virginity: "No one thinks I'm a virgin ... But I still am. ... In a funny way being a virgin – a closet virgin – made me feel powerful, as if I still had a lot of choice that no one knew about" (*Catalogue of the Universe*, p. 131). In other words, the nubile female body is automatically read as being licentious, and although Angela acknowledges that this can be empowering, it is also a false imposition on her virginal body.

All literature for children and teenagers "offers a symbolic depiction of a maturation process (initiation, rite of passage), so that it is *not* a strictly mimetic reflection of some concrete 'reality'" (Nikolajeva 2002:112). What teenage fiction offers us is not a direct representation of what teenagers 'really' do or how they 'really' behave; what it offers is an adult view of what this process of maturation is like or, more dogmatically, should be like: an ideology. Throughout the sixty year span covered in the corpus, the onset of carnal desire and the resulting loss of virginity is presented in ways that are tightly bound to the ideology of childhood innocence. Indeed, in the Anglophone tradition, sexual innocence is such a prized commodity that its counterpart, sexual knowledge, forms "a locus of power for adolescents. If it [did] not, adults would feel no need to regulate teenagers' sexuality" (Trites 2000:96). So when teenagers reject aetonnormativity and behave in 'adult' ways, the response has been to first punish them and then render their behaviour deviant. In the following chapter, I discuss texts in which the loss of virginity leads to various calamities as fictional teens are punished for becoming sexually active. The frequency with which this punishment takes the form of an unplanned pregnancy is reflected in the chapter, and is another indication that fictional accounts of adolescent carnal desire is primarily intended as a means of regulating teenagers' sexuality.

The calamitous consequences of carnality

Loss and loneliness, pregnancy and parenthood, disease and death

Fictional teenagers seem to have a pretty rough time when they lose their virginity. At best, they are disappointed; at worst, their first sexual experiences are painful and/or associated with violence. Even those few literary teens who do experience pleasure often find that horror lies ahead as they may well end up “diseased, pregnant, emotionally devastated, or dead” (Trites 2000:97). Given these options, it would seem unlikely that many teens would want to emulate their literary counterparts’ behaviour. The emphasis these works place on risk-taking behaviour is supposedly a response to evidence that teenagers are engaging in high-risk behaviours resulting in sexually transmitted diseases (especially chlamydia), unwanted pregnancies, pathological relationships, and so on (Ponton 2000:3). Ponton claims that high-risk behaviours are increasing, and the numbers of teenagers diagnosed with chlamydia have increased (Hitti 2005), and a recent change in the British judicial system acknowledges that teenagers are at risk from coercive relationships (BBC 2012). There may well be an underlying real world trend which is being reflected in teenage fiction. Nevertheless, the behaviour of literary characters should not be naïvely consumed as though it were an accurate reflection of the lives of real teenagers; it is an ideological tool for conveying adult beliefs about how teenagers behave and how they should behave. They form part of the environment in which adolescence is presented as a period of strife, and the on-set of carnal desire leads directly to (seemingly inevitable) calamitous consequences.

One of the most common beliefs, echoed in government policies, classroom practice, school advisory board decisions, and among the general public is that problems such as disastrous relationships and unwanted pregnancy would end if young people really understood the risks involved. Much adolescent fiction has also responded to this belief but, as Younger notes, “to expect fiction to somehow take the place of accurate and explicit instruction and education about sex, birth control, and pregnancy places a heavy burden on authors” (2009:24). This has not prevented many authors from trying, and the overtly didactic nature of many of the novels I discuss is impossible to ignore.

This didacticism may even be contributing to the problem it purports to address. In *Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex*, Judith Levine presents a sociological examination of how changes in sex education in America – particularly abstinence-only sex education – as well as the complex way in which children are sexualized in popular media has contributed to high levels of “what the public-health people call ‘negative outcomes,’ such as unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, not to mention what I’d also consider a negative outcome: plain old bad sex” ([2002] 2003:xxxiii). Levine’s study focuses on the situation in America, but does make comparisons to ‘Europe’, which always end in praise of European attitudes towards adolescent sexuality and sex education. Within ‘Europe’, however, it is worth noting that those ‘negative outcomes’ that are reported are highest in Britain. According to a study of teenage births in 28 of the world’s wealthiest nations by Unicef’s Innocenti Research Centre, Anglophone countries have the dubious honour of occupying the top three ranks: USA, UK, New Zealand with Canada, Ireland and Australia all making it into the top ten (see IRC 2001 for the report and Kmietowicz 2002 for a discussion of the report). There certainly seems to be something about the way in which the Anglophone world communicates with its youth that encourages teens to take risks that result in ‘negative outcomes’.

As my discussion of fictional representations of the loss of virginity in the previous chapter showed, Levine’s “plain old bad sex” ([2002] 2003:xxxiii) is certainly popular amongst authors of teenage fiction. Nevertheless, this chapter focuses on the more politically charged ‘negative outcome’ of teenage pregnancy; a topic which dominates the novels and short stories in the corpus. Given that adolescent literature is one of the main places where adults could talk to teenagers fairly openly about how to prevent unwanted pregnancies, I begin with a discussion of how birth control is presented. Remarkably few fictional teens seem to use birth control successfully: the corpus includes a disproportionately high number of novels (about one third of the total) depicting pregnant teens and/or teenage parents, the majority of which do seem to be trying to advise young readers against making such a “great ghastly mistake with ructions all round” (*Pennington’s Heir*, p. 32).

“There is, however, one crucial problem with this ‘ignorance-calamity-social problem’ picture of the causes and consequences of teenage pregnancy, and the policy and political thrust that results”, Simon Duncan observes, “the research evidence does not support it” (2007:313). I shall return to Duncan’s sociological research, which is exclusively concerned with teenage pregnancy and parenthood and not STDs, death or the quality of relationships in the section on empowered parents below. Duncan’s well-evidenced argument, in brief, is that those adolescents who are most likely to keep their children (as opposed to aborting the pregnancy or releasing the child for adoption) come from the lowest social strata, and

they have much to gain by becoming pregnant. Parenthood for these under privileged teens is likely to result in better social outcomes than their peers who do not have children early. The determined focus on pain and punishment reflects middle class values and presents them as universal outcomes. The lack of sociological evidence to support the beliefs prevalent in both the popular media and adolescent fiction adds force to Rose's argument that maintaining beliefs in childhood innocence is necessary for adult well-being, and the panic identified by Levine (2002) and Kincaid (1992, 1996, 1998) actually harms youngsters.

In this chapter, I look at fictional accounts of the phenomena of adolescent pregnancy, teenage parenthood, sexually transmitted diseases and death not as reflections of real world issues but in terms of punishment. In line with Trites, my argument is premised on the assumption that teenage fiction provides a platform where adult authors can coerce fictional youngsters into accepting that power is not and should not be theirs in the hope that readers will follow suit. This desire to persuade youngsters to adopt adult sanctioned rules of behaviour may well stem from a genuine desire to protect teenagers from the burdens of responsibility that come with parenthood, but the emphasis on emotional pain in book after book indicates to me, at least, that the main goal of these books is repression. This overview of adolescent characters whose carnal activities result in some kind of 'punishment' or repression will provide baseline from which we can evaluate the more unusual ways in which teenage carnality can challenge or support aetionormativity examined in later chapters.

The most common form of punishment is the damage done to personal relationships when teens allow their sexuality to get 'out of control'. Katharine, in Blume's *Forever*, is horrified when her mother gives her a newspaper article on sexual health containing the question "Have you thought about how this relationship will end?" (*Forever*, p. 120), but later finds herself ending her relationship with Michael. In this way, *Forever* implies that carnality inevitably damages adolescent relationships. In Stephenie Meyer's *New Dawn*, Bella is punished for her desire to incite Edward to 'bite' her by being left alone, and so on (Kokkola 2011c). Indeed, damaged relationships are so ubiquitous that only one of the novels in the corpus is wholly free of this feature: Margaret Mahy's *The Catalogue of the Universe*. This is one of the few novels to situate the budding sexual relationship between Angela and Tyke as merely an extension of the couple's long term friendship, and as a minor element in the plot which focuses primarily on the youngsters' individuation from their families. For Angela and Tyke, sex is neither a goal nor a problem, and the couple's mutual loss of virginity marks the increasing depth of their feelings for one another. It results in neither calamity nor parental disapproval. It does, however, change the way in which they view themselves and feel part of the adult world. So even for Mahy, sex changes everything, but the results are realistic: they

reveal a greater depth of understanding, but the characters are not miraculously transformed into adults overnight.

Sex changes everything, and with the exception of Mahy, it usually changes everything for the worse. Even Francesca Lia Block's *Weetzie Bat*, in which sexual desire is celebrated in successful, loving relationships, contains scenes warning adolescents of the potential damage carnality can wreak on interpersonal relationships. Weetzie's sex-positive attitudes place her at risk from sexual violence, and the text is somewhat ambivalent as to whether or not Weetzie 'deserves' to be punished in this way. Such extreme forms of punishment, rape, incest and complex victim-aggressor relationships form the centre of the penultimate chapter, and are not discussed here. The more typical experiences of loneliness and sense of loss that result from damage done to relationships by early sexual encounters are so ubiquitous that it colours all the other forms of 'punishment' discussed in this chapter. The pregnant teens and teenage parents in the corpus are a lonely bunch, even those who provide their children with good care.

I have arranged my discussion of teenage pregnancy and/or parenthood in terms of the outcome of the pregnancy, roughly arranged as though they could fall upon a continuum from least to most socially 'radical' outcome. In practice this means that I start with the superficially most neutral 'solution' to the 'problem' of adolescent pregnancy: putting the child up for adoption. Since adoption avoids the politically heated topic of abortion and does not result in teenage parenthood, it is ostensibly the most socially acceptable way to present adolescent pregnancy and still maintain a didactic tone. Furthermore, adoption clearly signals the inability and unacceptability of teenagers parenting their own children. I then consider the other alternatives to becoming parents starting with abortion and miscarriage. I also consider the prevention of parenthood through the death of the parent, but this discussion forms part of the section on disease and death. The section on the outcomes of pregnancy continues with a review of the ways in which teenage parents have been depicted over the last half century and concludes with stories of adolescents who gain from becoming parents.

Most of the texts depicting adolescent parents focus on motherhood rather than fatherhood, and this is reflected in my discussion of these works. In line with the arguments developed in my previous chapter, the starting point for my enquiry is that the pregnant body is read in terms of the adolescent's carnal desire, and the ambivalence towards both the teenage mother and her baby expressed in these novels stems more directly from negative attitudes towards the adolescents' perceived encroachment on the world of adulthood than from a genuine concern for the well-being of either the adolescent parents or the forthcoming child.

I have divided my discussion of parenthood according to the outcome, beginning with novels depicting adolescents struggling with their new roles as parents,

most often alone. A noticeable feature is that only mothers are depicted as monstrous. Teenage fathers are apparently expected to renege on their responsibilities, and so the few who stay around are praised. Indeed, teenage fathers who decide to raise their children are praised to such an extent that they are more commonly depicted as gaining from parenthood. Some fathers also decide (or are coerced) to marry prior to the birth of the child, thereby forming traditional nuclear families in all respects other than age. I compare such families from the earliest part of the corpus with those produced at the end to show how little presentations of fictional teenage marriages have changed.

The chapter concludes with a short discussion of other, less common punishments: disease and death. The identification of the HIV virus and the AIDS crisis in the 1980s provide the main context for my discussion of the association between sexuality and death. However, before I consider these consequences of carnality, I would first like to comment more generally on the texts' attempts to educate to educate youngsters on how to avoid such calamities, focussing on the topic of birth control.

Education and protection: Birth control

Before any of the couples in the novels from the 1970s – by Blume, Klein and Chambers – discussed in the previous chapter had sex, they discussed contraception. This is partly why *Forever* has been dismissed as a self-help manual, but for Reynolds modelling such behaviour offers adolescent readers “Good adolescent role models” (2007:121). Looking at the corpus as a whole, there is a noteworthy decline in the frequency with which the characters negotiate birth control, and so teenage readers are not offered insights into when and how the subject could be raised, nor are the alternative methods available discussed. Somewhat inexplicably, modelling how couples might discuss the use of contraceptives fades away during the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. Perhaps authors in the AIDS conscious era assumed that their readers already knew about a good deal about condom use. For rather than providing examples of how couples might discuss contraception and infection, they are simply admonished if they fail to take precautions. Such changes in expectations of knowledge indicate an underlying change in views of the adolescent and adolescent knowledge.

The most recent novels in the corpus are decidedly reticent about birth control and disease prevention. When Bella and Edward in Meyer's popular ‘Twilight’ series finally do have sex, we see the couple kissing in the sea followed by a blank line and then Bella waking up the following morning. Some of the details of the events in between can be surmised from the bruises left on Bella's skin, the broken

headboard and the feathers from the pillow (which Edward bit to avoid biting Bella). And despite the 1500 pages of verbal foreplay in the first three novels, the one topic they have never discussed is contraception. Similar uses of the before and after narration divided by a blank line or chapter break can be found in works as varied as Lanagan's *Tender Morsels*, Efaw's *After*, Peyton's *Pennington's Heir*, and Zindel's *My Darling, My Hamburger*, to mention just a few examples of this common phenomenon. None of them discuss contraception.

In film theory, this placing an event off-stage is known as discussed in terms of 'blind space'; a concept which has been applied to the study of children's literature (Zaparaín 2010, Curry 2009). The event is not narrated, but it is alluded to or even mentioned explicitly. The event "remains physically unseen, and blind since it remains ideologically unseen" (Curry 2009:62). It is another way in which the adult powers can dedicate "themselves to speaking of it [sex] *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the secret*" (Foucault [1978] 1990:35). When sex is situated in the blind space, the text 'turns a blind eye' to both the characters' experiences and the social implications of their behaviour. Without wishing to advocate the production of pornography for adolescents, it does seem to me that placing sexual activity in the blind space actually *increases* interest, and thus has precisely the opposite effect. The blind space is unresolved, it remains a source of tension and ambiguity, it forces the reader to engage with the text and work to fill in the gap with within existing realms of knowledge. Like the unbelievably drawn out sexual tension in the first three novels in Meyer's series, it is precisely the lack of an expected event that piques curiosity. In addition to provoking curiosity, the use of blind space forces the narrative to focus on the consequences of the action that is not narrated, rather than on the event itself. In the corpus, the consequence is often an unplanned pregnancy.

In an article reviewing novels depicting pregnant teens and/or teenage parents, Emge (2006) draws connections between the ways in which the availability of reliable contraceptives and the legalisation of abortion have affected the depiction of adolescents in fiction. Her starting point is Ann Head's commercially successful *Mr and Mrs Bo Jo Jones* from 1967, which was promoted through teenage book clubs in both America and the UK (Cart & Jenkins 2006:8). After July and Bo Jo have been beyond the "point of no return" (*Bo Jo Jones*, p. 8), July attempts to ask a doctor for advice. (Emge claims July is attempting to obtain contraceptive pills, but it is clear that July is already suffering from morning sickness). July "hopped a bus [*sic*] for Westcott, which is about fifty miles away, bought myself a wedding ring at the dime store, and picked a doctor out of the telephone directory. He turned out to be a heart specialist" (*Bo Jo Jones*, p. 21). The doctor is not fooled into thinking she is a young bride, and sends her home to "tell my parents the truth and not to waste any time" (*Bo Jo Jones*, p. 21). The result is that July does indeed become the young

bride she presented herself as being during her encounter with the doctor. July and Bo Jo's story, despite the 'punishment' of pregnancy, is surprisingly strongly on the side of the adolescent against the adult world. The couple are knowledgeable about how children are conceived and July recognises the symptoms straight away. Other fictional teenagers, however, are decidedly less knowledgeable than July and Bo Jo.

Ignorance about conception and contraception abound in adolescent fiction, and not only in the novels from the late 1960s and early 1970s. Despite very actively seeking such examples, I have been able to locate only a single instance of a literary text intended for a young audience which depicts a planned adolescent pregnancy, but the magic realism of the novel is such that the term 'adolescent pregnancy' is a misnomer. In Melvin Burgess's *Tiger, Tiger*, Lila, a spirit tiger who can shape shift into human form, transforms twelve year old Will into a tiger for the sole purpose of conceiving cubs by him. Lila believes that all her other cubs have been killed and that she is the only female tiger left in the world. She needs to produce off-spring in order to continue the survival of the species. Lila's agency and her capacity to ensure her sexual desires are met are refreshingly unusual elements in fiction for adolescent readers. Yet, given the fantastic circumstances surrounding Lila's pregnancy and the fact that she conceives tiger cubs not a human baby, it makes little sense to view the novel in terms of a commentary on teenage pregnancy. The simple fact that not one of the realistic novels incorporated for this study depicted a planned pregnancy is evidence that adults assume teenage pregnancies arise from ignorance not decision. This makes the absence of contraceptives in post-1970s novels all the more surprising.

A few of the corpus novels are clearly attempting to counterbalance false beliefs common amongst adolescents. I have found no instances of some of the more fanciful forms of contraception of school yard folklore such as having sex whilst standing upright in the fiction in the corpus, although the rhythm method appears as a contraceptive method in *Our Sacred Honor* (1987) and *What's Happily Ever After, Anyway?* (2004), and unsurprisingly fails to work. The most pernicious false belief expressed in the corpus, to my mind, is that only bad girls get pregnant. This is most typically expressed when the focaliser is someone other than the pregnant teen. The sister or friend who typically functions as the focaliser and often narrator expresses amazement and/or shock that the girl she knows could be pregnant (and thus, implicitly, a slut). Whilst the expression of such attitudes is presumably intended to instruct young readers that any sexually active teenage girl has the potential to become pregnant, these novels also serve to support the view that all pregnant girls are bad girls. When Nathalie in Lois Lowry's *Find a Stranger, Say Goodbye* from 1978 learns that her birth mother, Julie, was just fifteen when Nathalie was born, she assumes her mother was "screwing around" which was "a dumb thing for a kid to do. She really loused up her life. Mine too" (*Find a Stranger*,

p. 84), and this view is not questioned even when it becomes apparent that Julie conceived Nathalie during her first full sexual encounter. Julie may have 'loused up' her own life (although she seems fairly successful and happy to me), but I find it hard to see how she has "loused up" Nathalie's life. Nathalie would not have a life if Julie had not had sex, so the comment implies that Nathalie would rather she had never been born!

Two decades later, little has changed. When hitherto 'good girl' Anne, in Pennebaker's 1996 novel *Don't Think Twice*, becomes pregnant, she realises that all her years of 'good' behaviour count for nothing. She recognises that boys now regard her as a 'bad' girl, and that she has internalised that feeling: "It's like they looked inside us and realized how horrified and dirty we feel. That's the awful part" (*Don't Think Twice*, p. 51). The novel is set in 1967, and is intended to express the idea that attitudes have changed. Even though Pennebaker is undoubtedly sympathetic to Anne's plight, and allows her (and the reader) to at least question the self-loathing Anne feels, but the novel's repetition of these views helps keep them alive. The belief that good girls don't get pregnant is also offered as a form of contraceptive. Emge cites a mid-1980s novel by Paul Kropp in which Dave assures his girlfriend that "When two people love each other, anything they do works out" (in Emge 2006:22). The ensuing pregnancy hardly falls under the rubric of 'working out'. These novels offer the clear message that ANY sexually active teenage girl can get pregnant, but they fail to address the belief that only bad girls get pregnant.

The AIDS crisis of the 1980s led to the appearance of condoms in a wide variety of flavours, colours and textures in supermarkets, kiosks and other sites easily accessible to teenagers. The result of this and the increasing presence of sex education in school curriculums, led to the widespread belief that adolescents have a moral obligation to be knowledgeable. But knowing that condoms exist and knowing how and when to use them are two very different things as Lana, in *And Baby Makes Two* (2000), soon discovers. She does not even realise she has had sex until her boyfriend asks her whether it was her first time too because "I didn't remember him putting on a condom. I wasn't sure, but I had the impression it wasn't something you could do too far in advance" (*And Baby Makes Two*, p. 58). Lana becomes pregnant after this first sexual encounter, and she is not alone in this transition from virgin to mother in a single step.

Interwoven with the myth that good girls do not get pregnant is the belief that girls cannot conceive a child the first time they have sex. Since virgins are 'good girls', adolescents in these novels seem to believe that their years of chastity will offer some form of protection during their first sexual encounter. Will exclaims "But you can't – not just once" when his girlfriend Ruth tells him she is pregnant, and she admits that "I thought that too. Well, it's not true" (*Pennington's Heir*, p. 25). Such ignorance is widespread amongst fictional teens. Indeed, the frequency with

which adolescents conceive a child after a single sexual encounter is one of the most noticeable features of corpus. The didacticism of this literary convention is self-evident. Many of the girls are so young they will not have reached full fertile maturity. Thus the remarkably high conception rate amongst literary teens smacks of the moralizing adult reminding adolescents who cannot 'control' their sexuality to use contraceptives or expect punishment.

Many of the novels depicting virgin-to-mother pregnancies depict mutually consensual, loving sexual acts which result in children who radically alter the life plans of the mothers, but not necessarily the fathers. Doherty's highly acclaimed *Dear Nobody* (1991) stresses the relatively unaffected life of the father by starting her novel with a description of Chris in his bedroom, about to embark on the life he planned before his daughter, Amy, was conceived. His life is little altered by fatherhood. In Meyer's *Breaking Dawn*, Edward, despite his marriage to Bella and the birth of Renesmee, continues to think of himself more as the son of Carlyle than as the father of Renesmee. Indeed, the novel does not contain a single scene in which Edward is portrayed taking care of his daughter. And in novels as varied as Dowd's *A Pure Swift Cry*, Kamm's *Young Mother* and Sweeney's *Waiting for June* it is not entirely clear whether or not the father of the child is even aware of the pregnancy. (In Sweeney's *Waiting for June*, the father dies before his daughter is born, but reveals himself through her magical powers.)

Although the virgin-to-mother figure is noticeably over-represented in fiction depicting teenage parents, there are also numerous depictions of pregnancies conceived by decidedly more sexually experienced teens. Some of these sexual acts, like those discussed in the previous chapter, take place against a backdrop of violence. Curiously, however, in most cases these sexually experienced adolescents are exonerated in ways that many of the virgin-to-mother figures are not. The connection between Janey's exuberant promiscuity and her history as a victim of incestuous abuse, in Margo Lanagan's *Touching Earth Lightly*, leads her to be judged lightly even when 'punished' by becoming homeless, pregnant and eventually murdered. Another extreme example is Precious, in Sapphire's *Push*, who conceives her father's children through rape and the text allows no space for readers to blame her, even though she occasionally experiences orgasms when her father abuses her. In Burgess's *Junk*, both Lily and Gemma are working as prostitutes to support their heroin addiction; they cannot be certain that their children are their boyfriends' offspring. Overall, *Junk* is intended to warn youngsters of the dangers of heroin, but the effectiveness of its didacticism lies precisely in its ability to hide the wagging finger (Rudd 1999, Melrose and Harbour 2007, Kokkola 2011a). Janey, Precious, Lily and Gemma live hyperbolically risky lives, but unlike the virgin-to-mother characters, the novels in which they appear encourage readers not to judge them harshly.

The common thread running between all the knowing teen characters is that they are all presented as victims. Janey and Precious are incest victims: Lily and Gemma are the victims of heroin addiction. This victim status compensates for the knowledge they have gained through their carnal desire (all four characters are depicted as desiring subjects as well as abused objects). Their carnal desires and their sexual knowledge are too great for them to be considered children, but the association of victimhood – the forced ‘loss of innocence’ – appears to offer redemption. The contrast between innocence and experience jars; neither adults nor children, they are not quite human. The didacticism of these novels is primarily conveyed through the horror of their abusive situations, but these are also some of the few works to acknowledge that unplanned pregnancies do not necessarily arise from lack of knowledge. Janey’s bag “spill[s] foil-wrapped condoms like treasure” (*Touch Earth Lightly*, p. 15), Precious cannot remember a time when she did not know that ejaculation could result in pregnancy (*Push*, p. 12), and Gemma’s attempt at seducing Tar is interrupted by a protracted search for a condom (*Junk*, pp. 66–7). These girls know about contraception, but that knowledge does not prevent them from becoming pregnant.

Pregnancy and teenage parenthood: “Great ghastly mistake[s] with ruictions all round” (*Pennington’s Heir*, p. 32)

Few pieces of information are received with greater joy than news of a planned, desired pregnancy. Conversely, there is no happy solution to an unplanned, unwanted pregnancy. When the people expecting the unborn child are teenagers, the situation is invariably treated as a calamity, not least because of the abrupt rupture it causes to the adolescents’ expected plans, and the way it marks an end to our usual definition of childhood. In a very concrete manner, parenthood brings an end to the time when an individual can think of themselves primarily in terms of being someone else’s child, and must think of themselves as being primarily someone else’s parent. For Joanne Faulkner, recognizing that one is responsible for another human being “is supposed to distinguish the last remnant of one’s own childhood. ... It marks an irrevocable passage: at once an assumption of duty, and the loss of an innocence that, sadly, we didn’t know we possessed” (2011:1). For this very logical reason, parenthood is genuinely transformational in a manner that the transformation from child to adult that is supposed to follow from the loss of virginity is not. The day after a person becomes sexually active is very rarely different from the day before. The day after one becomes a parent is very different from the day before.

Literary presentations of teenage pregnancies thus offer suitable sites for expressing the fear of growing up and concerns about the end of childhood. Taking

on the responsibilities of parenthood closes the teenager off from making other choices. If one of the things that we value in childhood is the idea of the child as *tabula rasa*, a blank slate with the potential to become anything she wishes, then parental responsibilities signal the imposition of limitations on that potential. The teenage parent has far fewer options available than the teenager who is not responsible for raising a child. At the end of *Edith Jackson*, Rosa Guy celebrates her protagonist's recognition of her potential to be more than a mother or mother-substitute to her siblings and the young children in the orphanage nursery. When she relinquishes the responsibilities she has been carrying since her early teens, she finally becomes a person with the potential for self-fulfilment.

Parenthood has come to be viewed as something that should be planned with a mindful eye on the resources available for raising the child. Edith struggles to raise her siblings because the resources are simply not available. As a result, Smith-Battle claims that "The sin that modern teen mothers commit is not the sin of desire, but the sin of not *planning and rationally choosing* their future" (in Duncan 2007:325–6; emphases original). The sin that literary teen mothers commit is taking on an adult role too soon.

In a discussion of 36 novels depicting pregnant teenagers published between 1968 and 2003, Emge (2006) suggests that increasingly liberal attitudes towards teenage carnality, the availability of contraceptives and reduced stigmatisation of single mothers is reflected in adolescent fiction. In terms of surface level elements related to plot, the materials in the corpus suggest similar conclusions. However, a closer examination of the attitudes towards the pregnant teenage body, adolescent parents and their relationship to the society reveals that remarkably little has changed. For although books of the noughties do not express their negative attitudes towards the pregnant teen as bluntly as Koral's mother in Minshull's *But I Thought You Really Loved Me* (1977), who informs her pregnant daughter: "You've sinned. You've got to be punished. It's that simple" (*But I Thought*, p. 14), novels depicting pregnancy and its various outcomes still tend to promote the view that sexual activity during one's teenage years is abnormal, inappropriate and sinful. Traditional images of the fallen women, the loss of innocence and premature parenthood in terms of dependency and inadequacy have remained largely untouched throughout the past 45 years, despite the widespread belief (expressed by Emge) that we have become more liberal in our attitudes towards such matters. Most of the teenage mothers in the corpus are depicted as monstrous beings, whose bodies – because they fall outside the child-adult binarism – are abject.

My use of the concept of abjection draws on the work of Julia Kristeva who, in turn, articulates her ideas in relation to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical theory of identity formation. Lacan, like other psychoanalysts, places great emphasis on the early years of a child's life. His theory focuses on how the pre-verbal child makes

sense of the world, and how those pre-verbal experiences are integrated into the speaking child's life. The pre-verbal stage is termed 'the symbolic' as the infant's thinking is deemed to operate through symbols, some of which may be universal.

Kristeva takes Lacan's ideas and considers how traumas experienced during the pre-verbal stage are managed by speaking adult. In line with belief in talking therapy, her arguments are based on the assumption that fears that can be contained within language can be controlled. She also observes that some fears are so deep-seated that they cannot be expressed in language. These fears are *abject*: primal fears are formed within the subconscious (within the symbolic order, which is associated with the pre-verbal child). Typically, this is associated with collective fears (such as the fear of death) and responses to trauma. When something triggers such fears to surface, the individual experiences disgust and longs to reject it, but at the same time is fascinated as she attempts to control the fear by expressing it through language (the semiotic order). If the fear could be brought into the semiotic order (for instance, in a therapeutic situation), it could be controlled. Those fears that cannot be controlled in this way are abject.

Although we have a wide range of mechanisms for repressing our abject fears, Kristeva observes how they repeatedly surface as disturbances in language. Adult fears of the pregnant teenage body are revealed through disturbances in the language used to describe them. Novels produced from the cusp the millennium onwards include more monstrous depictions of the pregnancy itself than anything found prior to turn of the millennium. With novels as varied as Burgess's *Bloodtide* (1999), Sweeney's *Waiting for June* (2003) and Meyer's *Breaking Dawn* (2008) drawing on fantastic settings to emphasise their point, as well as more the realistic pregnancies found in Sapphire's *Push* (1996) and Blackman's *Noughts and Crosses* (2001), the pregnant adolescent body is presented as something that should be feared.

The monstrous mother: "No one say nuffin' to me now my belly big" (*Push*, p. 23)

In *The Poetics of Childhood*, Roni Natov notes how the metaphors of the mother's body as a place of safety are woven into many works of children's literature, especially those intended for very young readers (2003:63–90). Typically, the child character (or anthropomorphic animal character) expresses the desire to return to the safe haven of the mother's body, and their growing maturity is expressed through the rejection of the maternal body as 'home' and acceptance of their own autonomy. The body of the pregnant mother has been revered throughout the ages not only for the creation of new life, but also as a place of sanctuary. The flipside of the 'homeliness' of the maternal body is the *unheimlich*; the proximity (and necessity) for the child to become 'unhomed' as she is expelled from this first home. The intimate connection between these two aspects of the maternal body are thus

paradoxical. On the one hand, the pregnant body is celebrated, on the other it is grotesque (Kristeva 1982:102ff).

In much of the Western world, further paradoxes have been woven into this already ambiguous portrayal of the mother's body through images of the Madonna. This celebration of her virgin pregnancy proffers an idealised model of motherhood to which no mortal can aspire, but which is evident in presentations of the ideal mother as married, fully adult, self-sacrificially loving but asexual. The teenage mother, on the other hand, has not left her family of origin and established her own autonomy, but she is deemed to be rejecting her role as child and demanding autonomy without having earned that right. She is not expected to be capable of fulfilling the expected norms of self-sacrifice and she is self-evidently sexual. Her pregnant body challenges many of our most deeply revered beliefs. These beliefs, as noted from the outset, are historically recent, not culturally universal and not supported by research evidence, which makes their insidiousness all the more noteworthy.

Belief in the 'innocence' of the child, the sanctity of motherhood, the purity of the child's body, but above all the belief that adolescents are unfit to become parents may seem innocuous or even part of a well-intentioned value system intended to protect the young, and sometimes this may be the case. However, they can also be very destructive, especially for the most vulnerable members of a society. Pregnant teenagers as a group, regardless of the socio-historical era in which they live or where they live have fewer material resources at their disposal than their older counterparts. They are twice as likely to die in childbirth related complications as women aged over 20 (Boseley 2012). Stranded between the worlds of adulthood and childhood, the young, vulnerable, pregnant teenage girls in these novels carry the weight of the world's scorn on their shoulders at a time when other mothers, simply by virtue of another five years of life experience, would be basking in the admiration of society at large. They are *unheimlich*, disturbing presences whose pregnant bodies question the credibility of the adult-adolescent border. They are *abject*.

The abject signals a breakdown of some boundary we revere: the physical boundaries of the body and/or the border between adulthood and childhood (Covino 2000). In *The Powers of Horror*, Kristeva argues that the female body is abject because it is not fixed: it changes shape by swelling in pregnancy and contracting after birth, it bleeds, lactates and is open to penetration (1982:102ff; see also Creed 1995:87). This permeable, unfixed body, Kristeva argues after Bakhtin, is grotesque: it destabilizes the boundaries between the civilised and the uncivilised, between animal and human. With the onset of puberty, the adolescent body also becomes abject as it destabilises the boundary between the child and the adult and draws attention to the adolescent's sexuality (Grosz 1994:75; see also Grosz

1990). The pregnant adolescent is thus doubly abject and the pregnant, teenage body is monstrous, not human.

In *Push* by Sapphire, this rejection of Precious-as-child appears overtly in a nurse's comment made shortly after Precious has given birth to her first child. Realising that the baby was conceived incestuously, the nurse, 'Nurse Butter', asks: "Was you ever, I mean did you ever get to be a chile?" This is a stupid question, did I ever get to be a chile? I *am* a chile" (*Push*, p. 13). Nurse Butter's well-meant remark reveals the societal assumption that sexual activity and parenthood are incompatible with childhood. Even though Nurse Butter knows that Precious's sexual experiences have taken place involuntarily within abusive, incestuous relationships, she cannot combine the (adult) knowledge Precious has gained from her carnal experiences with the child's body she perceives. Precious is neither child nor adult; expelled from both categories, her body is abject. It is precisely this kind of reaction that reveals the insidiousness of beliefs in the sanctity of motherhood and childhood innocence.

The abject is a primal fear that cannot be expressed through language (the semiotic order), and so it is expelled or repressed within the subconscious (within the symbolic order) (see also Covino 2000). But it cannot remain repressed; it re-emerges as disturbances in language. Ms Lichtenstein expels Precious's abject body from the social (civilised) world of the school. She refuses to label what she sees, but instead uses a euphemism: "I see we're expecting a little visitor" (*Push*, p. 6). The particular 'disturbance in language' (euphemism) Ms Lichtenstein uses, "a little visitor", implies that Precious's child will not be staying for long. Indeed, all the figures of authority that we see in the novel – teachers, social workers and nurses – all confirm that they expect Precious to give her son up for adoption. Both Precious's pregnant body and the idea of her as a mother disturb the adults around her. Precious's experiences of sex have not been voluntary, but she is a 'knowing' child and she is perceived as such. Ms Lichtenstein and those nurses who do not know that Precious has been raped read her pregnant body in terms of the power struggle Trites outlines. They assume that she has deliberately encroached upon adult claims to power and is thus defiant and uncooperative.

The reader, however, witnesses how such views of Precious's body continue the cycle of abuse. For instance, when Precious returns to the hospital with her baby son in search of help after her mother has attacked her, she has to wait for Nurse Butter to become available. Whilst waiting, another nurse speaks to her. "She say she sorry to see me back here, had hoped I be done learned from my mistakes. What kinda shit is that! I didn't make no mistake unless it being born" (*Push*, p. 75). As Highberg observes "The truth becomes secondary to [the nurse's] personal assumptions, which push her to dismiss Precious as unworthy of any further attention, deeper thought or basic help" (2010:12). The assumption of superiority implicit in

the nurse's comment is evidence of the ways in which the heteronormative hegemony disempowers adolescents who attempt to use their sexuality to negotiate the adult-adolescent boundary. However, Precious is not deliberately posing a threat to the adult world, she is simply "trying to survive" the abuse she suffers (*Push*, p. 124). Since her father's abuse results in further societal rejection, as evidenced in the nurse's reaction, Precious is further separated from the limited sources of help and empowerment which she might access. As far as the nurses, who represent society, are concerned, Precious is simply "a problem got to be out they face", something they need to expel from the civilised world of the hospital (*Push*, p. 77). Precious, like teenage mothers in the real world, is expelled: she is no longer a child, but since she cannot be considered an adult, she is simply monstrous.

The abject quality of the pregnant, teenage body – because it bears witness to the transgressive act of 'underage' carnality – challenges our beliefs about how the world is (or should be) structured. We long to reject the idea of children becoming parents and, as a result, cope badly when they do. Precious's body is quintessentially abject since her pregnancies arise from incestuous abuse. Her body breaches our most revered boundaries: not only those concerned with bodily integrity and adult-adolescent boundaries, but also those that govern familial relationships. However, it is also worth noting that the best-selling novel in my corpus, Stephenie Meyer's *Breaking Dawn*, depicts an equally monstrous pregnancy, even though the characters do not have sex until they are married, and the fantastic premises of the couple's romance encourage us to believe Bella and Edward's love is everlasting. *Breaking Dawn* had the potential to offer a truly radical story: that of a planned, happy pregnancy resulting in the creation of a traditional, heteronormative, nuclear family with strong extended family ties. This traditionally *adult* conclusion is achieved, which makes the insistence on emphasising the unplanned nature of the pregnancy all the more noteworthy.

Edward and Bella's daughter is by no means planned. On the contrary, neither they nor Edward's doctor-father, Carlisle, knows that conception is possible until after Bella has conceived Renesmee. In this way, Meyer can maintain the virtue of her protagonists, but still engage with the most fearful consequence of adolescent carnality: pregnancy. The horror of Bella's pregnancy, even when the fantastic premises of the narrative are acknowledged, is hyperbolic. Even Bella is horrified by the speed of her pregnancy and how quickly her body changes. The excessive speed is explained in quasi-biological terms, but its primary purpose seems to be to offer an unequivocal stance on the issue of abortion. Even though Renesmee-as-foetus is already threatening Bella's life, and the werewolves believe she will threaten the wider human community after she is born as she will not be able to control her urge to feed on human blood, Bella (supported by Rosalie and Esme) is adamant that she will not kill her child. In Meyer's world, abortion is murder, and thus

wholly unjustifiable. That said, Meyer is not willing to write anything that might encourage her young readers to emulate Bella's actions and conceive their own children.

Disgust with the pregnant body is made possible, in no small part, by the narrative perspective. The majority of Bella's pregnancy is narrated by and focalised through the werewolf, Jacob Black. Jacob's obsession with Bella means that he cannot see beyond what the foetal Renesmee is doing to her mother's body. Jacob's narration begins when Bella has returned from her honeymoon and is in a critical condition because Renesmee-as-foetus is parasitically feeding off Bella, literally sucking the life out of her. Given that all fetuses do, in fact, feed off their mothers, one cannot criticise Meyer for inaccuracy here, only brutality. Jacob considers the foetus to be a "monster ... looking for something to sink its teeth into – a throat to suck dry" (*Breaking Dawn*, p. 217). Edward reads Jacob's thought, and this inspires him to suggest that they feed Bella on donated human blood so that Renesmee will receive the sustenance she needs without depleting Bella of her remaining resources.

If Meyer's goal was to produce a text that would terrify her young readers about the horrors of pregnancy, she certainly succeeds. Her depiction of the birth in the (unfortunately) inaccurately titled chapter "There are no words for this" (*Breaking Dawn*, p. 320), takes this macabre admonishment to a degree of excess that I can only hope will never be surpassed. Highlights include the sound of the placenta displacing ("a muffled ripping sound" *Breaking Dawn*, p. 318), a detailed account of Bella's bladder releasing after which she vomits "a fountain of blood" (*Breaking Dawn*, p. 320) and just before Renesmee is finally born by a caesarean performed with vampire fangs (*Breaking Dawn*, p. 323), readers are treated to a graphic description of Bella's spine breaking leaving her paralysed. At this point, Bella resumes her own narrative. As she is on the brink of death, Edward finally turns her into a vampire. Despite the painkillers she receives, Bella experiences three days of unrelenting pain during which she cannot even cry out. Even though motherhood itself is both easy and pleasurable for Bella, she cannot achieve this pleasure as a teenage girl. The happily married mother in *Breaking Dawn* is not the Bella readers have known for the first three volumes of the series. That Bella has died. By presenting teenage pregnancy as abject and the process of becoming a mother as a horror story, Meyer warns her young readers not to follow in Bella's footsteps and become parents before they are fully adult.

Bella lives on as an immortal being. Her descent into hellish agony for a three day period before her resurrection to life as a vampire is just one of the ways in which Meyer weaves Christian motifs into her series. Bella's willingness to sacrifice herself for her child means that she earns the right to become one of the few idealized teenage parents in the corpus. The death of the teenage mother or father is one of the more drastic means of preventing teenage parenthood, and fortunately one

which is remarkably rare in the Western countries in which these novels are set. In literary works, however, it is a fairly common trope. I take this up at the end of this chapter when I consider death as a punishment for sexual activity. Before that I examine the consequences of teenage pregnancy, starting with adoption.

Adoption: "it's always seemed like somebody else's baby, Mum's grandchild, Dad's disgrace, Auntie Olive's good work" (Someone Else's Baby, p. 22)

Reading lists under the heading 'adoption' typically reflect upon the experience from the point of view of the adopted child, not the child's parents. With only one exception, all the novels including a depiction or discussion of adoption in the corpus concluded in the best interests of the adopted child. Many of these works are sensitive to the ambivalent feelings of adoptees, who love their adopted parents but who cannot help pondering on the other life they might have lived had they remained with their birth parents. Attempts to respond to adopted children's fears and possible feelings of rejection as well as answering questions about why they were given up for adoption are in fiction, as in real life, not always possible (see also Novy 2005).

A prototypical example of a narrative which focuses of the adoptee's perspective but includes a meeting with the birth mother is Lowry's *Find a Stranger, Say Goodbye* (1978). The novel attempts to address the question of *why* that dominates many adopted children's thoughts. Natalie Armstrong finds her birth mother, Julie Jeffries, and reads the diary Julie wrote the summer she became pregnant. At seventeen, Natalie is two years older than Julie was when she gave birth. Their contrasting personalities leave the reader in no doubt that Julie was too immature to have successfully raised Natalie. As an adult, her successful career as a model and immaculate appearance are used against her to suggest she is a self-centred, vain woman who put trivial interests ahead of her daughter's needs. Julie reveals that, by the time Natalie was five, she was making a great deal of money (*Find a Stranger*, p. 129), and thus had the financial capacity, albeit not the maturity, to raise Natalie herself. In contrast, Natalie is a mature young woman who is preparing to leave home and start college. She resembles Julie physically, and could be a successful model, but prefers to follow her adopted father into medicine. Her constant consideration for other people's feelings and her willingness to take responsibility reveals that, although Natalie physically resembles her birth mother, her personality has been formed in her adoptive family. The transparent message of this, and many other, adoption novels (e.g. Paterson's *The Great Gilly Hopkins*) is that adopted children are better off with their adopted parents than they would have been with their feckless birth parents.

Such messages are very understandable, possibly even laudable for the comfort they offer adopted children, however the image of the mother who releases her child(ren) for adoption they paint is very harsh. The emphasis on, and often focalization through, the adoptee allows little space for expressing the equally ambivalent feelings of the mother even when, as in *Find a Stranger, Say Goodbye*, the voice of the teenage mother is given space. 'The best interests of the child' do not extend to child mothers. Novels which focus on the experience from the perspective of the birth mother do so within a horizon of expectations which expects them to be irresponsible, feckless individuals who would make inadequate mothers.¹ Even though they are children themselves, they are criticised for failing to behave like responsible adults. This starting point challenges authors to address an audience which may include adoptees who need to be told they are better off with their adoptive parents, readers who have given up their children for adoption (or who are close to those who have), and the desire to prevent adolescents from conceiving in the first place. The heavily didactic results are thus hardly surprising.

The conventions of adolescent fiction revolve around the belief that literature can socialize young readers into adopting sanctioned models of behaviour. Sadly, the topic of adoption is so sensitive and yet so rigid in terms of the attitudes it dares present that the sub-genre is primarily comprised of doggedly didactic, lacklustre novels which place socialising the adolescent ahead of aesthetic concerns. Even though Lowry is a deservedly prize winning author for some of her other novels, *Find a Stranger, Say Goodbye* is filled with tired clichés. And whilst the characterisation of Natalie and her biological grandfather is very credible, Julie is a lightly sketched, poorly constructed figure. With few exceptions (e.g., Lanagan's *Touching Earth Lightly* and Sapphire's *Push*), the mothers in these stories are decidedly flat characters whose minds, even when they narrate their own stories, are anything but transparent (Cohn 1978). They tend to be held at a distance from the reader, typically by using a narrative position which does not encourage too much empathy (e.g. lack of focalization, the use of an omniscient narrator). In addition, the mother is likely to self-centred and immature and thus not particularly appealing. They are 'bad girls'; their depiction upholds the belief that *good girls don't get pregnant*. By focusing on the mother's pain when she gives up her child, these

1. Fathers seem almost invisible in these novels, the mother may not know for certain who the father is (e.g. Kamm's *Young Mother* [1965], Kaye's *Someone Else's Baby*, [1990]), or he may abandon the mother (e.g. Lowry's *Find a Stranger, Say Goodbye* [1978]; Friend's *For Keeps* [2010]), very rarely do they play a major role in the decision making process. (For instance, Charles, in Eyerley's *He's My Baby, Now* [1977], merely holds up the process, he does not contribute to the decision making.) Adoption stories are thus the stories of mothers and the children they release for others to raise.

novel present adoptees with inadequate mother figures who, despite their decision to give their children up, did love their children, whilst offering a clear deterrent to becoming pregnant.

In order to reveal this sub-genre's typical plot elements without providing a full overview of these remarkably dull novels, I shall simply present Kamm's *Young Mother*, which I regard as being prototypical, pointing out elements where more variation is possible. Originally published in 1965, two years before abortion became legal in Britain, by Brockhampton Press (which also published many of Enid Blyton's series and the Asterix series in English translation), it was republished by the more international Heinemann Press in 1968 (without changing the references to abortion as illegal) and reprinted a further three times and distributed in Asia and Africa as well as the Western Anglophone countries I focus on. The longevity of the novel, in combination with its broad distribution indicates that it resonated deeply with the reading and buying public's view of adolescent pregnancy from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s.

Young Mother begins when the protagonist, Pat Henley, is already in her second trimester. Her baby was conceived after a single sexual encounter at a party (where she was tricked into drinking spiked drinks). Although the novel was written before abortion was legalised in Britain, Pat, like many characters in later novels, has considered this option, but by the time the narrative begins it is too late. Pat is sent away for the final trimester, a practice commonplace in both reality and in texts from or set in the 1960s and 1970s, but which changes from the 1980s onwards. After the birth, Pat kidnaps her son and tries to raise him herself. However, her housekeeping and parenting skills are so poor that she realizes she must release John for adoption. Kidnapping one's own child appears in several novels (e.g., Kaye's *Someone Else's Baby*, Eyerly's *He's My Baby*, *Now* and Leavitt's *Girls in Trouble*), but the primary purpose of this device is to demonstrate the unsuitability of teenage parents to raise their children, a feature which dominates this sub-genre. Some evidence of the adolescent mother's unsuitability is included in *every* novel in the corpus in which adoption is a seriously considered option.

Kamm's early novel is also depicts the long term consequences of Pat's pregnancy not only for herself, but also for her family. As a result of her pregnancy, Pat will not be allowed to return to her school, and the implication is that her career options will be severely hampered. Her mother is mortified and determined to keep Pat away from her son, but Mrs Henley is also implicitly blamed for failing to raise Pat properly. Mrs Henley is a successful business woman who is divorced from Pat's father. Her feminist independence is questioned by authority figures such as the head teacher and the social workers. Readers are not

merely encouraged to dislike Mrs Henley, but to deem her partially accountable for her daughter's actions.

In contrast, Pat's elder sister, Chris, is presented as an innocent victim of Pat's 'thoughtlessness'. Chris is the perfect woman of her era: chaste, domesticated, compassionate and engaged to be married. Her wedding is delayed and downsized in order to accommodate the shame of Pat's pregnancy (the possibility that Pat could attend the wedding when heavily pregnant is dismissed without discussion). The novel ends with the wedding and the implicit message that 'life goes on', but the text bludgeons its readers into observing how an illegitimate teenage pregnancy has repercussions for the family and community at large. Other long term consequences include the assumption of sexual availability and depression (e.g. *Someone Else's Baby* and *Touching Earth Lightly*), shame (e.g. *Find a Stranger, Say Goodbye* and *Don't Think Twice*), estrangement from one's family (e.g. *Choice Summer* and *But I Thought You Really Loved Me*), and of course the yearning for the lost child.

What strikes me as remarkable is that the only adoption story which did not conclude in the best interests of the younger child but instead concluded in the best interests of the teen parents was also one of the oldest in the corpus: *The Longest Weekend* (1969) by Honor Arundel. The novel starts with 19 year old Eileen taking her three year old daughter, Gay, on a bus to a cottage in Scotland where they will stay for the Easter weekend. From the start it is clear that Eileen struggles to care for her daughter's basic needs. They have to stop the bus so that Gay can pee, but the end result is that Eileen returns to the bus with her daughter's urine running down her tights and boots. The bus conductor commiserates kindly, but Eileen is presented as being the stereotypically unsuitable mother:

[Eileen] was filled with rage that she, young, attractive, well dressed in her boots and cloak and slinky coffee-colored jersey dress, should be lumped with all other dowdy mothers of incontinent children. A pass, however, disdained, would have been a tribute to her youth. Sympathy was an insult. (*The Longest Weekend*, p. 13)

The novel continues to depict Eileen making mistake after mistake, which is contrasted with the way Eileen's mother (Gay's primary care giver whilst Eileen works and studies) cares for her granddaughter. During the course of the weekend, Eileen must decide whether to accept her mother's offer to fully adopt Gay or to marry Joel, Gay's father, and raise their daughter together.

Initially it seems that Eileen will "admit defeat" and take her daughter back to her parents' home (*The Longest Weekend*, p. 39), but her pride will not allow her to do so. The quality of her parenting does not improve (she falls asleep, and Gay runs out of the cottage to play in the mud and rain dressed only in her underwear). The arrival of Joel does little to improve the situation. Although he and Gay get on well,

the young couple bicker. In flashbacks, we see how Eileen's mother has, unintentionally, undermined Eileen's ability to mother from the start by taking over the feeding, bathing and playing so that Eileen goes from having free hours in the afternoon to starting work and studying French. We also learn the entire history of Eileen and Joel's relationship and the misunderstanding that brought it to an end. The couple clear up the misunderstanding, work together to parent Gay and decide to marry.

The surprising feature of this novel is that although Gay would clearly be better cared for if she were adopted by her grandmother, this is not how the story ends. The novel's ending is not in the best interests of the younger child. Eileen's parents are well off, Gay is always well dressed, happy and clearly adored. In keeping with the standards of the day, but clearly used to mark Eileen's inadequacies, Eileen smokes and drinks (both when pregnant and afterwards), becomes so enraged that she hits Gay, and is not particularly good at household chores such as cooking and lighting fires. But she decides to go ahead and raise Gay with Joel anyway even though she realises that their marriage will not be

sensible, calm, affectionate [but] ... stormy ... full of misery and delight. Joel will never change. They'll be no happy ever after.

And for the sake of this relationship she was going to do the most cruel thing she had ever done in her life – deprive her mother of Gay – and her mother, with her exquisite sense of justice, would not even permit herself to cry out.

Eileen remembered reading somewhere that you grow up when you realize you can inflict pain on others. Yes, she was grown up now, and it was impossible to turn back into the little girl she had once been. (*The Longest Weekend*, p. 155)

This novel is truly radical in the way it sides with the teenage couple against the adult world, although it is traditional in presenting adoption as the best option for the child. It is clear that Eileen will be inflicting pain not only on her own mother, but also on her child and husband. Gay will not be grow up in a warm, supportive home. Although critical of the way Eileen's nascent mothering skills have been smothered, the text is adamant that children should be raised by their birth parents. It is worth noting, however, that the possibility that Eileen could raise her daughter alone is rejected. At sixteen, she was not fit to be a parent, but at nineteen, with a husband, she is accepted as a mother.

Age is critical. Sixteen year old Precious, in Sapphire's *Push*, is also lauded for her refusal to release her son, Abdul, for adoption (see also Kokkola 2012a). However, *Push* does not suggest she could have successfully mothered Little Mongo, who was born when Precious was just twelve. Little Mongo's name comes from the term 'mongoloid', that is, Down's Syndrome. Precious's use of terms such as 'retarded' and the name she gives her child signal how unready she is to parent. When the authorities finally realise that Precious's mother, Mary, has not been

caring for the child, they remove Little Mongo from the care of Precious's Grandmother. The years of neglect have left Little Mongo so badly damaged that she will never be placed in a family home again. Institutionalised life is certainly not romanticized in the novel, but at no point does Sapphire hint that, at the age of twelve, Precious could have fared better at raising Little Mongo than her grandmother did.

Neither *The Longest Weekend* nor *Push* wag the finger in the way the majority of the novels depicting adoption do. Eileen is never criticised for being sexually active, only for being irresponsible and lying when Joel asks whether she is on the pill (Eileen is also a virgin-to-mother figure). Precious is a victim who inspires pity from all who know her story. *Push* is not 'about' adoption in the way that *The Longest Weekend* is, and neither novel is typical. As I have already noted, the vast majority of adoption novels in the corpus are thinly disguised lectures on the importance of avoiding sex or suffering the consequences.

Adoption is far more popular in fiction than it is in real life. In real life, adoption is the final outcome for only c.a. 4% of all live births (Donnelly & Voydanoff 1991:404). In putting together the corpus, the only text that required any active searching was *The Longest Weekend* as I sought an example of a text which sought examples where the text sided with the mother. *The Longest Weekend* does end with the parents reuniting with their child, but in my view only *Push* suggests teenage girls could be better mothers than adults (Precious is a far better mother to Abdul than Mary was to her), although some of the teenage boys discussed in the section on empowered parents below are excellent fathers. Adoption novels are common, but in real life "For many teens, the most unappealing solution for an unwanted pregnancy is adoption. For one thing, it means the fall from virginal grace will be made public" (Emge 2006:25). Abortion is an option which has the potential to hide this "fall", but as the novels in the following section show, it is certainly not an easy solution.

Abortion: "There [is] no perfect way, no easy way, no way without pain"
(Growing Up in a Hurry, p. 168)

Abortions were illegal in all the countries from which these novels derived until the late 1960s or early 1970s and are still not legal on social grounds in all States in the US, and still require the approval of two doctors in the UK. The precise legal situation varies in different territories of Australia, but has effectively been available throughout the country since the mid-1970s. Canada legalised abortion under certain circumstances in the late 1960s and in 1988 became one of the few countries in the world to offer abortion on demand. As a result, by 1991, Donnelly and Voydanoff could cite evidence that "about half of U.S. adolescents

choose to carry their babies to term” (1991:404), meaning that the other half either abort or miscarry. The precise figures vary from year to year and from country to country, but over the sixty year period this study covers, we can surmise that, with the exception of Irish teens for whom abortion is still illegal,² abortion has transitioned from being one of the least likely outcomes to becoming the option most teenagers will choose. Fiction written for adolescents provides a fruitful space for adult authors to express their views on this controversial issue, and attempt to coerce this age group to take a stance on the debates surrounding this topic. The combination of the desire to coerce (rather than scold) and the complexity of the socio-political debates result in far more rounded characterisation and, overall, better quality novels than the predictable novels depicting adoption.

Overall, novels depicting abortion have become more liberal over time, but there are two caveats that must be taken into account. Firstly, finding novels depicting abortion – especially those written in the twentieth century – was not as easy as finding those depicting adoption, even though the latter is second only to miscarriage in rarity in real life. The relative silence surrounding abortion compared to the rarer but more socially acceptable option of adoption reveals a society that is so ambivalent about this topic that it cannot communicate with its young about this, relatively speaking, common event. My second caveat is that pro-choice books do not necessarily depict abortion at all. For instance, Rosa Guy’s *Edith Jackson* (1978), an early actively pro-choice novel, places the abortion off stage. After an extensive build up revealing the kind of life Edith and her child would lead, the alternative life Edith could leave if she were to abort, the novel ends with Edith deciding to terminate her pregnancy.

Dyan Sheldon’s *And Baby Makes Two* (2000) is, in my opinion, one of the most strongly pro-choice novels in the corpus. The novel ends when Lana realises that she is caught in a poverty trap, living in her council home with her baby, and that her dream that having a baby would lead to a middle class marriage and comfortable home will not be fulfilled. In desperation, she attempts to suffocate her baby with a pillow, and although she stops in time, she regrets she did not have an abortion. *And Baby Makes Two* ends without Lana making alternative provision for the care of her child, thereby implying that she will continue to parent despite her inadequacies. In this way, Sheldon offers a powerful argument in favour of abortion.

Typically, abortion is placed in the fringes of the narrative: the pregnant girl considers aborting but decides not to or the girl who has the abortion is a minor

2. I have not managed to locate an Irish novel commenting directly on abortion, let alone one depicting a character who has had one.

character.³ However there are a few novels that place abortion centre stage, and they contribute to the on-going discussions about the legal, moral and emancipatory import of abortion, but focus on pressing home the belief that adolescents should not be parents and emphasise that, as Karen in *Growing Up in a Hurry* observes “There [is] no perfect way, no easy way, no way without pain” to resolve an unwanted pregnancy (*In a Hurry*, p. 168). *Growing Up in a Hurry* is, as the title indicates, critical of Karen’s rush to encroach on what the narrative clearly perceives as being the world of adults. Its presentation of Karen’s need to mourn the death of her child is part of its didactic warning to readers to avoid the horrors of pregnancy. Nevertheless, the willingness this novel and others⁴ like it to show that a girl having the abortion may need to mourn even if she does not regret her decision indicates an increasingly complex understanding of the topic. In contrast, those which restrict the presentation of abortion to the narrative’s periphery, especially those in which the character ultimately rejects abortion as an option, tend to offer more conservative attitudes.

A noticeable feature of all the texts depicting characters whose pregnancies are not brought to term is that the texts are uniformly sympathetic to the mother’s predicament, resulting in more likeable characters than those in the ostensibly more neutral texts in which the child is given up for adoption. The most negative portrayals of abortion do not appear in texts depicting girls who abort, but rather in those where the teenager rejects abortion and carries the pregnancy to term.⁵ For this reason, I start by examining narratives depicting adolescents who consider or attempt an illegal abortion, which are primarily written or set before legal abortion was an option. I then look at texts written after abortion was legalized starting with novels in which the pregnant girl ends up making alternative decisions to either keep their child or release the baby for adoption. I then look at novels depicting legal abortions, especially those which place the event centre stage.

3. In Klein’s *It’s Not What You Expect* (1973), Carla marvels that her boyfriend’s girlfriend, Sara Lee, looks so calm after her abortion, but we get little insight into how Sara Lee and her boyfriend feel or knowledge of what they have experienced. Charlie in Chbosky’s acclaimed *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999) drives his sister to the abortion clinic and home, but the focus is on how this affects him, not on the impact it has on his sister. Similar patterns can be found in Zindel’s *My Darling, My Hamburger*, Blume’s *Forever* and Doherty’s *Dear Nobody*.

4. E.g. Johnson’s *My Life as a Rhombus*, Taylor’s *What’s Happily Ever After Anyway* and Fienberg’s *Borrowed Light*.

5. E.g. Brinkerhoff’s *Choice Summer*, Sheldon’s *And Baby Makes Two*, and Kaye’s *Someone Else’s Baby*.

Illegal contemplations and complexities “Oh, Pat! You might have killed the baby!” (Young Mother, p. 20)

Although Kamm’s *Young Mother* first appeared before the 1967 Abortion Act came into force in Britain, the protagonist, Pat, has considered abortion: she asks her doctor to help “but he wouldn’t do a thing” (*Young Mother*, p. 11). Her sister, Chris, is horrified, especially when Pat later admits that she took pills to induce an illegal abortion. Chris is adamant that “it was a living thing” (*Young Mother*, p. 20). The sisters go on to consider how Pat might raise her child or whether she should give it up for adoption (the route she ultimately takes). Although these two conversations combined occupy just one page in this 160 page novel, their inclusion is important for its acknowledgement of the availability of illegal abortions and for its decisively pro-life stance. In terms of its presentation of the pregnant teen, it is used to characterise Pat as immature and ignorant, whereas Chris comes across as knowledgeable and mature. The book was reissued without alteration at least three times after the 1967 Abortion Act, and so I read Chris’s statement as an anti-abortion statement from both author and publisher.

An early American novel to address abortion is Zindel’s *My Darling, My Hamburger*, originally published in 1969. Set in a fictitious small town some three years before abortion became legal, Liz Carston takes drugs to induce labour, but once she starts to bleed, her friend Maggie panics and thinks that something is very wrong. The novel is deliberately obscure about what happens next, but it is clear that Liz does not graduate and loses both her boyfriend and her best friend as a result. How permanent the physical and psychological damage will be is unclear. The novel was, for its time, radical in its presentation of sexually active, independent teenagers. Although the title mocks naïve adult beliefs about teenage carnal desire (their teacher recommends that girls should suggest going for a hamburger if their boyfriend gets too aroused), the novel depicts sexual desire as something fearful.

Illegal abortions have also been used by pro-choice activists who point out that criminalizing abortions simply increases the numbers of unsafe, illegal procedures that will be performed at high risk to the mother’s life and health (both physical and mental). Oughton’s *Perfect Family* is a novel that functions in this way. Published in 2000 but set in 1950s America, the novel depicts fifteen year old Welcome’s decision to procure an illegal abortion. She is so frightened by the experience, that she runs out of the room, leaving her hard-earned cash behind in her rush. The use of an historical setting to explore what might happen if abortion were to become criminalized again at a time when there was heated, public debate on this very issue can be regarded a powerful pro-choice argument.

Even after abortion became legal, we see instances of adolescent teenagers attempting to induce miscarriages through self-harming activities, as the title of

Knowles's recent *Jumping off Swings* reveals. In Doherty's award winning *Dear Nobody*, for instance, Helen throws herself off a galloping horse. This desperate attempt to induce a miscarriage is recognised by Chris's aunt, Jill: "what your Helen did just now up on the moors looked to me like a pretty desperate attempt to get rid of a pregnancy" (*Dear Nobody*, p. 56). Jill recognises Helen's actions because she has been equally desperate herself. She tells Chris and Helen about her own abortion which took place shortly after she separated from her husband. Although not an adolescent, she felt she did not have the resources needed to raise a third child alone. This discussion provides the teenage couple with their first opportunity to discuss the options available with an adult. In this pro-life novel, however, the conversation does not present abortion as a valid option. Jill's continuing need to mourn her lost child is presented as evidence which contradicts her claim that she was "one hundred per cent sure. I do not want this child" (*Dear Nobody*, p. 57). These attempts to abort through self-harming reveal a widespread lack of adult faith in adolescents' knowledge about how to resolve an unplanned pregnancy.

Changing minds: "I know this is the right thing for a lot of girls, but I just realized that it's not right for me" (*Dancing Naked*, p. 45)

When Kia demands to have the IV needle removed from her arm and walks out of the abortion clinic she has checked into, she informs the surprised medical staff that "I know this is the right thing for a lot of girls, but I just realized that it's not right for me" (*Dancing Naked*, p. 45). This decision literally takes place at the last possible moment, but changes of heart taking place are not infrequent in fiction depicting pregnant teenagers. Sarah in *My Life as a Rhombus* changes her mind, in part because Rhonda is so full of regrets about her own decision. These pro-life novels (and all of them are pro-life) focus on the procedure of abortion as a form of deterrent in much the same way that many other novelists focus on the horrors of child-birth as a warning to teenagers. Patrice in Eyerley's *Someone to Love Me* is horrified when she learns how vacuum aspiration is performed from a book: "after they had numbed you, sometimes they had to make you wider with metal rods. Even before they got to the part about the plastic tube they put in you and the little vacuum cleaner they attached to that, she began to feel quite faint" (*Someone to Love Me*, p. 92).⁶ The adolescent reader is presumably expected to feel 'quite faint' along with Patrice.

6. Nick, the father of the unborn child in Martin's *I Know it's Over*, and Keith, in *What's Happily Ever After?*, also feel the need to know the details of how the abortion will be performed. In both cases, however, it seems that this is the way that the male characters can feel involved in what their girlfriends are experiencing, and is intended to characterise them as caring, responsible young men.

Whilst all changes of heart are pro-life, Shirley Brinkerhoff's *Choice Summer*, which is published by the conservative Christian publishing house Focus on the Family Publishing, still manages to stand out for its pro-life activism. Although it is available outside the US, it has not been picked up by an international publisher which indicates that it is not particularly in tune with attitudes elsewhere in the Westernised, Anglophone world. The protagonist is the hitherto 'good girl', Nikki Sheridan. Nikki discovers she is pregnant in the first few pages of the novel and plans to abort the child before anyone else finds out. She is glad it has happened during the summer as she spends her summers with her grandparents in a town where few people know her. However her secret is exposed when she is nauseous during a dinner with family and friends. Then her grandma has a stroke. Whilst the grandmother is lying in the hospital, unable to speak, Nikki pours out her thoughts and feelings, and decides to release her child for adoption. Unfortunately, her parents arrive and overhear Nikki's secret. They insist she must have an abortion as bringing the child to term will cause a scandal they fear will have an adverse effect on Mr Sheridan's career. They make all the arrangements, and take her to a clinic. However, the duty nurse confuses the patients' files, and so a technician accidentally performs an ultrasound, enabling Nikki to hear her baby's heart-beat. This convinces Nikki that abortion is wrong, so she tricks her parents into believing that she has had the abortion as planned. By the time they realise that Nikki has lied, Grandma has recovered and is able to support her granddaughter. Nikki is thrown out of her parental home, and moves in with her grandparents. She gives birth to a boy whom she puts up for adoption. The novel's overtly Christian, pro-life message is predictable, but it is refreshing to see that the villains of the piece are not the teenager herself, but rather her self-centred parents who are more concerned about how their daughter's pregnancy might reflect on them than they are with Nikki's (or their potential grandchild's) well-being. As a result, Nikki is a slightly more pleasant virgin-to-mother to release her child for adoption than most, but the moralising tone and overt didacticism of the piece renders the work as lack lustre as the other adoption novels.

Going ahead: "I never understood in what way it was like murder" (It's OK, p. 174)

Varian Johnson's *My Life as a Rhombus* is a recent American novel which places abortion centre stage, but which, if the question and answer section with the author at the end of the novel is to be believed, strives not to make an absolute pro-life or pro-choice stance. The interview clarifies the author's belief that abortion is a woman's issue in that "it's a hell of a lot easier to be pro-life or pro-choice when you aren't the one who can get pregnant" (Johnson 2008:303). Whilst Johnson dodges the issue in interview, his novel is by no means as neutral as he seems to

think. In *My Life as a Rhombus*, Rhonda tutors Sarah Gamble although she “do[es] n’t tutor high school students, especially spoiled, superficial, popular high school students” (*My Life as a Rhombus*, p. 2: italics original). Sarah comes from a wealthy, middle-class home. Her brother, David, plays basketball with Rhonda’s ex-boyfriend, Christopher. Rhonda soon recognises that Sarah is pregnant, and endeavours to help, despite her prejudices. Rhonda is still grieving after her own abortion, which took place several months before the start of the time covered in the novel. Her anger against her father, whom – at the start of the novel – she feels forced her to have the abortion, against her ex-boyfriend and against pretty girls like Sarah is mingled with her need to mourn and her inability to take responsibility for her actions. Rhonda is a teen who badly needs to be able to talk about the experience of abortion, but because of the shame and secrecy surrounding the event can find no outlet for her mixed emotions.

Helping Sarah helps Rhonda. She even takes Sarah to the same clinic she used, but is delighted when Sarah changes her mind and decides to go ahead with the pregnancy. In its focus on Rhonda’s emotional turmoil and its celebration of Sarah’s decision to become a mother, the novel is decidedly pro-life, despite the author’s claims to the contrary. The novel is noteworthy in the way it presents a complex range of emotional reactions arising from abortion, and so chips away at the silence surrounding terminations. Other novels in the corpus also attempt to show that this solution to motherhood may not be easily resolved emotionally. And because of the burden of shame girls who abort their children are expected to carry, they are afforded even fewer opportunities to express their feelings than girls who miscarry.

When Stephie, in *Keesha’s House* by Helen Frost, miscarries towards the end of her second trimester, everyone is sympathetic. The next time the poem cycle from which the novel is created returns to Stephie’s voice, she has recovered enough to recognise the pleasures of being “a girl with a mom and a dad and a brother and *no baby*” (*Keesha’s House*, p. 86; italics original) and in her final sonnet she declares she “half – no, more than half – glad how it turned out” (*Keesha’s House*, p. 103). So although Jason, the baby’s father and Stephie’s mother were prepared to raise the child, the lack of shame and space to express grief allows all of them to move on with their lives far more quickly than Rhonda and her father.

The most sympathetic portrayal of a girl who aborts appears in Lanagan’s fantasy, *Tender Morsels*. Both Liga’s daughters are the result of rape. Her eldest, Branza, is her father’s daughter, whereas her youngest, Urdda, is the result of gang rape. Prior to the births of her daughters, however, Liga has been forced to abort two of her father’s children. Liga’s father recognises his daughter is pregnant before Liga comprehends the implications of the changes in her body. Da obtains a poisonous smoke, which he forces Liga to inhale by locking her in the room. The second time,

he forces her to consume a herbal tea, which Liga drinks without knowing what it will do. The third time she gets pregnant, she manages to hide it until she is well into her second trimester. Da's determination to induce a third abortion, despite the late stage of pregnancy, indirectly leads to the bonding between Liga and the untrained hedge witch, Annie. As a result, Liga's father dies and Liga is able to give birth to her daughter.

A recent novel by K.C. Kelly Martin, *I Know It's Over* (2008) offers a slightly unusual insight into abortion in that it is one of very few to consider the experience from the male perspective. The protagonist-narrator, Nick, is a popular, good-looking sixteen year old guy who wants to enjoy a casual relationship without commitments. After a short fling with Dani, he meets Sasha and is surprised by the depths of his feelings for her. They lose their virginity together, but a pillow talk discussion leads Sasha to panic about how serious their relationship has become. She ends the relationship, and leaves Nick devastated and alone to deal with his emotions about this, his parents' divorce and his best-friend's coming out angst. Sasha reappears on Christmas Eve to tell Nick that she is pregnant, she wants Nick to know, but she does not want to resume the relationship. Neither of them is quite certain about what to do, although they are fairly knowledgeable as literary teens go (Nick's parents are so open minded, his father has even given him condom money earlier in the novel). Nick and Sasha decide to abort the child. The novel focuses on Nick's emotional turmoil, yet makes it clear that Sasha is more deeply affected. Like Chris in Doherty's *Dear Nobody*, Nick's grief is much more about the loss of his girlfriend than it is about the end of the pregnancy, and at the end of the novel he appears to be continuing life just as he would have if Sasha had not conceived.

Unlike most other teens coping with an unplanned pregnancy, Nick can talk to his father. Indeed, he tells his father about the pregnancy straight away. But although the father listens to his son, he leaves all the decision making to the teenagers themselves. Nick's mother realizes that there is something troubling her son, but does not press him to talk to her. Nick finally tells her everything during the evening after the abortion. She is sympathetic and non-judgmental and one is left wondering why he was afraid to talk to her earlier. Like his father, Nick's mother accepts that if Nick and Sasha are old enough to conceive a child, they are also old enough to decide have an abortion and make the arrangements themselves.

I Know It's Over is unusual in its presentation of a male perspective and the parents' respect for teenagers' decisions. The numerous (non-graphic) sex scenes are presumably meant to encourage a larger male readership than most of the novels included in the corpus. The non-judgmental attitudes towards sex, pregnancy and abortion are also unusual in this didactic genre. Otherwise, the inclusion of too many 'issues' (divorce, coming out) makes the novel overall so concerned with presenting these topics in a non-judgmental light that it fails to leave space

for character development or, indeed, interest value. The characterization of female characters in these novels, however, is improving. Regardless of whether the novel is pro-life (as most are) or pro-choice, the sub-genre is developing to show increasingly complex interiority as the girls' often conflicting and wide ranging emotions play out under the shroud of shame and silence imposed by a society that is uncertain how to react to both pregnant adolescents and the solution of abortion.

Although all the novels depicting pregnant teenage girls depict unplanned pregnancies, some unplanned pregnancies result in wanted children. As Ruth's father pragmatically points out in Peyton's *Pennington's Heir*: "Fifty per cent of the population are great ghastly mistakes, and always have been, all through history" (*Pennington's Heir*, p. 32). Although the novel was written and set after abortion became legal, Ruth decides to raise her child with the baby's father, Pat. The final section on the 'punishment' of pregnancy examines novels which depict teenage parents who decide to raise their child. Novels depicting teenage parents appear throughout the period covered in the corpus. However, unlike novels depicting abortion, there is no general trend towards more liberal views. There are certain categories of attitudes, but not a simple chronological development. Positive views of teenage marriage, for instance, appear in some of the oldest novels in the corpus and some of the most recent, but not in between. Teenage fathers are always praised if they parent their child, but single teenage mothers do not receive praise until the turn of the millennium. In terms of what these novels reveal about adolescent encroachment onto the adult domain of parenthood, the only generalisation one can make is that it is too simplistic to dismiss all teenage parents as being 'punished' for becoming sexually active. Indeed, novels like Aidan Chambers's *This is All* are positively celebratory of teenage pregnancy and marriage.

Teenage marriages: "I'm not [ill] ... I'm married" (Bo Jo Jones, p. 44)

Duncan's review of studies of teenage parenting in Britain, the USA, New Zealand and Canada reveals that teenage birth rates, conceptions and absolute numbers of live births have declined since the 1960s (2007:310–1). The main differences lie in the ways in which teenagers 'resolve' their pregnancies. In the 1950s and 1960s, the majority of teenage parents married, at least briefly, in order to grant their child legitimate status and about 20% put the child up for adoption. By 2000, teenage marriage was rare, although the majority cohabited, and about half of those who did not cohabit still registered the birth jointly indicating that both parents planned to participate in the raising of their child (*ibid.*). The dramatically reduced numbers of teenagers releasing their children for adoption during the same period presumably reflects the (whole or partial) legalization of abortion in most Anglophone

countries. Presumably those teenagers who put their child up for adoption in the 1950s and 1960s come from the same demographic as those who opted for abortion once it became safely and easily available.

The changes in social practice Duncan outlines are also evident in the fiction for adolescents, with a few interesting exceptions. The stereotypical 'shotgun' marriage appears in novels from the 1960s and early 1970s, but marriage is proffered as a 'solution' to an unplanned pregnancy throughout the corpus. After her short review of these novels and of proposals that do not lead to marriage, Emge concludes that "Although there are examples of happy teen marriages to be found in young adult literature, in books targeted to young adults teen marriage is generally portrayed as a bad idea" (2006:23). This was exactly what I anticipated. I expected that novels depicting marriage would be as didactic and dull as the novels on adoption. Marriage, to an even greater extent than carnal desire, is an encroachment on adult privilege. Yet although I followed up all Emge's examples and found more of my own, I did not reach the same conclusion. To be clear, there were works that were every bit as didactic and moralising as I had anticipated. Margaret Willey's *If Not for You* from 1988 is a fairly typical example. Willey's novel is focalized through a teenage girl, Bonnie, who merely observes the marriage as the couple's babysitter. Initially Bonnie is fascinated by the young couple's marriage and considers it very romantic. Gradually, however, she comes to recognize that marriage and parenthood is anything but romantic. But Bonnie is not one of the married characters in the novel, she merely witnesses the unhappy marriage. Unhappy marriages, in works for adolescents, primarily happen to other people. Happy marriages, I was surprised to find, happen to the protagonists.

Two of the oldest novels in my corpus and two of the most recent novels celebrate teenage marriage. This may be coincidental or may be a sign of the return of more conservative values in Britain and America (where the novels were written and set).⁷ In the 1960s, Head's classic *Mr and Mrs Bo Jo Jones* (1967) was one of the first American novels to depict a pregnant teenager. In Britain, K. M. Peyton produced *Pennington's Heir* (1973). The latter novel is far less well known than the author's highly successful *Flambards* series of horse stories. *Pennington's Heir* is the third in a series of four novels depicting a talented musician from a working class background who falls in love with a lower middle class girl after a brief relationship with a girl from the upper middle classes, and class differences remain as much a part of the subtext of this series as they do in the *Flambards* series where the stables provide a meeting place for the working class grooms and the upper-class riders.

7. See Abate 2010a for a fuller discussion of recent American conservatism and its influence on children's literature.

Class differences also affect the dynamics of July and Bo Jo's relationship in Head's novel, albeit to a lesser extent.

Although both couples marry whilst the girl is pregnant, the goals and outcomes of this marriage are not the same. July and Bo Jo's marriage is not expected to last, the couple plan to divorce soon after their child is born; their marriage is simply meant to ensure that the child is not born illegitimately. Pat and Ruth, in *Pennington's Heir*, are more committed to one another from the start. Ruth has waited for Pat to be released from prison for nine months, and visited him every month whilst he was incarcerated. Ruth's commitment to Pat is matched by Pat's commitment to his music. However, as the novel progresses, Pat recognizes how much he has come to depend on Ruth and how central she is to his well-being. The contrast in the outcomes of the pregnancies is even greater: Ruth gives birth to a son about half way through the novel, but July has a miscarriage shortly before the end of the novel. Where the blurb for *Mr and Mrs Bo Jo Jones* declares that July is "one of the lucky ones: at least her child will be legitimate" the later novels (including *Pennington's Heir*) all overtly or implicitly suggest that teenage marriage is not necessarily an appropriate response to an unplanned pregnancy. This might not seem surprising, but does seem at odds with the fact that the relationships in both novels are successful and loving.

Moreover, considerably more narrative attention is paid to the way in which marriage impacts upon the couple's relationship than on either the pregnancy or the child, and the same is true of the two novels from the noughties – *Breaking Dawn* and *This is All* – where the child (a girl in both cases) is very obviously present in the text. The pregnancy functions as a *deus ex machina* which 'forces' the young couple into a formal relationship in the novels of the 1960s and early 1970s, whereas the couples of the noughties are already committed to one another and the pregnancy is presented as a celebration of the youngsters' love for one another. July and Bo Jo in *Mr and Mrs Bo Jo Jones* lose their child in a miscarriage, and the surprising twist to the novel is that they decide to remain married even though they no longer 'need' to do so for the sake of the child. Pat and Ruth's marriage survives poverty, jealousy, flirtation and lack of parental support, and both these early novels are uncompromising about the amount of work required to maintain a long term relationship. The novels of the noughties are decidedly less realistic and more celebratory.

The novels of the noughties, Stephenie Meyer's *Breaking Dawn* and Aidan Chambers's *This is All*, both huge novels from established authors, albeit one decidedly lowbrow and the other highbrow. Both celebrate the love the teenagers have for one another, even though the pregnancies are not planned. Both use the death of the wife as a means of ensuring that this love is preserved for eternity. In *Breaking Dawn*, Bella (as readers have known her) dies as a human and is reborn as a

vampire. Since she and Edward are now both vampires, they will live forever in perpetual marital bliss. In *This is All*, Cordelia's death is literal. Like her own mother, she dies when her daughter is infancy, but will be remembered forever through her 'pillow books' which celebrate her love for the father of her child, Will.

Married parents raising their children in the noughties seem to have a fairly easy time. Not only are their marriages emotionally satisfying and sexually exciting, they give birth to perfect children. Bella and Edward's daughter, Renesmee, inspires love from everyone she meets. Since she prefers to drink donated blood rather than breast milk, Bella does not even need to nurse her and there are hordes of vampires, werewolves and humans around who love to entertain and care for her. Raising Will and Cordelia's (unnamed) daughter requires little more work, despite the greater realism of the novel. Their contemporary hippy, extended network of family and friends join forces to help raise their daughter. The images of the complex web of relationships which surround the baby girl are intertwined with images of Will's beloved trees. The result is not only a deeply Romantic view of the girl's childhood, but also of young love.

In the 1970s, Ruth had a slightly more difficult time than her peers in the noughties. In the era before the birth of the 'new man', Pat in *Pennington's Heir* recognises that his financial responsibilities to his wife and son, but seems oblivious to all other aspects of fatherhood. He practices the piano whilst Ruth is trying to get Ludwig to sleep, he invites musician friends over at all hours of the day, even though the couple and their baby have rented just one room in the house, and so the musical improvising and chatter go on whilst Ruth feeds Ludwig and attempts to establish a regular sleeping pattern. Pat's inability to recognise his paternal responsibilities even results in abuse when he accidentally damages his hand. As a piano player, Pat knows that any damage to his hand may result in an inability to work or enter competitions. He rushes off to the hospital, abandoning his three month old son alone in his pram at the bottom of the garden. When Ruth returns several hours later to find Ludwig "in the garden ... yelling blue murder, and there was no sign of Pat at all", she is merely "indignant" and never expresses these feelings to her husband (*Pennington's Heir*, p. 163). Despite Pat's poor fathering skills, Ludwig seems to thrive and allows the novel to continue to focus on the couple's relationship with one another. Oddly, their primary relationship is still to one another and not to their child. (See Travis 2008 for a fuller discussion of parenthood in this novel.)

Ruth and July both become pregnant at the age of seventeen, and so are both technically 'children', unlike Bella and Cordelia. The third millennium mothers are both technically adults when they become mothers (Bella is 18, Cordelia 19) and both in happy marriages at the time when their daughters are born, which suggests that teenage motherhood can only be celebrated within very rigidly defined

parameters: parameters which are strongly associated with the middle classes and the celebration of the nuclear family. July's main problem in the early days of her marriage is not knowing how to fill her days as a housewife. The possibility that she could have continued her schooling or earned money while pregnant is never even raised as an option. Instead she focuses on the details of how to buy provisions on a limited budget, how to cook and how to decorate their home. Ruth is also preoccupied with such issues, although the birth of Ludwig half way through the novel and the furthering Pat's career are also important issues for her. These are all issues with which a housewife of her era would be expected to be concerned about.

Three decades later, despite their feminist protestations, Cordelia and Bella both adopt very traditional feminine roles and create families which resemble those idealised in the older novels. Yet neither Cordelia nor Bella raises her child within a traditional nuclear family: both draw on their extended family for support. The novels offer an idealisation of a tightly bonded family unit which is not rigidly restricted by biology, but which celebrates the blended families of the first decade of the third millennium. Meyer and Chambers thus both offer rosy views of contemporary family relationships formed through remarriage, choice and friendship as well as the more traditional biological connections.

Teenage marriage, these novels seem to suggest, is romantic and pleasurable. This surprising outcome is, in no small part, due to the relative lack of attention the young parents need to pay their offspring. When left alone with their child, most teenage parents struggle with the day-to-day grind of child care. And although some of them are successful, and take pleasure and pride in their children, all of them are clear that parenthood is hard work (e.g., Green's *Blue Moon* [2003] and *Baby Blue* [2004], Lanagan's *The Best Thing* [1995] and Doherty's *Dear Nobody* [1991]). Nevertheless, single fathers – including Will after the death of Cordelia in Chambers's *This is All*, in particular, but also some recent single mothers are empowered by their roles as parents.

Empowered parents: Fantastic fathers and marvellous mothers

Norma Klein, a fearless author of teenage fiction, tackled many subjects previously considered unfit for teen readers in the 1970s. Her liberal attitudes towards adolescent sexual desire still seem unusual when compared to the generally conservative attitudes expressed in most of the novels in the corpus. Her sexually savvy, feminist character, Jody, in *It's OK If You Don't Love Me* (1977), discussed in the previous chapter, is incapable of understanding how abortion “was like murder” (*It's OK*, p. 174) – a view which is not expressed anywhere else in the corpus.

As such, it is not surprising that Klein produced the earliest fully empowered teenage parent novel in the corpus: *No More Saturday Nights* (1988).

Tim Weber, Klein's protagonist, is eighteen when he becomes a father, with sole parental rights after his ex-girlfriend releases Mason for adoption. Tim is in his final year in high school and on his way to college. With a reasonable inheritance from his mother behind him, Tim is more financially secure than most teenage parents. With a judicious amount of luck, he manages to arrange reasonably priced child care, find a room in house with three female students, keep up with his studies and even have a social life. It is not that Mason is an abnormally easy baby – and there moments when Tim wishes someone else could take the responsibility for him – but when the opportunity arises at the end of the novel, Tim has demonstrated that he is perfectly capable of taking care of his son himself. The novel is narrated from Tim's perspective, and so readers are encouraged to agree with his decision to reject first Mason's mother and her fiancé's wish to reclaim Mason and his father and step-mother's request to care for Mason during term time, that is, to reject two stereotypical, heteronormative family arrangements in favour of single fatherhood. Other fabulous fictional fathers include Sam Pettigrew in Bechard's *Hanging on to Max* (2002), who also proves to be the best possible father for his son, even though he raises Max alone, and David in Garisch's *Babyshoes* (2003), who takes on the role of father to his half-brother when his mother walks out on the family. The success of these teenage fathers or father surrogates is all the more remarkable given the general *lack* of effective parenting shown by many adult fathers (see Michaels and Gibbs [2002] for a discussion of poor fathering in award-winning fiction for teens).

Of course, not all teenage fathers are fantastic. Charles, in Eyerly's *He's My Baby, Now* (1977), kidnaps his new-born son from the foster home for an hour. One hour is enough to convince him that the child will be better off without him and that he is not ready for the responsibilities of fatherhood. Pat in *Pennington's Heir* (1973) leaves his son unattended in the garden. Fictional fathers can be feckless but, for the most part, those teenage fathers who do stay around do a pretty good job and grow as characters as they care for their children. Single, fictional teenage mothers are – as a group – much less appreciated. Unlike their married counterparts, they have to work much harder and struggle with the day to day problems of nappy changing, sleep rhythms and so on.

In many ways the struggles of fictional teenage mothers reflects reality – as a group, single teenage mothers are far less privileged than their older counterparts who raise their children alone. However, when Simon Duncan and a team of researchers broke down the demographics further, they found that, in the real world, teenagers who come from impoverished backgrounds have much to gain from parenthood (2005, 2007). This is partly because the need to care for the young

baby enables the mother to negotiate social services more effectively, and so improve her housing situation and become financially independent of her birth family, but also because of the way it helps young women to become more goal oriented and so work towards independent financial security (2007:319–20 & 27). Towers (1996) also identifies a shift in teenagers' attitudes towards more positive views of parenthood taking place.

Precious, the protagonist of Sapphire's *Push* (1996), comes from the lowest strata in society: she is poor, Black, illiterate, abused and obese. However, like Duncan's interviewees, the birth of her son, Abdul, enables her to leave her abusive home with her mother and receive help from the social services as well as helping her focus on her education and become financially independent. By the end of the novel, she has created a far better living situation than she had at the beginning – even though she is still “½way between the life [she] had and the life [she] want[s] to have” (*Push*, p. 84). The sequel, *The Kid*, clarifies that Precious dies before she achieves the life she wants to have, but she is undeniably better off than she was, and Abdul is undeniably better off when he is being raised by his mother than he is when he is left to the social services.

It is fair to claim that Precious is empowered by becoming a mother. Despite other people's opinions, Precious is proud of herself for becoming a mother, even though both children are the result of rape. Indeed, it is her pride in being a mother that pushes Precious to continue to strive towards literacy, caring for her child “while, not *instead of*, following [her] dreams” of becoming literate and gaining autonomy (Gore & Lavender 2001:xiii). When Precious arrives at the alternative school, she takes (and presumably fails) a preliminary literacy test, but she refuses to be put down: “I look bitch teacher woman in face, trying to see do she see *me* or the tess. But I don't care what anybody see. I see something, somebody. I got baby. So what. I feel proud 'cept it's baby by my fahver and that make me not in picture again” (*Push*, p. 33). Motherhood is one of Precious's few sources of strength in the oppressive environment in which she lives. It does not compensate for her sufferings, however. And it does not change the fact that society looks down on her as a “vampire sucking the system's blood” (*Push*, p. 31). As a single mother, she is perceived as a drain on society, rather than as a woman raising herself and her son out of an impossibly difficult situation. The novel invites readers to re-examine their prejudices against teenage mothers. Similarly successful teenage mothers include Sephy in Blackman's *Noughts and Crosses* (2001) and its sequels, Mia in Green's *Baby Blue* (2004) and Mel in Lanagan's *The Best Thing* (1995).

I have chosen to focus on successful teenage parents in no small part to counter the perception that teenage parents – in real life and in fiction – are irresponsible individuals who are not fit for the tasks that face them. Inept parents certainly make their presence felt in the corpus. And overall, the novels in the corpus do not

endorse adolescent parenthood. The appearance of books depicting empowered teenage parents, be they married or single, however, reveals that adult views of teenagers who are willing to take on the multitude of responsibilities involved in raising a child are not entirely bleak. Nevertheless, the underlying assumption that adolescents should not become parents prevails, although as the books discussed in the following section, worse options are available.

Murdering mothers: An alternative to parenthood?

The most extreme alternative to becoming a teenage parent is infanticide. This was not an option I had considered, but it appears in three novels in the corpus. In Dowd's *A Pure Swift Cry* (2006), Shelley is accused of infanticide in a novel that was based of the Kerry babies incident that shook Ireland to the core in 1984. In April 1984, a newborn baby boy was found murdered on a beach in County Kerry. A local woman who was known to have been pregnant initially admitted she murdered her child, but then changed her story and said that her child had died shortly after birth and had been buried on the family farm. Dowd kept these details, but changed the mother of the child from an adulterous adult woman to a teenage girl whose mother has died. The focalization and chronology of the novel prevent the reader from knowing whether or not Shell murdered her baby, and who the father of her child was (her father, a kindly local priest and a classmate are all put forwards as options) until the very end. In Ireland in 1984, the Kerry babies case led to a public debate on the behaviour of the gardaí (Irish police) and the treatment of unmarried mothers. Dowd's extension of this discussion to adolescent mothers is a political move which expresses solidarity with sexually active teens (despite the comparison with adultery) and teenage parents. By the end of the novel, readers realize that Shell is more victim than aggressor (see Killeen 2011 for a fuller discussion of Shell's innocence), and accept that her baby died of natural causes. Yet, for all its support of the teenage mother as victim, *A Pure Swift Cry*, allows no space for either Shell or the reader to grieve the dead child. Like the miscarriage in Frost's *Keesha's House* (2003), miscarriages and natural deaths are presented as positive, guilt-free solutions to teenage pregnancy. I hope I am not alone in finding it heart-wrenching and shocking that teenagers' grief can be dismissed so lightly.

To return to the issue of infanticide, however, Shell is only accused of killing her child. By the end of the novel, the reader is assured of her innocence. Unlike Shell, however, Lana in Sheldon's *And Baby Makes Two* (2000) actually attempts to murder her daughter by suffocating her. Lana is a self-delusional teenager who is convinced that her route out of her impoverished life in a council owned flat in the UK lies in finding a man. On her fifteenth birthday, she starts a relationship with

Les who works at a video rental shop. Readers soon realize how much both teenagers are lying to one another and, in Lana's case at least, to herself. Lana exaggerates her age and implies she is further along in her studies. Les claims he is climbing the corporate ladder and hides the fact that he still lives with his mother. Lana believes that Les will marry her when he learns that she is pregnant, and that this is her ticket to a middle class home and lifestyle.

When she finally realizes that she will remain in poverty, cutting out coupons and living a life more like her mother's than the dream world she has envisioned, she attempts to suffocate her daughter. She stops in time to save the child's life, but the novel ends at this point without any alternative provision being made for either mother or infant. Unlike *all* the other novels and short stories in the corpus, there is no ray of hope anywhere in the bleak ending to this novel (even novels depicting girls working as prostitutes contain a greater sense of hope than Sheldon offers). Readers have been encouraged to laugh at Lana's ineptitude earlier in the novel, which makes the ending all the more brutal. Inept parenting, Sheldon clarifies, is no laughing matter.

Devon's baby in Efav's *After* (2009) also lives, despite her mother's attempt to kill her. The baby is found in a dumpster by a man who is out walking his dog. The police search nearby. And do visit Devon, but only gradually are readers (and Devon's solicitor) able to piece the story together and recognize that she really did try to kill her child. The problem is not lack of information: within a few pages it is clear that the dumpster baby really is Devon's child. The problem is that one does not want to believe that an intelligent young teen could attempt to murder her child, or that everyone around her could fail to recognize the pregnancy. These were precisely the ideas that motivated Efav to write the novel, after her husband served as prosecutor on such a case. The result is a finely crafted novel, which provides remarkable insights into the disturbed teenage mother's mind. Unlike Lana, Devon's ignorance and fear are presented as the logical result of the poor parenting she receives, and readers are encouraged to feel empathy and sympathy for her *even though she has attempted murder*. The result is a challenging read which demands that readers temporarily suspend their preconceived ideas about infanticide as they form the jury who must judge her at the end.

Few sensible conclusions can be drawn about how these three novels raising the issue of infanticide from three different countries in terms of what they reveal about adolescence. Although there are 'only' three novels that raise this theme, the presence of *any* novels raising infanticide as an option is surprising. They clearly indicate an expectation that teenagers can cope with very raw subject material. The sympathy expressed towards Shell in *A Pure Swift Cry* and Devon in *After* is noteworthy in that both teenagers are treated as *children* not as adults or even as encroaching upon adulthood. They, as well as their children, are victims. Lana, in

And Baby Makes Two, however, is just presented as being stupid: she even names her daughter 'Shinola' after the shoe cream without realizing. She is an object of scorn and readers are certainly not encouraged to share in her predicament. So even though two of the novels are sympathetic to the characters' plights, all three novels ram home the message that teenagers should not be parents. In this respect they are not as radical as their shocking content might lead one to expect.

Pregnancy and parenthood dominate the list of punishments meted out on sexually active adolescents, but are not the only horrors that lie in store. Adolescents whose carnal desires are 'out of control' can face worse. As Laurel in Block's novel *The Hanged Man* (1994:14) unsuitably informs readers: "Sex can kill you".

Disease and death: "Sex can kill you" (*The Hanged Man*, p. 14)

Sex and death are both deemed markers of the on-set of linear time (Nikolajeva 2000) and of adulthood (Trites 2000). Although seemingly very different, within the human psyche, the two have become irrevocably linked. Grosz's explanation that "Sexuality introduces death into the world, or perhaps the converse: death is inevitable, and sexuality may function as a compensation for and supplement to death" (1995a:292) seems to be fairly widespread – a recognition that the two have become linked but without any sense of causal direction or indeed why this might be. Fortunately, within the context of literature for adolescents, Kathryn James's study, *Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature*, provides a finely worked examination of the myriad ways in which death is gendered and sexualized.⁸ By using gender and sexuality as a "lens" for examining representations of death, James reveals how youngsters whose gender or carnal desires do not fall within rigidly proscribed norms are often rendered deviant and punished with disease or death. Death is associated with "violence, teenage pregnancy, homosexuality, sexual abuse ... and disease" (James 2009:7), that is, death is the punishment for carnal desire.

In my materials, death is undeniably used as a form of punishment, and with little subtlety at that. The hypersexual teenage girls Janie in Lanagan's *Touching Earth Lightly* and Fern in Waite's *Game Girls* are both murdered as a result of their risky sexual practices. I found no comparable instances of boys being murdered for promiscuous behaviour and, sadly, I find this unsurprising. These are straightforward deployments of an obvious literary device for admonishing the adolescent character in the hope of curbing the reader's desire to emulate the character's

8. See James (2009:18–19) for a summary of ways in which sex, gender and death are connected.

behaviour. Both Janie and Fern are also victims. Fern is the most slow-witted of the groups of three girls who become prostitutes in *Game Girls*. She is also the only one who is a virgin at the start of the novel. Janey has been abused by both her father and her brother, and initially Janey's promiscuity is connected to her incestuous abuse. The reckless acts which result in her death are connected to Janey's grief over having given up her child for adoption.

Death as a punishment, however, affects one group of adolescents more than any other. As Cart and Jenkins ironically summarise

When YA literature of the sixties and seventies portrayed heterosexual intimacy between teens, the health consequences were predictable. Even if the sexual act occurred only once, girls almost inevitably got pregnant. They then had several options: if the pregnant girl were a secondary character, she would often simply disappear from the story. If she had a steady boyfriend, the two might get married, to the chagrin of all, including themselves. If she had no steady boyfriend, the girl might get an abortion, which was likely to leave her either dead or permanently barren. There are, of course, exceptions to these fictional scenarios, but the majority followed the course(s) described above.

As for same-sex sexual activity, the most frequent unintended health consequence of it in YA novels of the 1980s and the 1990s was, of course, AIDS

(Cart & Jenkins 2006:84–5)

In the 1980s, AIDS inevitably meant death, which is why Laurel, the narrator of Francesca Lia Block's *The Hanged Man* tells her audience "Sex can kill you" (p. 14). Published in 1994, when AIDS treatments were improving, Block could have chosen a more subtle message. In the corpus, however, AIDS inevitably results in death, and the emphasis on AIDS, rather than more common diseases such as chlamydia or herpes, seems to me part of a desire to threaten rather than simply warn. The threat that sex can have fatal consequences affects one group of teens more than others: death by car or motor bike accident seems to a common consequence of same-sex desire and suicide (or attempts at suicide) are not rare.

Before I examine these works, however, I would like to pick up on Cart and Jenkins's tongue-in-cheek summary of the consequences of teenage pregnancy. In more recent novels depicting teenage pregnancy, another alternative has emerged: the parent may die. What I find interesting about this option is that it draws on the much older literary phenomenon of killing off the Romantic child, so as to preserve her innocence. In several novels published close to the start of the new millennium – *Push*, *Noughts and Crosses* and *Breaking Dawn* – the teenage parent either dies or the novels ends at the point when we know she will die, but in each case death is presented, not as a way of punishing the adolescent for being sexually active, but as a way of preserving their innocence. This is utterly unlike the way in which Janey's death in *Touching Earth Lightly* is presented. Where Janey is

presented as a grief-stricken, inadequate mother whose sexuality has been pushed out of control by her repeated experiences of abuse, Precious, Callum and Bella in the aforementioned novels are all presented as ideals to which the reader should aspire, and is part of the valorisation and empowerment of teenage parenthood discussed above.

John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* is widely acknowledged to be the first English language novel with a gay theme explicitly written and published for an adolescent readership. Published in the same year as the Stonewall riots that sparked the marshalling of the gay rights movement, Donovan's novel entered into a wider debate on the homosexuality. In several publications, Michael Cart has recounted the trepidation with which the novel was published (Cart and Jenkins 2006:8–9; Cart 2007:76–77), which resulted in an endorsement from the Gesell Institute of Child Development after Donovan was asked to write an increased sense of guilt into the plot. The guilt Davy, the protagonist, feels after kissing Altschuler is tied – in Davy's mind – to the death of his beloved dachshund, Fred. Fred dies when Davy's mother takes him out for a walk so that Davy can discuss his relationship with Altschuler with his father. Davy's mother lets go of Fred's lead allowing the dog to run into the busy New York traffic. In other words, Fred's death has nothing to do with Davy's carnal desires, but Davy is determined that Fred's death "was because of what we did, you dumb bastard! That's why my mother was walking Fred that night. Because of us. Because of all that queering around" (*I'll Get There*, p. 185). This equation between homosexuality and death was, unfortunately, picked up and was to remain a common punishment for the ensuing decades. Cart claims that of "the eight YA novels that would appear in the next decade, death figures in three" (2007:77). To Cart's figures, one might add Rosa Guy's *Ruby*, in which Ruby's lover, Daphne, ends the relationship when she risks death by climbing out of the window to avoid being caught by Ruby's aggressive father, Calvin.

As in the case of Fred, the beloved dachshund in Donovan's ground breaking novel, the death is not always that of the protagonist or gay character. For instance, in Linda Hall's *Sticks and Stones* (1977), it is the protagonist's nemesis who dies in the car crash, not the gay character or the protagonist (who was driving at the time of the accident). The novel is built around a triangular relationship: Floyd (heterosexual) who wants to be friends with Tom. Tom, the new boy, rejects Floyd and forms a friendship with Ward, who is gay. The novel ends with Ward visiting Tom in hospital and Tom shaking his hand saying "Ward, I'm glad you came" (*Sticks and Stones*, p. 187). According to a letter from the author cited by Cart, this was a compromise between what the publisher wanted (the death of Tom) and what Hall wanted ("I wanted Ward and Tom to love each other, to live happily ever after, and that was the way I ended it" [in Cart 2007:29]). The publishers felt

that such a positive outcome “might be dangerous to young people teetering on the brink” (*ibid.*). Thus in the social mind frame of the 1970s, death was an appropriate punishment for expressing same-sex desire. And if, as in Judy Blume’s *Forever*, no car crashes take place, then suicide is an appropriate alternative (in Blume’s case, the suicide attempt is unsuccessful and Artie’s parents send him off to a mental institution).

The following decade saw the publication by the highly acclaimed British author, Aidan Chambers: *Dance on My Grave*. The novel stands out for refreshing refusal to make homosexuality a ‘problem’. Hal and Barry’s relationship is presented without great fanfares to alert the reader that the boys’ instant attraction, flirtation, ensuing romance and sexual relationship are anything out of the ordinary. Only when Barry has died (in a motor bike accident after an argument with Hal in which the pair break up) does homophobia enter the plot. But although I agree with Trites that *Dance on My Grave* is not so much about gay love as about obsessive love (2000:106), Hal’s obsession with death and the association between death and homosexuality is maintained in this otherwise liberal novel.

M.E. Kerr’s *Night Kites* from 1986 was the first novel to bring AIDS (identified some five years earlier and already at crisis point by the time of Kerr’s novel appeared) into literature for teens. Kerr was fully aware of the dangers of writing a novel that maintained the connection between homosexuality and death, but felt honour bound to do so. As she explains: “It seemed to me that *not* to have a homosexual be the AIDS sufferer would be a way of saying I’ll recognize the illness but not those who have it ... a sort of don’t ask/don’t tell proposition” (in Cart & Jenkins 2006:63). The character with AIDS in the novel is Pete, the 27 year old brother of the teenage protagonist, Erick. Pete comes out and tells his family he has AIDS at the same time. Although this delivery of a double whammy is a sadly accurate portrayal of many infected by HIV in the 1980s, the intimate connection between the deadly diseases and homosexuality forged in the conversation continues the same overtones. In addition, *Night Kites* forged a legacy in which the person with AIDS depicted in the novel is an adult. In this way, AIDS becomes a disease which only affects teenagers and children through the grief they experience when a loved one dies.

Novels depicting teenagers with AIDS or HIV infection started to appear from the early nineties onwards. Francesca Lia Block’s *Baby Be-Bop* is an early example. In the novel, Dirk’s lover, Duck, leaves the extended Weetzie Bat family leaving the following note behind:

I found out yesterday that my friend Bam-Bam is sick. He is really sick. The world is too scary right now. Even though we’re okay, how can anyone love anyone when you could kill them just by loving them? (*Baby Be-Bop*, p. 63)

Duck does not name AIDS, but his letter equates death as a consequence of loving someone rather than a consequence of a viral infection. In this conflation, AIDS is – inadvertently I think – presented as a punishment for same-sex desire.

Nelson, in Sanchez's third millennium *Rainbow High* (2003), is the most promiscuous of the trio of gay characters in the trilogy and it is perhaps inevitable that he would be the character who dates a man who has HIV. HIV is presented as a social problem as much as a life-threatening virus, and the novel reflects the vast improvements in medicine that have taken place. Nevertheless, even this novel conflates disease and desire in ways that imply punishment.

As this brief discussion reveals, homosexuality and death are intimately linked when presented to young readers. Although the novels have become decidedly more liberal and embracing of same-sex desire, even those novels which attempt to celebrate such relationship seem to fall back on the trope of associating disease, death and desire. The result seems to imply that Mart Crowley's line in *The Boys in the Band* was right: "Show me a happy homosexual and I'll show you a gay corpse" (in Cart 2007:77). Although he clearly admires many of the above mentioned novels, Michael Cart, writing in the mid-nineties, deplores the ways in which novels including characters with AIDS are so often distanced from the main character and often contain misleading information (for instance that loving someone can kill them). Interwoven with detailed statistical data on the real world situation, Cart's concern in his discussion of AIDS seems to be that he does not feel the novels provide the kind of educational content he would like to see, and that the numbers of books being produced on this topic do not reflect the numbers of young people affected by AIDS (1996:212–222). Although I resonate to Cart's concerns, my concern is with what those novels that are produced reveal about attitudes towards adolescent carnal desire. The problem for me is that these novels tell teenagers that "Sex can kill you" (*The Hanged Man*, p. 14), even though the protagonists are usually punished with grief rather than death.

Even in today's more liberal society, it takes a great deal of confidence and conviction in one's beliefs to write a novel depicting desiring gay and lesbian teens. Perhaps for this reason, the few who do attempt to write such novels also tend to be versatile, gifted writers. The works discussed in this final section are, as a group, vastly superior to the majority of the didactic novels depicting heterosexual adolescents discussed in the previous sections. Same-sex desire may be rendered deviant and punished with death, but queer literary characters are always subversive characters. In the following chapter I shall examine the subversive power of *queer* as means of moving beyond the simplicity of "You've sinned. You've got to be punished. It's that simple" (*But I Thought*, p. 14), which has dominated the novels discussed in this chapter.

Queer carnalities

Adolescent sexuality as queer sexuality

The previous chapter, with its numerous examples of adolescents suffering, mostly supported Trites's claims that teenagers who express their carnal desires are punished. However, odd pockets of resistance were evident: teenage parents who accepted full adult responsibilities as parents were even praised. Fairly recently, Appelbaum observed

children's literature, produced by adults for young readers, reflects the tension between the intention to empower the child reader and the wish to maintain control over her. Texts for children construct childhood according to adult conceptions as well as reflecting their subconscious attempts to control and contain it.

(Appelbaum 2010:97)

This desire to empower the child reader typically manifests itself through fictional role models who are capable of taking power into their own hands and successfully using that power *to* improve their own situation (as opposed to using power *over* others, see French 1985:505ff). As this chapter works its way towards radical portrayals of sexually active adolescent characters, the desire to control – and protect – youngsters is gradually replaced by the desire to present empowered individuals or at least teenagers who do not resist or subvert aetnonormative expectations.

Adolescents are by no means the only group for whom carnal desire has been a primary site of struggle with hegemonic forces. The most obvious parallel is with on-going struggles by those, like myself, who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and/or queer (GLBTQ) to receive the same recognition for our carnal desires and resulting relationships as society affords heterosexual desires and resulting relationships. Adolescents who recognise that their own desires fall within the range of 'queer' (a political term which covers more than same-sex desire) are doubly marginalised in the sense that they must overcome prejudices against both their age and their orientation (Fuoss 1994). This can be distressing: "For an adolescent to realize that he or she is gay or lesbian can be the most frightening event of his or her life" (Daniel & McEntire 1999:194). Daniel and McEntire clarify that the problem lies not in the adolescent's sexual orientation but rather in the homophobia they will already have absorbed from society by that time. Unless

their parents have been overtly pro-gay, teenagers are likely to fear their reactions. Sadly their fears are often realistic. As a result, Daniel and McEntire cite evidence showing that gay and lesbian and teens are two to three times more likely to commit suicide than their heterosexual peers (1999:194). Literature written for teens frequently attempts to provide some kind of antidote for this frightening consequence of homophobia.

Trites notes that, unlike texts depicting heterosexual teens, romances depicting same-sex desire tend to be written with the aim of empowering the queer adolescent reader through the presentation of positive examples. Many, but by no means all, the authors are queer, and feel a responsibility for and desire to reach out to queer adolescent readers. In an interview with Michelle Anne Abate, the lesbian author Marijane Meaker (who publishes as M.E. Kerr) was discussing her novel *Little Little* in which the protagonist struggles with her dwarfism. She explains that “I compared, in my mind, dwarfism to homosexuality because each group has no peers, and they’re sort of isolated until they can find their own group, and nobody in their family can say to them, ‘Oh, I went through that, too,’ because they’re unique and there’s lots of parallels” (Meaker in Abate 2007:192). Literature depicting GLBTQ teens has the potential to fill that ‘Oh, I went through that, too’ gap for queer teen readers who must seek their ‘family’ outside their birth family. Awareness of this moral responsibility permeates GLBTQ fiction for adolescents.

By providing the information that others have gone through ‘that’ and survived if not triumphed, as Trites goes on to observe, societal condemnation of same-sex desire highlights the ways in which sexuality and power intertwine.

Nonheterosexual teen romances employ a different set of ideologies that are meant to empower queer teenagers. Although novels about gay males and lesbians are often more different than they are alike, they share a tendency to address how teenagers are affected when they develop their sexuality oppressed because of their orientation. This oppression of queerness exemplifies one obvious site of power being limited in adolescent literature. The novels are also revelatory for the ways that they highlight a physical act – sex – being transformed by discourse into sexuality, which Foucault insists pervades the culture (Trites 2000:102)

As Trites observes, a consistent feature of novels depicting the first sexual experiences resulting from same-sex carnal desire tend to emphasise the discourse of sexuality over the physical and emotional import of sexual acts. To put it simply, after experiencing same-sex carnal desire, teenagers tend to focus on what it means to be gay or lesbian, rather than upon the specifics of their relationship. Non-heterosexual romances are more overtly about identity issues than texts depicting adolescents being ‘transformed’ into adults over night. Even texts that purport to be positive about same-sex desire, end up shying away from allowing characters to

experience *jouissance*. This is mainly because queer novels are set within realistic settings in which homophobia undermines the possibility of pleasure, or at least causes the teen characters to ponder on the impact of living in a world where the group they identify with are treated with disdain or even aggression. The pain-pleasure matrix common to all discussions of human sexuality in adolescent novels is exaggerated in works depicting same-sex desire (see also Trites 1998).

This chapter invokes the power of 'queer' in two ways. Firstly, nearly all the novels examined here contain depictions of teenage characters who experience same-sex desire. (My second, more political, use of the term 'queer' moves beyond the boundaries of same-sex desire to consider the other ways in which teen desire may be designated 'abnormal'.) Although some of the fictional characters have experienced desire for both the same sex and the other sex as well, bisexuality is treated so similarly to same-sex desire¹ that I have not treated it as a separate category. Transgendered characters are not included in this section, except in passing. This is not because I consider them irrelevant. Their exclusion is partly because they have been studied so well by critics such as Flanagan (2008), Österlund (2005) and Franck (2009) that I have little to add, but mainly because my focus is on carnal desire, not sexual identity (although I recognise that these cannot be wholly separated). Moreover, my goal is not to provide an overview of novels containing depictions of same-sex desire. For that, the overviews by Michael Cart (2004, 2007:73–87) and Cart and Jenkins (2006) are better (see also Crisp 2009).

My goal is to investigate further how queer sexualities are related to the adult-adolescent binarism, and to see how this binarism may be undermined by queerness. For this reason, I do not examine books in which the only queer characters are adults. Gay or lesbian parents, uncles and teachers form the focus of a number of largely bland, overly didactic picture books for young children. The obvious intent of these books is to normalize queer relationships, and so typically reproduce families which resemble heteronormative nuclear families e.g. Newman's well-known Heather in *Heather has Two Mommies* is a characterless, 'normal' girl who lives with her happily coupled butch/femme mothers. Heather, with her big eyes and Shirley Temple hair, is clearly marked by her gender: she is a 'normal' girly girl. Her 'girliness' is presumably intended to show that queerness is not contagious: Heather is not a lesbian just because her parents are. Quite apart from the illogicality of assuming that girly girls do not experience same-sex desire, the

1. The two novels in which bisexuality appears as an identity in the corpus are M.E. Kerr's *Hello, I Lied* (1997) and Aidan Chambers's *Postcards from No-Man's Land* (1999). The issue is foregrounded in Kerr's novel, but not in Chambers's novel. Other novels in Chambers's Dance-sequence also contain bisexual desire (*Dance on My Grave* and *This is All: The Pillow Book of Cordelia Kenn*), but do not express these desires in terms of an identity.

presentation of Heather reveals another interesting facet of our fear of the queer child. As Stockton observes, there is still a

watertight taboo: a child with clear-cut same-sex preference. This queer child, whatever its conscious grasp of itself, cannot unfold itself according to the category of "the homosexual" – a category culturally deemed too adult, since it is sexual. And yet to refuse a child this designation actually reveals our culture's contradictions over childhood sexual orientation: the tendency to treat all children as straight while we culturally consider them asexual. (Stockton 2004:283)

Unlike their heterosexual peers, youngsters experiencing same-sex desire are formulated as having undergone some form of transformation even before they act upon their desires. They were presumed to be heterosexual until they 'came out' as queer. Their desires immediately plunge them into adulthood, whereas heterosexual desires which are not acted upon do not always signal a transformation into adulthood. (This was why romance like the *Sweet Valley* series excluded from my study. See Pattee [2011] for a full discussion of romances.)

Most of the works I focus on in this section are 'coming out' novels (or include a character whose sexual orientation confuses the protagonist), and they retain and maintain the homo-hetero binarism. They are political in the way in which they situate the 'problem' of adolescent characters' sexual orientation. The surface level elements indicate that all the novels I refer to are intended to present a positive view of the adolescent characters' same-sex desires. However, by making sexual orientation the 'problem' that needs to be solved, many inadvertently reinforce negative stereotypes of same-sex desire. In an attempt to address this situation, we also find novels in which *homophobia* rather than same-sex desire is clearly identified as the problem the character needs to confront. Peter Hollindale's distinction between *surface* and *passive* ideology demonstrates that this problem is scarcely unique to queer adolescent fiction (1988:9–12ff). He shows how the surface ideology (the author's consciously held, overt political beliefs, in this case, to reassure homosexual readers) are often undermined by their passive ideology (unexamined beliefs, often those that integrated into the society). So although these novels' surface ideology promotes queer-positive views, the passive ideology reveals authorial expectations that a queer identity cannot be formed without strife. All the novels I examine are, without exception, gay-friendly, but few are politically queer. However, applying a queer lens to *reading* novels opens them up to richer ways of examining how adolescent carnal desire subverts aetnonormativity.

My second use of 'queer' is more contentious: I will argue that, in some senses, *all* adolescent sexual desire can be regarded as a queer desire. That is, regardless of the sexual identity or genitalia of the object of desire, the desiring adolescent is herself a queer subject: "the child, from the standpoint of 'normal' adults, is always

queer: either 'homosexual' (an interesting problem in itself) or 'not-yet-straight,' merely approaching the official destination of straight coupledness (and therefore estranged from what it 'should' approach)" (Stockton 2004:283). 'Queer' is a radical term used to confront heteronormative, hegemonic views of sexuality and sexual identity. The theoretical offspring of the gay rights movement, 'queer' began to gain ground as a theoretical concept from the early 1990s. The term itself appropriates a term of abuse without domesticating it. 'Queer' retains its in-your-face quality as those embracing a queer identity can draw on the power of its pejorative use. To put it simply, when I define myself as queer, I remove the power from those who would wish to insult me by referring to me that way and take reign of that power for myself: 'Is that really the worst you have to say about me?'. Queer is also a more flexible category as one of its primary motivations is to destabilise the power of binarisms such as hetero/homo, man/woman and so on. Sometimes described as "a deconstruction of Gay and Lesbian studies", queer theory is a celebration of the abnormal (Kekki 2003:44). This determined, systematic undermining of the binarisms related to carnal desire and sexual identity bears close resemblance to the ways in which adolescent sexuality undermines the locus of power that rests on the adult/adolescent division.

Foucault was a key critical thinker in the development of queer theory, albeit not under that name. His three volume *The History of Sexuality* and posthumously published series of lectures, *Abnormality*, reveal the ways in which sexual desires are intimately connected with power discourses and so are historically contingent. By tracing changes in the genealogy of carnal desire, Foucault revealed that the categorization of specific desires and acts as deviant/abnormal or natural/normal is arbitrary. Moreover, he demonstrates that 'abnormality' is a social construction which is not even related to frequency. Using the masturbating child as his example case, he demonstrates "the universality of sexual deviance" ([1975a] 1999:62). Foucault's deconstruction of the normal/abnormal binarism produces a view of sexuality that is far more fluid – and more representative of sexual practice – than any rigidly defined categories could be (see also Foucault [1975b] 1999:167–200 and [1975c] 1999:231–262). The binarism of adult-adolescent is equally arbitrary, and although often suffused with the genuine desire to relieve the young of the burdens of responsibility, as we saw in the previous chapter, it is often expressed through punishment and admonition. This refusal to acknowledge and endorse adolescent sexuality has much in common with the ways in which same-sex carnal desires are frequently ignored or, when acknowledged, punished. As a result, I argue that valuable parallels can be drawn between the marginalisation of adolescent sexuality and that of queer desires.

Queer is a politicized term: queer readings are political activities, and individuals who identify as queer are political beings. For the most part, the characters

in the novels I focus on in this section do not identify as queer, not least because many were written before the concept of gay pride was widely accepted and queer was known as anything other than as a term of abuse. They simply experience desire for a particular person of the same sex. If these characters do label themselves, they almost invariably use the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian', not 'queer'.² Lesbian-feminist philosopher, Elizabeth Grosz has argued that queer is a risky political term as it places same-sex desire on a par with other 'heterosexual deviants' such as "[h]eterosexual sadists, pederasts, fetishists, pornographers, pimps, voyeurs" (Grosz 1995b:249–50). Indeed, Foucault's early deconstruction of the nature of sexual desire was particularly keen to show how S/M and fetishism crossed the boundaries of hetero-homo, and relocated desire away from its traditional, reproductive focus. However, as the punishments meted out to heterosexual teenagers in the novels I discussed in the previous chapter demonstrated, the desiring adolescent is also a deviant who must be controlled for the betterment of society as a whole. In this sense, all adolescent carnal desire is queer.

To unpick the idea that adolescence can be considered a queer state, I have included a discussion of cross-generational desire within this chapter. When Joan Collins announced her engagement to her fifth husband, Percy Gibson, who was 32 years her junior, she commented on how age differences are perceived by society. She pointed out that same-sex desire was no longer stigmatized to the same extent, but that love and desires that cross significant age gaps are considered unacceptable, even when the couple are heterosexual. Collins and Gibson were both fully adult when they married, but her point rings even more true when one of the desiring persons is an adolescent. Cross-generational desire, I argue, is a queer desire. Even though all the examples of cross-generational desire that are acted upon in the novel are heterosexual, they disturb and challenge normative views of carnal desire. More specifically, the element of desire they foreground is precisely the significance of the age difference this study addresses. Why is desire that crosses the adult-adolescent boundary so disturbing? What constitutes informed consent? Much as I would like to proffer my opinions as definitive answers to these questions, I accept that the best I can do is expose the views expressed to teenagers through works written for them.

Using 'queer' as a lens for reading other deviant forms of carnal desire – e.g. cross-generational carnality – I expose how the reading teen can be empowered by learning to read against the grain, seeking out queer expressions desire. Two case

2. The significant exception to this is Donovan's *I'll Get There* (1969), which is widely regarded as the first gay novel for teens in America. Davy refers to his relationship with Althusser as "queering around", but there is no sense of pride in this. On the contrary, Davy is ashamed of his desire for Althusser.

studies are presented: the first is Laura Robinson's now (in)famous discussion of lesbian desire in L. M. Montgomery's *Anne* books and the second is a summary of a queer reading of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series presented by Tison Pugh and David L. Wallace (Pugh and Wallace 2006, 2008 and Pugh 2011).

Adolescent desires = Queer desires?

In their introduction to *The Queerness of Children*, Bruhm and Hurley observe that "There is currently a dominant narrative about children: children are (and should stay) innocent of sexual desires and intentions. At the same time, however, children are also officially, tacitly, assumed to be heterosexual" (2004:ix). This bizarre, non-sustainable configuration, they go on to argue, is itself a decidedly queer convention: "The very effort to flatten the narrative of the child into a story of innocence has some very queer effects. Childhood itself is afforded a modicum of queerness when the people worry more about how the child turns out than about how the child exists as a child" (Bruhm & Hurley 2004:xiv). The queer child who "exists as a child" (*ibid.*) is difficult to identify because we have been trained to look away. Bearing witness to the carnally desiring child, regardless of the object of that desire, is considered an 'invasion' of "the innocent, pristine body of the child" (Bruhm & Hurley 2004:xxxiii). Nevertheless, queer children – children who do not conform to the imposed expectation that they should be asexual-but-becoming-heterosexuals – have always appeared in the stories about and for children and teenagers, simply because there have always been queerly sexed children. But, like their adult – especially female – counterparts, queerly sexed children are often simply not recognised.

Lack of recognition is just one way in which useful analogies can be drawn between the literary strategies used to depict the deviance of lesbian sexuality and the deviance of adolescent sexuality. Drawing heavily on the work of Barbara Creed's discussion of 'tribades, tomboys and tarts' (1995), I will outline a number of ways in which adolescent sexuality is like lesbian sexuality and may helpfully be considered a queer sexuality. Many of the stereotypes of lesbians are merely variations of stereotypes of women more generally (e.g., the *femme fatale*, the victim, the frustrated nun), but Creed is able to identify three stereotypes "which are so threatening they cannot easily be applied to the body of the non-lesbian. These stereotypes are: the lesbian body as active and masculinized; the animalistic lesbian body; the narcissistic lesbian body" (1995:88). What I find fascinating about this list is that all these stereotypes are common in the depictions of sexually active adolescents in the books in my corpus, but the animalistic body is perhaps even

more common in works intended for adolescents than it is in depictions of lesbians in literature for adult readers. Indeed, the wealth of material on animalism made it relevant to consider the animalistic adolescent body in a separate chapter of its own. The marked queer aesthetics and the narcissistic, auto-erotic adolescent body is retained within the current chapter.

Creed's observations on how the doubly marginalized lesbian (as woman and as homosexual) are represented in popular culture seem more relevant to adolescent sexualities than similar investigations of male homosexual desire. Where gay men meet with visceral admonitions and disgust, lesbians often face ambivalence. This may seem benign, but as we probe deeper into that ambivalence, we see that this is an insidious way of undermining and disempowering the desiring subject. Bearing in mind Creed's assertion that the stereotypes she identifies are quintessentially lesbian because of the threat they pose to the patriarchal, homophobic world view, their presence in depictions of adolescents can analogously be regarded as threatening the heteronormative world view.

Firstly, adolescents like lesbians are questioned as to whether what they do really counts as sex. Their desires may be trivialised, dismissed as crushes or simply a passing phase. An extension of this, and Creed's second point, is that they tend to be disparaged rather than outlawed. Whilst the sodomy laws against gay men are designed to control and contain such 'deviance', they also signal acceptance that what men do constitutes sex. Statutory rape laws, like sodomy laws, acknowledge that children do have sex, but undermine the potential for desire below a certain age. Lesbians may have suffered less from legislation, but this is also a refusal to acknowledge they exist. Queen Victoria's refusal to sign the legislation outlawing sex between women because she did not believe it was possible is probably an urban legend, but it lives on as summation of this refusal to accept that women can and do desire one another. When applied in court, statutory rape legislation does acknowledge that the age of both partners, but there is a tacit assumption that young teenagers are incapable of informed consent. For the most part, however, adolescent sexual activities are not illegal, they are merely distained and are not expected to form the basis of lasting relationships.

The third and fourth aspects of lesbian sexuality Creed observes are both continuations of the above observations and easily applicable to adolescent sexuality. Lesbian, and indeed gay, sexuality is considered immature, and thus can be dismissed as an unimportant, fleeting emotion. This is particularly evident in gay and lesbian novels from the 1970s and 1980s (Cart 2007:77 and Cart & Jenkins 2006:14–5). So, on the one hand, same-sex desire can be presented as simply a 'phase' a character goes through prior to maturing as a fully-fledged heterosexual, or it can simply not be recognised as desire. Indeed, the notion of homosexuality as a 'phase' is so central to the presentation of queer teens that I have taken it up in

detail in the section on coming out and lack of recognition is taken up in the section on ghosting and queer reading. Analogously, teenage romances can be dismissed as being trivial emotions; relationships that are intended as practice for the real, adult relationships which come later (see also Pattee 2011). Although sex is deemed adult behaviour, and thus an arbitrary marker of maturity, adolescents are, somewhat paradoxically, considered to be more mature when they are able to curb their carnal desires and refuse to engage in sexual acts. According to this logic, 'real' carnal desires are only possible between heterosexual adults.

Creed's next two points have already been evidenced through my discussion. She observes that, on the theoretical plane, lesbian desire is constantly interpreted in terms of another sexuality: scholars writing about women are often asked about men, but rarely vice versa. Scholars writing about adolescents compare their work to studies of adults, but rarely vice versa. Heterosexual adolescent sexual desire is only deviant because of the actors' ages. Since the late 1970s, most people have become sexually active during their teens, thus carnally desiring adolescents cannot be considered a minority, yet they are treated as though they were. Minority sexualities, Creed observes, tend to be perceived in terms of the main frame (lesbians are perceived as masculinised women, adolescents as immature, 'young adults'). This often results in 'passing': lesbian and gay men who do not look stereotypically queer are typically read as straight (this topic is taken up in the section on queer aesthetics below). Translated into the adolescent-adult context, we find that teenagers are perceived as being non-desiring children until they overtly act upon their desires.

When lesbian desire is labelled, it is insatiable. The same is true of adolescent desire. Many of the virgin-to-mother characters discussed in the previous chapter experienced this insatiability: July in *Mr and Mrs Bo Jo Jones* discovers "there really is a point of no return" (*Bo Jo Jones*, p. 8), Chris and Helen in *Dear Nobody* are taken "by surprise and storm" (*Dear Nobody*, p. 1) and the feelings between Ruth and Pat in *Pennington's Heir* surge "so quickly, so passionately, so perfectly, that there was never any question of Ruth withdrawing, doubting" (*Pennington's Heir*, p. 16). These portrayals of the teenage body as being so desiring that decision-making is impossible and self-control gives way to the onslaught of physical responses combine to suggest that adolescent desire is a dangerous force that should not be ignited. The adolescent body is also "insatiable – a monstrous quicksand of desire", their desires are queer (Creed 1995:86).

Creed mentions two other features of the ways in which lesbian desire is portrayed – narcissistic and in need of taming – which I find helpful to discuss in relationship to a third she does not mention: loneliness. As I have shown above, for the most part, the desiring adolescent is depicted in ways which resemble the depiction of lesbians in literature for adults. Presumably Creed did not mention the

convention of associating lesbianism with depression because it seems out-dated in the world of literature for adults. Radclyffe Hall's classic novel, which marks the start of Anglophone lesbian literature, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), as the title suggests, depicts lesbianism as a source of isolation and loneliness. In the novel, Stephen's belief that she is different feeds her feelings of loneliness and, consequently, depression. Connections between loneliness and same-sex desire also find their way into literature for younger readers. The opening line of the first English-language teenage novel to incorporate a lesbian relationship, Rosa Guy's *Ruby* (1976), describes the eponymous protagonist lying on her bed.

Loneliness, like a vapor, wafted from her bowels up through her stomach, encompassed her heart where, gaining substance, it slithered along her throat, collecting, thickening, making cords bulge out on her neck, forcing her to swallow, hold on to the thickness, prevent its erupting into screams, hysteria, torrents of tears. She really had nothing to cry about. (*Ruby*, p. 3)

At this point in the narrative, even readers who have read the previous novel in the series will be unable to identify the main source of Ruby's feelings of isolation and depression. In Guy's earlier, better known novel, *The Friends* (1973), which is narrated from the perspective of Ruby's younger sister, Phyllisia, and focuses on Phyllisia's friendship with Edith Jackson, Ruby has come across as a well-balanced, 'good' girl who behaves in the manner their father, Calvin, desires. She appears to have coped well with the death of her mother, and so this highly visceral response to her friend, Marian, moving house is unexpected. Only later in the novel, with the arrival of Daphne, does Ruby find "an answer to her loneliness" (*Ruby*, p. 55). And it is only once Ruby and Daphne's relationship has begun to flourish that the reader (and perhaps Ruby herself) recognises that Ruby's loneliness and depression have been closely connected with her (perhaps unrecognised) same-sex desires. Her response to Marian moving house also makes more sense once one has recognised Ruby as a desiring subject. Rereading *The Friends* with this information in mind opens up both the earlier and the later novel, *Edith Jackson*, to interestingly queer readings, although on the surface Ruby appears to be a heterosexual girl.

Ruby is a desperately needy adolescent. She clings to her father Calvin, despite (or, perhaps, because of) his tyrannical personality, and throughout *The Friends* she has come across as an individual who longs for approval to the extent that she is willing to debase herself in order to follow the arbitrary rules he sets. When she meets the beautiful, strong-willed Daphne, she thinks "At last she had found herself, a likeness to herself, a response to her needs, her age, an answer to her loneliness" (*Ruby*, p. 55; my emphasis)". This thought takes place in the context of desire. The previous line reads: "Her mouth was being kissed, and she responded eagerly to those full, blessedly full, lips" (*Ruby*, p. 55). The view that lesbian desire is a

narcissistic desire (i.e., that the woman does not desire the other woman, but rather desires herself) is a common extension of misogynistic beliefs about women's vanity, or as Barbara Creed succinctly notes: "such [is] the nature of male arrogance, they argued that when a woman kissed another woman it was like kissing herself."³ The other woman symbolized her own reflection" (1995:199). Unfortunately, men are not the only ones guilty of such "arrogance"; Guy's sensitive, subtly crafted novel also depicts same-sex female desire as a form of narcissism.

The irony is that, although it may be true that Daphne is what Ruby needs, Daphne is nothing like Ruby. Ruby's perception of Daphne as "a likeness to herself" (*Ruby*, p. 55) is merely wishful thinking; Daphne is what Ruby *wants* to be like, not what she *is* like. Daphne takes pride in herself and this includes standing up to the White teachers in their school, where Ruby is willing to debase herself and help the teachers like Miss O'Brien whom she admires despite her overt racism. Daphne is also sexually confident, and leads the way as the two become lovers, whereas it is clear that Ruby has not even recognized her desire for Marian (the friend who moved house). The novel never refers to their relationship as 'lesbian', nor do the pair demonstrate any angst about their sexual identity. This sounds positive, but in practice it seems to be that – for Ruby at least – this is because she does not integrate her love for Daphne into her sense of self. She delights in the fact that, because Daphne is a girl, they are allowed to spend time together in her bedroom. In other words, she delights in the way Calvin's homophobia allows her desires to remain invisible. If they were recognised, and it seems that towards the end of the novel they are, they would be curtailed. At the beginning of the novel, Calvin forces Daphne to separate from her boyfriend, Orlando. The novel ends with a reconciliation between father and daughter materialised through Calvin inviting Orlando to visit the house. The novel ends with the implication that Ruby will resume this relationship simply because she does not want to be alone and her father wishes her to do so. Again she debases herself, and accepts the right of others to decide how she should live her life.

Like the heterosexual relationships discussed in the previous chapter, gay and lesbian teenage couples rarely stay together, and *Ruby* is no exception to this generalisation. Ruby and Daphne split up not because Daphne "capriciously decides to end the affair" as Cart (1996:225) suggests, but because Ruby refuses to adapt her life to meet Daphne's needs. Daphne is adamant that she will make something of her life. She stands up for herself and demonstrates 'Black Pride' in ways that are totally alien to Ruby. In terms of nurturing and developing one another, their relationship is very much a one way street: Daphne tries to cultivate Ruby's self-esteem

3. It is worth noting that the same is *not* true of male same-sex desire. On the rare occasions when two men are depicted kissing, their mutual desire is immediately recognised.

but Ruby fails to respect Daphne's autonomy. Matters reach a head when Calvin arrives home unexpectedly. The girls are in the bedroom, and so Ruby persuades Daphne to climb out of the apartment window to hide. This action appeases Calvin, who clearly suspects there is more to the girls' relationship than friendship, but leaves Daphne furious. When she ends their relationship, she explains that "Because you cannot stand up to your father, I almost left this world – on a hummer" (*Ruby*, p. 210). Rather than face Calvin's wrath, Ruby is willing to place her lover's life at risk. When Daphne realizes this, she storms out of the house and out of Ruby's life. Ruby is left as lonely as before. Her lesbian relationship is thus presented as a temporary phase (see also Romalov 1991).

The tragic realism of Guy's novel makes it hard to criticise. The whole trilogy presents such well-rounded characters that each of her decisions makes perfect sense in context. The Cathy family's difficult transition to Harlem after their life in Trinidad takes its toll on all the characters, but especially the female characters. The forms of racism they experience in the school, and the way they are ostracised by the more established Black community in Harlem feed into the ways in which the characters relate to one another. Within the context of Calvin's aggressive, patriarchal bullying, Ruby's behaviour is wholly understandable. It makes sense that her rebellion would take the form of seeking out a relationship that could nurture her, but it is also sadly convincing that this insecure young woman would rather bow to her father's dictates and the norms of society than come out as a lesbian. We might wish that Ruby were not so submissive, just as we might wish that many other gay and lesbian adolescents would have the confidence not to hide themselves or enter into unfulfilling heterosexual relationships, but Guy is, sadly, realistic in her presentation of a character for whom same-sex desire can only be a temporary rebellion. In the final novel in the trilogy, *Edith Jackson*, Ruby's desires – for women, at least – are once again invisible. She appears to be a docile heterosexual girl heading for college. Fortunately, there are braver fictional characters within the corpus, who offer more positive role models to young readers.

Coming out, becoming visible

You're in love with another girl, Liza Winthrop, and you know that means you're probably gay. But you don't know a thing about what that means

(*Annie on my Mind*, p. 143)

Fiction containing openly queer adolescents is a post WWII phenomenon. Even Fairy Tales seem largely unaware of their existence (although the twelve dancing princesses who prefer not to marry may have found their own forms of carnal pleasure!). Cart's overviews of the history of GLBTQ literature for teens mention

several works which were originally published for adults, including Daly's *Seventeenth Summer*, which was later reclassified as adolescent fiction. These early works include passing mentions of same-sex desire (or in the case of *Seventeenth Summer*, transvestism), but it was not until 1969 and John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* was published that Anglophone gay literature for teens was launched, followed some seven years later by Rosa Guy's *Ruby* (1976) depicting same-sex desire between teenage girls. Novels depicting same-sex desire did not become available in any significant numbers until the mid-eighties, about one and a half decades later than their heterosexual counterparts.⁴ Given the age of both the characters and the intended readers of these novels, it is unsurprising that virtually all of them deal with homophobia (internalised or externalised) and with the process of coming out.

What is surprising is that, unlike the topic of abortion, the conservative right has not produced its own literature in any significant quantities. There have been numerous attempts to ban books⁵ depicting same-sex desire (on the grounds that such works 'recruit' children), but only a couple of explicitly oppositional books for very young children have been produced (e.g. *Chased by an Elephant: The Gospel Truth about Today's Stampeding Sexuality* by Janice Barrett Graham). For teenagers, the only novels I am aware of that overtly promote the view that there is something wrong or immoral about same-sex desire are Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins's *Left Behind* series published by Tyndale Press. The novels are based on *The Book of Revelations* depicting the days after the faithful have ascended into heaven and those left behind must redeem their ways or forever be sentenced to Hell (See Abate 2010a:22–78 and 2010b for a fuller discussion of these novels). These books are so difficult to obtain outside the U.S.A. that I do not consider them part of an 'Anglophone view' of same-sex desire. For the vast majority of the Anglophone world, depictions of same-sex desire are – at least on the surface – written with the intention of supporting adolescents who are coming out and/or friends and family close to them.

In the context of my investigation as to how sexuality functions as a way of differentiating between adults and adolescents, 'coming out' functions as an additional layer to essentially the same issue. Whereas heterosexual adolescents have to

4. Between 1969 and 1996, Michael Cart claims that only 67 novels on gay themes or with queer factors were published (1996:222). Cart's figures only cover books published or distributed in the U.S., but his findings are indicative of other parts of the English speaking world as well. Few writers dared approach this 'shibboleth', as Cart ironically terms them. In Ireland, Whyte (2011:72ff) notes that the first novels for teens depicting gay and lesbian characters did not appear until 1998.

5. For more on attempts to ban books containing queer topics or characters, see, for example, Abate (2010a) or Cart (1996:228–9).

'come out' as sexual desiring beings, queer adolescents have to 'come out' as being not only desiring beings, but as experiencing same-sex desire or other deviant desires such as cross-generational desires. And, just as the loss of virginity is treated in literature as being a life-altering event, coming out as lesbian, gay or otherwise queerly sexed is typically treated as though it were a single event, whereas those of us who are 'out' know that it is an on-going process that must be repeated each time one meets a new person, especially for those of us who 'don't look' gay or lesbian. And for those who do 'look' gay or lesbian, gay-bashing remains a threat regardless of the individual's sexual orientation (see also the section on queer aesthetics below). As noted in my comments on *Trites* in the introduction to this chapter, 'coming out' novels rely on a binarism between straight and gay: "they highlight a physical act – sex – being transformed by discourse into sexuality" (*Trites* 2000:102). In these novels, the loss of virginity in same-sex relationships results in the character pondering on their identity: they 'become' gay or lesbian (i.e. a particular kind of adult) through this act in an even more marked way than heterosexual adolescents 'become' adults through sexual desire.

There are two aspects of 'coming out' that I wish to examine in this section, the first is how the focus on the fears and negative experiences of facing homophobia – which are often depressingly realistic – result in a conflation of homosexuality and the emotional pain of rejection and often the physical pain of gay-bashing. As a result, even these liberal, well-intentioned novels inadvertently support what Cuseo dubs "society's impression of the homosexual as an individual it is permissible to harass" (1992:55). These novels, often in a well-meaning attempt to explain 'it gets better', inadvertently suggest that queer teens will be experience angst as they adjust to the social implications of their carnal desires. The formulation not only focuses of pain, it also implies that the queer teens consider themselves to be something other than queer (asexual? heterosexual? 'what' is not clear) prior to the 'recognition' of their desires. The second aspect of coming out I shall examine concerns 'queer aesthetics'. Queerness becomes a 'problem' that needs to be resolved before the teenager can achieve maturity. Even though I am not interested in the issues of gender identification and gender performance *per se*, stereotypical queer aesthetics function in much the same way as sexual experience as a form of coming out. As Tannenbaum (2000) points out in her study *Slut!*, simply looking as though one is sexual can be enough to be admonished for having unacceptable desires. Teens who 'look queer' are often perceived as desiring beings, regardless of their orientation.

Stereotypes of coming out

Coming Out for the first time is a painful, difficult, scary thing to do. That said, what 'coming out' means for any individual can vary considerably. For some, it is

'merely' a recognition of carnal desire (something one *does*). For others, it is a public declaration that one belongs to a particular "species", as Foucault ironically dubs it ([1978] 1990:43). Curiously, both options can be used by homophobic aetionormative forces to delegitimize adolescent desire. For those who identify as queer, their desires may be delegitimized by adults who insist they are just going through a phase. For those who do not connect their desires with their identity, they may find their bodies are read as queer, and therefore treated as though they were encroaching on adult territory anyway (see also Tannenbaum 2000 for a discussion of 'misread' heterosexual bodies).

Whilst the novels depicting this 'crisis' of identity generally attempt to normalise the experience for both the protagonist and the adolescent reader, they do have the unfortunate consequence of presenting homoerotic desire as a problem with which one needs to come to terms. So, despite the overtly signalled messages of acceptance, the covert messages of most of these novels to their queer or questioning readers is that they will probably suffer from immense angst and may well be rejected by those who are most dear to them. The novels also portray queer characters being subjected to public humiliation as well as verbal and, often, physical abuse. Whilst not wishing to diminish the difficulties many youngsters face when they recognise that their sexual feelings are queer, the emphasis on the pain of coming out does seem to imply that suffering and internalised hatred are central to a queer identity. Even in Levithan's utopia in *Boy Meets Boy* (2003), where "There isn't really a gay scene or a straight scene in our town. They all got mixed up a while back" (*Boy Meets Boy*, p. 1), Paul's friend, Tony, lives outside the town with homophobic parents. For heterosexual readers, these novels present a view of queer teenagers as victims of society. Although this is perfectly reasonable in any one novel, when *all* the images presented to young readers are so negative, adolescent fiction can fairly be accused of continuing the current state of affairs rather than as acting as a source of change as it has for heterosexual teens. None of the coming out novels in the corpus featuring queer characters can be regarded as 'radical' in Reynolds' sense in the way they treat the topic.⁶ However, learning to read queerly is empowering, and so books which can enable readers to learn to read queerly are essential in queer adolescent fiction.

6. Aidan Chambers's *Dance on My Grave* (1982) is radical in its deployment of post-modern elements, and its playful depictions of Hal and Barry's mutual attraction and ensuing relationship. However, this is not a coming out novel. It is clear that the social worker does not understand that Hal and Barry were lovers and it is questionable as to how clearly Hal's parents or Barry's mother comprehend this. It remains a topic on which neither boy is clearly out, and in Hal's case it seems he actively suppresses this information from his father. Moreover, Barry's death connects Hal's desires with grief.

Donovan's novel, *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* (1969), set the tone for the ensuing decades. Davy's parents react in contrasting ways that we see in many future novels. His mother (an alcoholic) becomes hysterical, which is a normal reaction for her: she becomes hysterical about a variety of problems ranging from the number of times a day Davy's dog needs to pee to the details of the meals her ex-husband's new partner prepared. The father is a more understanding figure, but he clearly hopes that Davy's feelings for Altschuler are simply a 'crush'. He explains that "a lot of boys play around in a lot of ways when they are growing up, and I shouldn't get involved in some special way of life which will close off other ways of life to me" (*I'll Get There*, p. 173). Mr Ross's comments imply that same-sex desire is just a phase, just as adolescence itself is presented as a phase. The 'There' of Donovan's title is presumably adulthood. 'Getting There' is presented as the reward for the terrible trip one must make through adolescence to achieve this goal. As such the novel explicitly links adolescence with turmoil, but also with desire, confusion and transience. There/Adulthood is apparently a stable place where the causes of turmoil – in Davy's case, death and desire – are no longer a problem.

The notion that orientation is simply a passing phase that one can choose whether or not to act upon rather than a more stable identity issue is repeated in a number of novels, especially older novels or novels depicting older characters. I have already shown how Ruby's relationship with Daphne is presented as a temporary rebellion in Rosa Guy's *Ruby*. The idea continues to appear in more recent novels expressing more positive attitudes towards same-sex desire. In these more liberal novels, the notion of homosexuality as a phase is rejected by the same-sex desiring characters who recognise that their experiences cannot be dismissed so lightly. For instance, in Francesca Lia Block's *Baby Be-Bop*, the seemingly angelic Grandma Fifi tries to convince Dirk that the feelings he has had "since he could remember" (*Baby Be-Bop*, p. 379) are just a phase: "Just a phase. Dirk thought about those words over and over again. Just a phase. Until the train inside of him would crash. Until the thing inside of him that was wrong and bad would change" (*Baby Be-Bop*, p. 380). Dirk realises that this is not just a phase and the novel traces him through some early, difficult relationships affected by internalised homophobia to the establishment of a life-long, loving relationship with Duck.

Coming out *is* hard to do, and so the balance between the desire to reflect this reality and the unfortunate association between same-sex desire and pain such presentations create are an insolvable conundrum. In some ways, the successes of gay rights movements around the world have exacerbated this problem by insisting that one embrace a queer identity along with queer desires. Whereas earlier, same-sex desire was a "temporary aberration", coming out now requires redesignation as a different "species" (Foucault [1978] 1990:43). For Liza Winthrop in *Annie on My Mind*, this is fairly straightforward: "You're in love with another girl, Liza

Winthrop, and you know that means you're probably gay. But you don't know a thing about what that means" (*Annie on My Mind*, p. 143; italics original). Being gay, in Liza's mind at least, is something different from simply falling in love with someone of the same sex. It requires taking on an identity, and this seems problematic for many teens. In her search for an answer to her questions about what it "means" to be gay, Liza – ever the diligent student – seeks answers from her father's encyclopaedia and is not pleased with what she finds: "in that whole long article, the word "love" wasn't used even once. That made me mad; it was as if whoever wrote the article didn't know that gay people actually love each other" (*Annie on My Mind*, p. 143). Liza's desire for Annie develops gradually alongside a wealth of emotional changes and responses which demonstrate that 'being gay' is far more than a sexual act. For Liza it is about love, and for Holland, in Julie Anne Peters's *Keeping You a Secret*, "it wasn't about sexuality. Not entirely. It was about identity. Love" (*Keeping You a Secret*, p. 190). The increased focus on orientation as a source of identity compensates somewhat for the brevity of many of the relationships: the particular love affair might not last, but the character has gained a stronger sense of self-identity, which is equated with the supposed stability of adulthood.

This stable identity typically involves invoking stereotypes of gendered behaviour, and does not seem to have varied much since Davy Ross and Altschuler got up from the floor where they were kissing and started fake boxing. "We mess around like for a few seconds, pretending we are two bantamweight tough guys. I mean very tough. I mean a couple of guys like Altschuler and me don't have to worry about being queer or anything like that. Hell, no" (*I'll Get There*, p. 150). For Altschuler and Davy, "being queer" is intimately connected to gender identity: they attempt to act in "very tough", stereotypically masculine ways because they assume that only effeminate men can be queer. Extremely masculine men, according to this logic, are obviously straight. This simplification of the prejudices surrounding the relationship between sex identity and homoerotic desire – 'queer aesthetics' – remain common tropes in later works featuring adolescents who experience or witness same-sex desire, although novels like Ferris's *Eight Seconds* and Kerr's *Deliver Us From Evie*, discussed in the next section, overtly question these beliefs.

Stereotypes of queer aesthetics

As M.E. Kerr's obviously butch-dyke Evie Burman admits, "Some of us *look* it, Mom! I know you so-called normal people would like it better if we looked as much like you all as possible, but some of us don't, can't, and never will. And some of us go for the ones who don't, can't, and never will" (*Deliver Us from Evie*, p. 86; emphasis original). Evie's claim is not quite true. Those, like Evie's partner Patty, who do

not look stereotypically gay, pose threats of a different sort. Nevertheless, Evie's comments on her butch-femme relationship with Patty evoke some of the most widely held prejudices concerning queer aesthetics: that same-sex relationships mimic heterosexual relationships (one is the 'man' and the other is the 'woman' in the relationship) and that there is an intimate connection between queer identity and gender identity. Kerr's novel is a good humoured exploration of the issue of stereotyping gays and lesbians by the heterosexual community, although many of her points are relevant for considering stereotyping within the queer community as well. The novel is primarily about appearances and small town life. The protagonist is not the main queer character, but her younger brother, Parr. The reader's gaze is directed by Parr as he bears witness to the relationship between Evie and her femme partner, Patty. At the start of the novel, Evie is not publically out (at least not to her family), but she has "always known it" (*Deliver us from Evie*, p. 85).

When Parr colludes with Cord, a man whose advances Evie has spurned, to out Evie and Patty publically, the town is sent into such an uproar that Patty and Evie move to New York. Unlike the majority of queer romances in the corpus, the couple survive this move and are still together at the end of the novel. The loss we witness is not so much Evie's loss as Parr's. Parr has lost his lively, good humoured sister: the sibling who wanted to take over the running of the family farm. He feels he may be forced to stay on the farm, although he had hoped to leave and study something unrelated to agriculture. He does not feel he can rebel against tradition in the way Evie has. Both Evie and Parr would have preferred a different outcome, but at the end of the novel, Evie is free and her family at least tolerate her queerness.

Evie is a victim of homophobia for sure, but the novel also addresses the idea that her masculine appearance has provoked antipathy before she is publically out. Evie declares that she doesn't give a "ding dong damn" about what other people think of her appearance (*Deliver us from Evie*, p. 57), yet her looks make others feel uncomfortable. They reveal her orientation even before it is named. Her mother thinks "It's bad enough to look that way, but it's awful to look it and actually be it" (*Deliver us from Evie*, p. 66). Evie's mother claims that the biggest problem is that Evie is a stereotype and thus more vulnerable to attack than a more 'straight-looking' woman might be.

There is an element of truthfulness in Mrs Burrman's comment: 'straight-looking' queers are initially deemed more acceptable, although as Creed observes, this acceptance is very hypocritical (1995:101). These attitudes are, unsurprisingly, internalized by many gays and lesbians. John Ritchie, the protagonist-narrator of Ferris's *Eight Seconds*, is startled when he discovers that the hyper-masculine cowboy, Kit, is gay: "How could Kit be gay? Gay meant being a florist or decorator; it meant wearing eye shadow and long scarves; it meant walking funny

and throwing like a girl" (*Eight Seconds*, p. 76). John is not even out to himself at the start of the novel, and remains closeted to others even at the end. Part of his problem seems to be that because he has internalised stereotypical connections between gender identity and orientation: he assumes that a masculine man like himself cannot be gay.

The masculine woman, the butch, may be cut a little more slack in her adolescent years, when she is 'just' a tomboy. For many girls, being a tomboy is just a phase, and tomboys often do go on to become very feminine heterosexuals. Literary tomboys, such as Jo March, Anne Shirley and Scout, often follow this pattern, much to the loss of readers' enjoyment when they become women. However, this connection by association between tomboys and seeming signs of maturity (behaving in stereotypical gender specific ways) and liminality feed into one another (see Flanagan 2008, especially chapters four and seven).

The femme, on the other hand, is in some ways more threatening to the patriarchy. Her behaviour and her desires cannot be dismissed as a passing phase, nor is she instantly identifiable. Her looks and her desires do not seem to fit; they disturb the homophobic mind. The femme embodies the potential of any woman to be or become lesbian. Evie's femme girlfriend, Patty has long blond hair and wears skirts. When she comes over to visit the first time, Parr watches his father straightening his tie: "She had that effect on you: She looked so good you started worrying about how *you* looked" (*Deliver us from Evie*, p. 17; emphasis original). The hyper-masculine, gay cowboy Kit in *Eight Seconds* is similarly disturbing to those around him. In his discussion of heteronormative masculinity, Mountney notes that "If a gay male displays features characteristic of a 'normal' male – for example, aggression, musculature and non-effeminate behaviour – but remains differentiated in terms of sexual orientation, the coherence of heteronormative masculinity is undermined" (2010:96–7). Ferris's novel highlights the 'threatening' possibility that *anyone* could have queer potential.

The simplicity of the butch-femme division and its male equivalent presented and played with by Kerr and undermined by Ferris is developed further in Alex Sanchez's highly acclaimed *Rainbow Boys* trilogy. In these novels – *Rainbow Boys* (2001), *Rainbow High* (2003) and *Rainbow Road* (2005) – the characters identify as gay and seem very affirmative about their orientation. However, as Thomas Crisp observes, while it is "certainly appealing to find 'affirmative' novels, it is also important to remain cognizant of the fact that in many cases, such stories rely on largely unconscious cultural associations" (2008:238). The associations are concerned with normative conceptions of sexuality and so draw on typecasts to depict non-normative sexual desire. Unfortunately my use of terms such as masculine/feminine, male/female, like Crisp's, reinforces the normative boundaries 'queer' attempts to destroy.

Sanchez's trilogy centres around a complex triangular relationship which is formed in the first novel when best friends Kyle and Nelson meet Jason at a gay-straight alliance group at their high school. Jason is the school jock: he is good looking, has a beautiful girlfriend and plays on the school basket-ball team. Kyle has admired Jason from afar for ages, and he and Jason do eventually form a relationship, although it takes a while before Jason thinks of them as a couple. For Jason, sex is something he and Kyle do, but not necessarily something he is. "True, they'd had sex. ... but did that make them *boyfriends*?" (*Rainbow High*, p. 62; emphasis original). Gradually Jason integrates his sexuality into his sense of identity and becomes a spokesperson for gay issues. Nelson has already assumed a gay identity at the start of the novel. As the head of the school's gay-straight alliance, he models gay pride. Nelson has been interested in Kyle for years, and so he is jealous and hurt when Kyle and Jason get together.

In the sequel, *Rainbow High*, the boys are in their final year and much of the time is spent thinking about the school prom and trying not to think about what will happen when they leave high school. Each of the boys faces a problem integrating their sexual orientation into other aspects of their lives. Kyle's problem is that he has been accepted to Princeton and has to decide whether to accept a place at this prestigious university or accept a place at 'Tech' so that he can stay close to Jason. Jason comes out publically (in the first novel he keeps his orientation a secret from all but his family and his girlfriend, Debra. Nelson is dating a man with HIV, and struggles with social disapproval as well as the disease itself. The final novel finds the three young men on a road trip. Jason is an invited speaker at a newly founded high school exclusively for gays and lesbians, and the trio decide to drive across the country to the event together. The road trip motif allows for chance and fleeting meetings with a range of character types (homophobes, a committed gay couple and a transgendered teen). Kyle and Jason's relationship is tested as Jason struggles with aspects of a gay identity and Kyle wonders about Jason's commitment. Nelson's continuing attraction to Kyle is also a factor, although Nelson seeks out other relationships as well.

The trilogy's popularity, commercial success and public endorsement bears testimony to the ways in which GLBTQ literature has developed in recent years. However, Crisp is surely right to point out how much of the series' success is dependent on Sanchez's deployment of easily recognized stereotypes, and how problematic that can be if this is the only novel containing gay characters a teenager reads. Sanchez is open about his use of stereotypes. Crisp cites an interview in which Sanchez dubbed Jason a "'Tragic Closet Jock' (or T.C.J.)" and develops a similar term "the S.U.D.: the 'Sympathetic, Understanding Doormat'" to describe Kyle (2008:245–6). Crisp's discussion draws attention to two key problems of pairing a T.C.J. with an S.U.D.

Firstly, Crisp shows how the novels inadvertently align themselves with revisionist psychologists who claim that homosexuality can be eliminated if parents would enforce and encourage gender-specific behaviour, that is, a return to the antiquated belief that masculine men do not become gay. In fairness, Jason's orientation offers an easily identifiable caricature of the muscular, athletic gay man immortalised in the drawings of 'Tom of Finland'. The main problem lies in the scenes in which we see Jason with his physically and mentally abusive, alcoholic father who repeatedly calls Jason "Fairy-Boy, Pansy" and questions his son's masculinity (despite all the evidence to the contrary) (*Rainbow Boys*, p. 27). These scenes imply that, if Mr Carrillo were a better parent, Jason might not be gay. The boys themselves also imply that there is something rather special about Jason's obviously and stereotypically masculine traits. Kyle encourages Jason to come out as he would be "a role model – someone people would look up to" (*Rainbow Boys*, p. 27). Jason is constantly praised for his bravery in coming out, whereas the more gender neutral Nelson, who has been gay and proud for far longer than Jason, receives no praise for his 'bravery'. On the contrary, even Nelson agrees that Jason will make a better spokesman for Gay Rights. Jason's internalisation of these views is evident in the way he attempts to suppress his 'feminine' traits (his desire to cry, for instance) and emphasise his 'masculine' traits (primarily through sport) as ways to "work harder to prove he wasn't gay" (*Rainbow Road*, p. 62–3). That he cannot change is clearly Sanchez's main point, but the novel allows a great deal of space for conservative counter-arguments.

The second problem with the pairing of Jason and Kyle that Crisp identifies is that the two boys form what seems to be a heteronormative couple (where Jason is the 'man' and Kyle the 'woman'). Kyle consistently suppresses his own needs in order to accommodate Jason: in the first novel he agrees to keep their relationship a secret as Jason is still not out in public, and he seriously considers damaging his future by accepting a less prestigious place to study. He plays a submissive, caretaking role. On the road trip, he is responsible for Jason's finances, ironing, and for sorting out problems in their relationship (for instance, when Jason kisses a girl at a nightclub). This mimicry of the idealised, monogamous heteronormative couple is in keeping with Sanchez's claim that "I tried to depict characters that both embraced and challenged stereotypes of what gay teens are like" (in Crisp 2008:246). His presentation of Kyle and Jason's relationship is well-rounded, although it relies heavily on idealized stereotypes of straight relationships. It does not suggest that queer relationships might have the potential to challenge gender-defined roles within a monogamous masculine-feminine pairing.

Crisp's discussion of Nelson highlights the ways in which Sanchez draws on existing stereotypes of proud gay men as having an insatiable desire for sex. Nelson is a queen: he is loud, fascinated by his appearance, exaggeratedly feminine and

delights in playing drag. Although nothing like Ruby, he too exhibits narcissism and his behaviour is gradually tamed during the course of the trilogy as he seeks a 'proper' relationship, i.e., one that resembles a monogamous, heteronormative relationship like Kyle and Jason. His body is "a monstrous quicksand of desire" (Creed 1995:86), and he flirts with all and sundry and enjoys casual sex (even high risk, unprotected anal sex with a stranger when he loses his virginity). Nelson is a likeable stereotype, but a stereotype nonetheless. Stereotypes have their place, and there are novels in the corpus which do not rely on them (e.g. Boock's *Dare Truth or Promise*, Garden's *Annie on My Mind* and Chambers's *Postcards from No-Man's Land*). However, all the major queer characters in the corpus struggle with internalised and/or social forms of homophobia.

Gay, lesbian and bisexual teens are not the only queer teens who face social sanctions when they express their desires. Following on from my discussion of the potential of queer to destabilize boundaries, I wish to examine another type of queer pairing that appears fairly often in the corpus: carnal cravings between teenagers and adults. These relationships cross the adult-adolescent divide, and so have the potential to throw the binarism into a new light in much the same way that same-sex pairings throw gender into a new light.

Crossing the great divide: Cross-generational carnal capers

The initiation of adolescents into the liminal spaces of the gay community by adults has been a deeply problematic issue within the gay rights movement. "The association of paedophiles with gay men persists (in spite of evidence to the contrary) in homophobic culture, which is doubtless why the mainstream gay movement would be reluctant to countenance any official discussion of this matter. But the issue of intergenerational sex continues to be debated vigorously in many gay and lesbian communities" (Jagose 1996:70). For many, both within and outside the queer community, 'man-boy love' is simply an attractive name for sexual abuse (it is worth noting that no comparable term exists for attraction between women and girls). For others, the majority of whom enjoyed their first sexual encounters with someone considerably older than them, it is offensive to assume that these acts were not volitional. In the end, the matter comes down to the issue of what constitutes informed consent, and at what age a person is capable of informed consent. Since individuals mature at different rates, the latter issue cannot be resolved, which places even greater onus on us to discuss what constitutes informed consent. It takes a very brave individual to face the public scandal of supporting adolescents' right to choose to have sex with people much older than themselves, but we must do so – at least provisionally – if we are to understand what 'informed

consent' means for those making such decisions. Blanket assumptions that teenagers cannot make informed consent about sex affects adolescents' autonomy in ways that may have far reaching consequences.

Bruhm and Hurley are some of the few critics to question the assumption that "sex between a child and an adult, regardless of the gender of either party, is inevitably traumatic and debilitating for the child" (Bruhm & Hurley 2004:xxii). They dismiss this blanket assumption as a "fantasy" (ibid.) and argue that "Clearly, remembered childhood sexual experiences can be traumatic *or* pleasant; the problem that interests us most here is how to make sense of the child's pleasure without pathologizing it or reducing it to 'trauma'" (2004:xxix). In works for adults, this is easier. Edmund White's fictionalized autobiography *The Beautiful Room is Empty*, addresses the topic of man-boy love with humour. In the novel, the protagonist recalls his teenage years when he was befriended by an older man, Lou. Lou and the narrator do not become a couple despite the younger man's desires. Once he enters adulthood, he has a terrible recognition: "The only dreadful thing was my realization that at nineteen I was already too old for Lou. I'd been waiting year after year to grow up so I could lead the gay life, and all the while I'd been wasting my most precious capital, my youth" (*Beautiful Room*, p. 113). Lou is attracted to younger teens, but would not force himself upon them. This results in a miscommunication: the protagonist recalls his teenage self as a desiring individual who longed for sex but did know how to articulate the carnal nature of his desires. He assumes that once he is an adult, the situation will change. But when he finally arrives at the grand old age of 19, he finally realizes that he is too old to attract men like Lou. The mood of the piece is ironic and self-depreciatingly humorous as the older narrator reflects on the ignorance of his younger self. It is transparently obvious that 'abuse' would be an inappropriate term to describe the sexual relationships the protagonist desired or those he witnesses Lou enjoy with younger teens.

The Beautiful Room is Empty is intended for an adult audience. Similarly positive portrayals of man-boy love do not appear in my corpus of fiction for adolescents. The closest I could find was in Tom Lennon's *When Love Comes to Town* (1993). This Irish novel depicts an athletic teenage boy during his initial coming out, first to himself, then to friends and finally to family. On his very first night in a gay bar, Neil meets an older man he dubs "Uncle Sugar" (*When Love Comes*, p. 53), as Neil quickly realizes that he could milk the older man as a sugar daddy. Uncle Sugar offers Neil lifts and invites him over to watch porn. He is also the one who calls an ambulance when Neil is beaten up by homophobes after leaving the bar about midway through the novel, and buys an expensive watch to replace the one that was broken. Uncle Sugar is unfailingly kind and considerate. He is also clear about his sexual desires for Neil, but "Sugar obviously wasn't a psycho, and he certainly wasn't going to make any unwanted demands" (*When Love Comes*, p. 56).

Neil even considers having sex with him and pretending Sugar is Ian, the teenager Neil is attracted to because “sex was sex” after all (*ibid.*). Indeed, Sugar – as depicted through the eyes of the teenage Neil – is a rather sad character whom it would be easy to manipulate. There is a degree of arrogance as “It dawned on him how much power he had over this middle-aged man, the poor fellow would have done anything for him. Ever willing to please, he wore his heart on his sleeve, awaiting the slightest whim of his new obsession” (*When Love Comes*, p. 56). The point made overwhelming clear in both White’s quasi-autobiography and Lennon’s novel is that not all older gay men who desire young teens are menaces to society. Both novels celebrate the power teens gain from being the objects of older men’s desire, and neither associates man-love with trauma.

It is also noteworthy that neither of the teenagers – Neil nor the unnamed protagonist of White’s volume – are virgins, both teenagers have had sex with others of the same age. This experiential background is relevant for assessing their capacity to make informed decisions. As noted, Neil seriously contemplates having sex with Uncle Sugar even though he finds the older man unattractive. The point being, that Neil feels so comfortable and in control of the situation that he can really think through his choices. He contemplates the risks (including HIV infection and the risk that Sugar might become violent) and, even though he is sexually aroused, is capable of restraint (unlike the heterosexual couples discussed in the previous chapter).

Neil’s restraint with Uncle Sugar was a sensible move for an author producing what is heralded as Ireland’s first gay novel for teens. Had Lennon made Neil’s first homosexual sex an act between mature adult and teenage boy, he would have been slated and quite possibly prevented further gay novels being produced in Ireland for some time to come. Instead, he acknowledges this possibility, provides the opportunity, and allows his teenage character to decide otherwise. Writing in Ireland in the 1990s, Lennon offers a positive, empowering view of adult-teen sexual relations which disputes the assumption that the age difference always results in trauma.

A more typical case in fiction would be a warning. For instance, fourteen year old Calvin in the astonishingly raunchy Australian novel, *Sushi Central* (Duncan, 2003), engages in a wide variety of sexual behaviours with other teens. He enjoys casual sex with quite a number of men, but is particularly excited about the idea of posing for pornography. He finds the idea empowering: “Being young and pretty means having power. And it’s the kind of power that we have to exploit while we can” (*Sushi Central* p. 165), and initially Calvin does seem empowered by the attention he receives. However, the photo session ends with Calvin being anally penetrated by the older man, at which point he dissociates: “I try not to feel anything when he’s inside me, and after a while I don’t, I’m somewhere else. I’m gone” (*Sushi*

Central, p. 257). The novel thus offers a warning to young teens who wish to exploit their sexual attractiveness with adults.

In their discussion of sexual relationships between teens and adults, Bruhm and Hurley draw attention to the context in which these relationships are negotiated: "Rarely do we consider that both trauma and intergenerational sex themselves have historical dimensions. ... What now counts as trauma has not always been counted as such ... Similarly, intergenerational sex has not always been reducible to trauma as we know it" (2004:xxiii). William Tierney responds to this claim by stating

We ... know that adult and child relationships have occurred in other cultures and other centuries without harm to the child. However, we do not live in other cultures and other centuries, and we know that terrific physical and emotional harm has been done to children who have been molested by adults. Consent is essential to a fulfilling relationship, and I do not believe that in general children can provide meaningful consent for a sexual relationship with an adult.

(Tierney 1997:52)

It is more than mildly unfortunate that Tierney brings his argument down to his 'belief' that children can provide meaningful consent. Admittedly, Tierney is primarily concerned with young children, not adolescents for whom 'meaningful consent' is a more reasonable proposition. Although not as dismissive in tone, Peter Cumming also calls for "a more nuanced consideration of the prevalence (or not) of adult-child sex in the formation of and experience of queer sexualities and a more detailed, explicit, political acknowledgement of the dangers and destructive potential of adult-child sexuality (whether homosexual or heterosexual) in this cultural moment" (2006:175). As already noted, it is very risky for authors depicting homosexual relationships to depict man-boy desire in books intended for teenage readers, but it is possible for authors depicting heterosexual relationships to offer "a more nuanced consideration ... of adult-child sex" (*ibid.*). And given the challenge these desires pose to heteronormative conceptions of carnality, these cross-generational desires are readily understood as queer desires, even though all the examples in the corpus involve heterosexual pairings.

In the seventh and final novel in Aidan Chambers's 'Dance' sequence, *This is All: The Pillow Book of Cordelia Kenn*, Chambers's eponymous protagonist expresses the full range of her carnal desires, primarily for her first lover and later husband, Will, but also her queer desires for her girlfriend Izumi and her affair with an older married man, Edward. It is her relationship with Edward that interests me here. The pair become acquainted at a party her father throws for his colleagues, and which she helps him to host. She works in Edward's office and occasionally accompanies him on site trips. The pair become lovers and Cordelia

provides detailed descriptions of Edward's penis and sexual technique.⁷ It is obvious that Cordelia is as enthusiastic about the relationship as Edward. She feels no guilt about the fact that Edward is married, nor does she appear to care how much their affair would hurt Edward's wife, Valerie. Indeed, she appears to find his lack of availability appealing: when Edward offers to leave Valerie so that they can set up a home together, Cordelia literally runs away in panic.

The "more nuanced" discussion of whether their relationship constitutes abuse takes place when Cordelia wants to end the relationship and the pair have a frank discussion during which Edward recalls how their affair began. Cordelia came into his office ostensibly to talk about work but, as Edward recalls, "I knew then you had a thing about me – that you wanted me. You'd lie about it. You'd lie to me, and you'd lie to other people about it" (*This is All*, p. 504). Cordelia is forced to admit her own culpability, although she does try to defend herself: "But you're the man and you're the adult, and you were – are – my employer, so you were the one in charge and you were the one who was responsible" (*This is All*, p. 505). To which Edward responds

Yes, I am a man, and yes, I am an adult, and yes, I employ you. But you're quite sure, are you, quite certain, that I was the one in charge? That I was the one making the running and – what? – imposing myself on you? – and you weren't responsible in any way? And that you aren't responsible now, my sweet Cordelia, who never lies, except once so that she could see the man she wanted to show herself off to, and was wearing a nice tight top and short-short skirt and was carefully made up and was air brushed and warm from cycling fast and was flashing her eyes and flirting her hair, and pretending to be an innocent schoolgirl on a homework mission
(*This is All*, p. 506)

Cordelia recognizes that, despite the raw, blunt way Edward describes her behaviour, there is a degree of truth in what he says. One could simply read this as Chambers wagging the finger at the teenage girl who dresses too provocatively or as Cordelia internalizing her abuser's world view. I think it is more fruitful, however, to take this discussion at face value. Cordelia is not a virgin when she meets Edward, and the way she singles Will out as the person with whom she will lose her virginity verges on the predatory. She is very open and self-aware as she writes down her carnal desires. Her realization that she has indeed encouraged Edward is

7. Given that the text is ostensibly written for her daughter and edited by her husband and teacher, the level of detail disturbs me. Not only do these sections of the novel border on the pornographic, the presentation of intimate details of sexual acts in a text written by a mother to her unborn child breaches the incest taboo. Cross-generational desires evoke the incest taboo ("he's old enough to be your father!" expresses this connection), and in this novel, Chambers foregrounds the connection through the fictional reader of the text, Cordelia and Will's daughter.

a surprised recognition of how she has internalized and relied on her belief in childhood innocence. Edward's remarks reveal just how risky such her beliefs are. Cordelia's acknowledgement of the truthfulness of Edward's statement reads to me as a nuanced discussion of how blanket assumptions that relationships between adults and teens are always abusive can actually disempower youngsters and place them at greater risk. Cordelia is not unduly harmed by her affair, because Edward genuinely cares for her and the other adults in her community protect her from scandal. Cordelia, as the novel demonstrates, is perfectly capable of planning and negotiating sexual relationships, but when her partner is an adult man, she assumes a passive, victim role and does not negotiate or even fully acknowledge, her own power in the role. Her own belief that adolescents in teen-adult relationships are 'innocent' places her at risk.

Melvin Burgess also opens up the complexity of what constitutes informed consent between adults and teens through his presentation of a female adult – teen boy pairing. In *Doing It*, his "Nobby book for boys" (Burgess in Tucker 2001:np), Burgess depicts a relationship between a teenage boy, Ben, and his drama teacher, Miss Young. At first it seems that Ben is empowered by this relationship, he is a horny teenage boy getting as much sex as he wants. Gradually, however, the reader is led to see how living out a fantasy is harmful to Ben. This first becomes apparent in depictions of specific sex acts, when it becomes clear that Miss Young is aroused by the forbidden nature of their relationship, and the power imbalance between them. Gradually, Ben decides he wants to end the relationship and start relationships with girls his own age, but Miss Young manipulates him by cutting her wrists leaving Ben feeling confused, guilty and even more out his depth than ever. He confides in a friend, which helps, and finally comes up with an exit strategy: he tells Miss Young's mother what has happened. This reinstates his status as a child who needs to turn to an adult for help. The novel ends with Ben realizing that he has options, something he has not felt the entire time during his relationship with Miss Young.

Ben may not have had the upper hand for much of his relationship, but this disempowerment is presented as being temporary. Unlike Michael in Bernhard Schlink's novel for adults, *The Reader*, cross-generational sex has apparently not scarred Ben for life. However the comparison between the books is valuable. Michael in Schlink's novel is not aware that he has been damaged by the early onset of sexual relationships with a woman, Hanna, who is so much older than him, but because the novel continues until well into adulthood, readers become acquainted with the long term impact of this relationship. *Doing It* ends too soon for the long term impact to have become clear. Where novels for adults depicting man-boy love celebrated adolescents' agency, novels like *The Reader* place female adult – teen boy relationships in a matrix of pain and abuse.

What is clear is that, for all his bluff in interviews, Burgess does not encourage readers to emulate Ben's behaviour. Anne Fine (2003), in a now infamous review, criticised Burgess's depiction of the teacher-boy romance primarily on the grounds that it was misogynistic but also because it is unrealistic. I acknowledge that Burgess's descriptions of the process of grooming and recovery are not as well developed as those in Lyga's *Boy Toy* (discussed in the final chapter), but by removing the focus from these aspects of the relationship and emphasising how manipulated and trapped Ben feels when he wants to end the relationship, Burgess nudges his readers to distinguish between fantasies and reality. His novel is decidedly less raunchy than either *The Reader* or *Boy Toy*, and his message is simple: fantasies about having sex with your teacher are fine but are only pleasurable as fantasies.

What all the novels depicting voluntary cross-generational sex share is that the relationship must be kept secret. It later transpires that many people did know Cordelia and Edward were having an affair in *This is All*, but Ben and Miss Young manage to keep their relationship a secret. Awareness that their relationships are considered repugnant by most of the outside world, the couples in these novels shroud their relationships in secrecy, like other queer relationships, they are often invisible to the outside world.

Unseen desires: Ghosted girls in straight plots

Within gender studies, much attention has been paid to male gaze, and the way 'to-be-looked-at-ness' – to use Laura Mulvey's classic but ungainly term ([1975] 1992:27; emphasis original) – impacts on women's lives. To an even greater extent than women in a patriarchal world, children are subject to aetonnormative gaze (Higonnet 1998). This gaze assumes that children are not sexual, but will become heterosexual. As a result, adolescent desires, especially queer desires can be rendered invisible – *ghosted* – by a viewpoint that literally cannot see them. As Castle explains:

When it comes to lesbians ... many people have trouble seeing what's in front of them. The lesbian remains a kind of ghost effect in the cinema world of modern life: elusive, vaporous, difficult to spot – even when she is there in plain view, mortal and magnificent, at the center of the screen. Some may even deny she exists at all. – Why is it so difficult to see the lesbian – even when she is there, quite plainly, in front of us? In part because she has been "ghosted" – or made to seem invisible – by culture itself (Castle 1992:2&4)

In her study of literature from the eighteenth century onwards, Castle examines the common trope of transforming lesbian characters into ghosts or vapours in

order to avoid direct representation. She does not claim this is necessarily a conscious decision, only that it reflects the unexamined consciousness of the authors and their society. By turning lesbian characters into ghostly beings, Castle argues, lesbians and pro-lesbian authors have been able to communicate with one another about their desires. So, in part, ghosting offers a means of disguise from a hostile heterosexual world. More commonly, however, she suggests that the literary practice of disguising lesbian sexuality has been a way for authors to characterise sexual desire between women as not only being deviant, but as being so unreal and of such little relevance that it can be dismissed like a vapour. Given how aware of sexuality contemporary society seems to be, the existence of novels deploying similar ghostly images to depict adolescent carnal desire seems, initially, unexpected, especially as the characters are not necessarily lesbian.

Cherokee, in Francesca Lia Block's *Cherokee Bat and the Goat Guys*, fails to heed her temporary guardian's warnings about the powers of sexuality and as a result she allows her desires to change her. In a state of rage brought on by sexual jealousy and frustration, Cherokee is transformed from a ghost-like form into an overtly sexual, goat-devil figure:

[Cherokee] took the armload of fur and bone into the bathroom, pulled off her clothes, and stared at her reflection – a weak, pale girl, the shadows of ribs showing bluish through her skin like an X ray.

I am getting whiter and whiter, she thought. Maybe I'll fade all the way.

But the hooves and haunches and horns and wings were not fragile. Everything about them was dark and full, even the fragrance that rose from them like the ghosts of the animals to whom they had once belonged... Cherokee stepped into the [animal skins]. ... In the mirror she saw a wild creature, a myth beast, a sphinx. She shut her eyes, threw back her head and licked her lips.

I can do anything now, Cherokee thought (The Goat Guys, p. 234–5)

Cherokee's transformation takes place in two stages: first she sees her body in ghost like imagery, and then she becomes an animal. These are the key images I take up in this chapter and the next. Both suggest that there is something intrinsically deviant – queer – about the desiring adolescent. If she does not embrace her sexuality, she is pale, she fades even from her own view. She wonders whether she might “fade all the way”; by suppressing her sexual desires, she suppresses something so central to her being that she will disappear. In this way, Block uses the ghost imagery, but subverts it as she indicates that adolescent desire is a life force. Yet when Cherokee does embrace her desires – symbolised through the donning of the animal skins given or stolen for the other members of the band, she becomes “a wild creature, a myth-beast, a sphinx”. She is monstrous, deviant, but she feels empowered: “I can do anything now, Cherokee thought”. Cherokee is punished for grasping the power of sexuality prematurely: she collapses under the weight of the animal

spirits she has invoked and becomes seriously ill. So even the seemingly liberal Block suggests that there is something deviant about adolescent carnal desire.

Deviance questions the status quo. Simply by existing, the lesbian forces the question ‘what if women did not need men?’ Because deviance cannot avoid challenging the status quo, deviance is often perceived as a threat. Whilst Castle argues that this ghosting is a response to the “threat” that sexual love between women presents to “patriarchal protocol” (Castle 1993:4), I argue that similar strategies take place when referring to the sexuality of adolescents. That is, since adolescent sexuality poses a threat to aetnonormative power structures, it has been subject to similar strategies designed to exorcise the threat posed by female homosexuality. In my use of the term, texts which ghost teenage sexuality contain sexualised adolescents, but the text obscures our view of them so that we may not immediately recognise that which we see. An extension of this, illustrated in the passage from Block’s novel, is that adolescent carnal desires may be turned into a form that enables the reader to take distance from or even disparage them.

Ghosting bears strong resemblance to the well-established metaphor of invisibility for representing race, which is most fully articulated in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) (see also Lieber [1972] and Stewart [2009] for a discussion of invisibility as a trope). Invisibility in works in the Ellison tradition, use the metaphor to suggest a total lack of agency, a denial of the right to exist. Stewart observes that “Trauma, including physical or sexual abuse, is probably the most common factor leading to invisibility. As a result of the trauma, characters are often depicted as withdrawing to the point of psychic invisibility” (2009:182fn). Whilst fully accepting that the following distinction appears somewhat arbitrary, I find it more helpful to examine texts that deploy invisibility as a device in the chapter on trauma and abuse, because although ghosting and invisibility may sound like the same thing, in practice they are very different. When characters in adolescent novels are depicted as being invisible, they lack subjectivity and their bodies are rendered abject. The ghosted lesbian character may be rendered deviant, she is not necessarily robbed of her subjectivity: she still allows herself to be seen to those with the willingness to throw off the shackles of society and look properly.

In many novels in the corpus, queer sexual relationships remain unfulfilled in the carnal sense, but the romantic, sometimes physical, attractions of key characters may still be characterised as queer by readers who are willing to uncover the sexual subtexts. In their commentary on John Knowles’s *A Separate Peace* (1959), a novel which was published for adults but has become part of the adolescent canon by default, Cart and Jenkins comment that “it clearly had a gay – though coded – subtext” (2006:7; see also Tribunella [2002] 2011 for a fuller discussion of the coding of the subtext). Their view is supported by a quote from the author in an interview in 1972, where Knowles described that characters, Finny and Gene,

as being in love “Whether teens, then or now, perceive this is moot” (*ibid.*). Tribunella (2002/2011) argues that for queer readers at least, the queer subtext is so clear he can move directly to consider how the boys’ mutual desire functions within the heteronormative imperative.⁸

In this section I discuss texts where same-sex desire is present in the subtext, but it is a moot point as to whether or not readers who are inexperienced (as readers and/or as desiring subjects) will necessarily recognise these desires. In the context of Holocaust literature, I have suggested that there may be great benefits to gain from such muted accounts as they allow the reader to be protected from that which they are not yet ready to acknowledge (Kokkola 2003:15–46; 2002). In the context of same-sex desire, I cannot see that youngsters might need to be ‘protected’, but suggest that publishers – particularly of early works like *A Separate Peace* – might have felt they do. This refusal to “name the love that dare not speak its name” to quote Lord Arthur Douglass’s letter to the imprisoned Oscar Wilde is a continuation of the belief that there is something inherently problematic and wrong with same-sex desire. Oddly, the two novels I focus on in this section – *Touching Earth Lightly* and *Violet & Claire* – are both by decidedly liberal authors. On a more positive note, for those who do read the queer subtext in these novels, they portray a desire which is steeped in a loving friendship and decidedly more developed than the purely physical relationships the girls in these novels have with men.

Janey, in *Touching Earth Lightly*, has numerous sexual relationships with men. Early on in the novel, she and her best friend Chloe go a scrap metal reclamation centre. The scene is focalized through Chloe, who is talking to a teenage boy who is queuing up to have sex with Janey in the back of a car. Despite their willingness and interest in having sex with her, the boys look down on Janey for being so promiscuous. Nevertheless, they are disparaging of Chloe because she does not display any interest in boys, and so decide she must be a lesbian. In the brief space of less than two pages, Lanagan embroils her readers in the performance of double standards and introduces them to a decidedly knowing teen: Janey. After she has had sex with two boys in less than half an hour, Janey clambers across the cars and joins her friend. The novel is focalised through Chloe who watches Janey’s naked body as she removes a borrowed jacket “warm breast and shoulder air puffed out of it – Janey air that smelled like hot metal. Climbing back into the dark stack, she was just a soft white writhing, kinked and cleft here and there” (*Touching Earth Lightly*, p. 14). Chloe’s gaze, and thus that of the readers too, ravishes Janey’s body. The novel is not narrated by Chloe, and so inexperienced readers may not

8. Tribunella (2002/2011) argues that suppressing same-sex desire in novels like Knowles’s *A Separate Peace* is troped as a way of marking the on-set of (heterosexual) maturity. Only by rejecting the boy he desires can the protagonist rise to manhood.

immediately recognise the perspective as being the protagonist's. But as the novel progresses, Chloe's obsession with Janey becomes clear.

Other characters in the novel also recognise Chloe's desires, she is asked whether she is "a radical lezzo" (*Touching Earth Lightly*, p. 11), but her response is simply to smile. Chloe dismisses the question off-handedly, and the reader who is unwilling to see same-sex desire may follow suit. It is not long after this that Chloe starts dating a boy, Isaac, which supports the view that Chloe is straight. Yet Lanagan clarifies that their relationship is not sexual, and the novel consistently points out that Chloe is more committed to her relationship with Janey than she is to her relationship with her boyfriend or family. Indeed, Chloe is willing to sabotage nearly all attempts at forming relationships with others in order to preserve her relationship with Janey. She even places herself at risk, when Janey's father and brother threaten her.

Ostensibly, Chloe's protective attitude towards Janey arises from her knowledge that Janey has been sexually abused by both her father and brother. Janey's promiscuity is also presented as being a direct consequence of this abuse. Eventually, her promiscuous behaviour results in her death: Janey is murdered in the same junk yard where the novel begins. The novel does not end here though, but continues to trace Chloe's development as she grieves her friend. It may be Janey who touches earth lightly, but the novel is Chloe's story. And it is clear that Chloe loves Janey. I think it is also clear that Chloe desires Janey, but is unable to fully articulate her desires even to herself. This is partly because there is nothing in the novel that suggests that Janey feels the same way about Chloe. With no-one to read or respond to her desiring body, Chloe remains arrested in her sexual development.

The same cannot be said of Violet and Clare in Francesca Lia Block's novel of the same name. As the title of the novel suggests, Violet and Claire's relationship is the one which is central. This relationship is never defined as lesbian, yet their attraction to one another surfaces in particularly physical and sensual ways. Although the girls do not have a sexual relationship, their desire for one another is mutual. Like many of Block's novels, on the surface this novel seems exceptionally open, even celebratory, about teenage sexuality. It contains one of the most empowered depictions of casual sex in the corpus, and yet this foregrounding of heterosexuality functions as a means of disguising the lesbian desire that lies, ghosted, at the centre of the novel.

The novel is set in Block's typically fairy tale version of LA. Violet is the angst ridden teenager whose wealthy parents provide the camera equipment and car needed to make the plot function. Violet is determined to become a successful movie director, and views her world at a distance, as though it were taking place on a screen. At High School, she is a loner and has felt lonely ever since her friend Mandy left. The narrative begins with Violet checking out the new girl, Claire,

across the quad. "It took an expert eye to recognise it in her but I recognised it – she was my star" (*Violet & Claire*, p. 7). Although expressed in terms of her dreams of becoming a movie director, it is easy to read this scene in terms of a queer flirtation in a straight setting and Violet's "expert eye" as a so-called 'queer eye' or 'gaydar' which enables her to recognise Claire's queerness. Violet tries to talk to Claire, but is interrupted by a boy asking her out on a date, and a gang of kids ridiculing Claire for wearing fairy wings. (Claire considers herself to be the descendant of the persecuted faerie folk, which allows for a number of word plays around the fairy=gay man theme.) After overcoming these obstacles, the girls meet and spend the evening together. The following day, the boy who asked Violet out on a date reappears to label them "Dykes" (*Violet & Claire*, p. 26).

Although the girls reject this label and never have a sexual relationship, Violet admits that, apart from movies, Claire is the first thing to make her feel good since her previous 'friend', Mandy. This revelation is interrupted with other information, so that once again the lesbian content of this story is constantly interrupted and displaced. It requires an active, engaged reader to piece the ghosted narrative together. On their second evening together, Violet and Claire go to "the Red Cherry, which was this transvestite bar in Hollywood that I'd always wanted to check out" (*Violet & Claire*, p. 35). Violet can use her movie director status as a smokescreen for explaining why she has "always wanted to check out" a gay bar, but the teenagers' mutual desire is not lost on the "girls" at the Red Cherry. And nor is it lost on the careful reader.

The lesbian plot, though visible, requires a patient reader as the narrative constantly foregrounds elements which are either of less relevance or which appear to contradict it, such as the heterosexual relationships both girls have. In fairness to Block, the main stumbling block appears to be her characters' own lack of self-awareness. With hindsight, Violet finally recognises the emotion she feels when she sees Claire is attracted to her male poetry writing teacher. "Jealousy? Was I jealous? I didn't know it then. Maybe if I had known it, things would have been different. All I knew was that I was suddenly unsettled, as if something I needed in order to survive was about to be taken away" (*Violet & Claire*, p. 78). Once she has finally recognized her jealousy, Violet is still not clear how to express her feelings but is clearly moving in that direction. In contrast, Claire recognises her feelings for Violet straight away, but expresses herself in such poetic terms that it easily goes over the reader's head. Her unsuccessful attempts at having a sexual relationship with a man are simply her form of homophobic panic. At the end of the novel, Violet goes on a quest to find Claire, who has run away. The novel ends with "Two girls, blending themselves together like a magic potion, and the separating, one more powerful and one more gentle after the alchemy, neither afraid anymore" (*Violet & Claire*, p. 169).

So why does Block not simply allow her characters to express their desires? Drawing on W.E.B. DuBois's concept of double-consciousness, I want to suggest that *Violet & Claire* proffers insightful readers with training into reading with a queer eye. DuBois's concept refers to the way in which the marginalised person, in his case Black, learns to view himself not only from his own perspective, but also simultaneously through the eyes of the dominant White perspective. That is, the individual is simultaneously *conscious* of himself from two differing perspectives. For DuBois, and many critics who have drawn on his work to develop notions of the double consciousness of women as well as those working within race studies, double consciousness is a burden, an awareness that leads individuals to internalise their marginalised position in society. In keeping with the spirit of queer studies, I would like to reappropriate this term and suggest that, for queer readers of Block's novel, the hidden subtext of the girls' romance can act as an agent for the positive deployment of double consciousness. That is, in discovering the marginalised narrative, the reader makes an active decision to read against the surface grain. For an experienced reader, the clues to reading this novel as a novel of unfulfilled (at least within the novel) lesbian desire are extremely obvious. The setting of the drag bar for their meetings and resolution, the numerous references to the pleasure they take in one another, the faerie-fairy word play and so on are unsubtle. However, the overt heterosexual sexual scenes easily distract readers who are used to reading heterosexually, and even those who are familiar with gay and lesbian characters but assume an absolute either/or division will not necessarily recognise the lesbian desire between Violet and Claire straight away. The novel's lack of subtlety trains queer and queer-friendly readers to read beyond the heterosexual banter to unearth the stronger and more stable source of desire in the novel. One might even say that the novel offers training strategies for the queer reader in how to read the queered body. By empowering the queerly reading reader, rather than the queer character in the novel, Block provides an invaluable way of empowering her readers, and enabling them to learn to read queerly.

Queer readings and reading queerly

Since the turn of the millennium, queer readings have taken a huge leap forwards. In 2000, a huge debate blew up in the media over a conference paper presenting a queer reading of the iconic Canadian series of *Anne* books by L. M. Montgomery. A few years later, Tison Pugh and David L. Wallace presented a queer reading of the *Harry Potter* books by J. K. Rowling and at the end of the decade, Pugh published *Innocence, Heterosexuality, and the Queerness of Children's Literature* with queer readings of numerous well-known, superficially heterosexual children's series

including Baum's *Oz* series, Wilder's *Little House* series, Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, Handler's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* series, Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* series, and Meyer's *Twilight* quartet. In a decade, scholarship in the field has moved from homophobic panic to incorporating queer readings into mainstream series.

Queer readings like those of Robinson, Pugh and Wallace demand a level of sophistication and experience that few teens encountering the *Harry Potter* or *Anne* novels would, in the past, have been deemed probable. However, slash fan-fiction on the internet – some of which is ostensibly produced by teenagers – suggests that at least some contemporary teens are well versed in the art of reading and rewriting queerly. Presumably, they can now recognise the desires they have read in mainstream GLBTQ fiction. The same cannot be said of the Canadian media in 2000 for whom the suggestion that Anne Shirley may have experienced same-sex desire was shocking.

Laura Robinson presented her paper 'Bosom Friends: Lesbian Desire in L.M. Montgomery's *Anne Books*' at the annual Canadian Learned Society's meeting in 2000. Before presenting her carefully argued queer reading, which drew attention to Anne's expressions of desire for various female characters, especially her 'bosom friend' Diana Barry, but also Katherine Brooke and Leslie Moore, as well as to the numerous alternatives to the heterosexual marriage evident in the *Anne* books, Robinson sent a copy of her paper to the newspapers with the result that it was widely cited, scorned and discussed in the Canadian media, and often by those who had not read her paper (White 2001:46). The paper itself was not published in full until 2004.

Robinson's controversial paper presents a finely nuanced discussion of queerness and the use of the word 'lesbian'. Drawing on the work of Lilian Faderman, who drew attention to the widespread social acceptability of intimate relationships between women prior to the 1920s when same-sex relationships were pathologised, and on Adrienne Rich's well-known proposal of a 'lesbian continuum', Robinson dubs Anne not 'queer' but 'lesbian', although she does not suggest that Anne identifies her same-sex desires in terms of an identity. On the contrary, Robinson acknowledges the surface heterosexual plot pattern as Anne and Gilbert marry and raise children of their own, but does so in terms of 'compulsory heterosexuality' as defined by Rich.

By drawing attention to Anne's same-sex desires, however, Robinson identifies a key source of power behind Anne's ability to challenge the status quo.

Even though Anne's desires are not overtly fulfilled in any textual way, their inclusion disrupts the patriarchal, heterosexual status quo by always gesturing to possibilities beyond the norm. And that is after all, Anne's legacy of her inevitable and often inadvertent ability to ruffle the feathers of complacency.

(Robinson 2000 in White 2001:46)

The suggestion that Anne's friendships with key women in her life could be dubbed 'lesbian' threw the media into a homophobic panic. Writing before the publication of her article based on the paper was published, Gavin White explained that "Because Robinson's paper used the word 'lesbian' in a way that could only confuse readers with no background in the academic thought of Faderman, Smith-Rosenberg, or Rich, it got a great deal of attention" (White 2001:46). Since much of the debate took place in the newspapers, rather than within academic journals, the fine nuances of Robinson's paper – especially her politicised use of the word 'lesbian' – were lost. In her summary of the media bubble surrounding the paper, Cecily Devereux (2002) links the discussion to Canadian national identity: suggesting that Anne might be lesbian tarnished Canadian national identity. Devereux may well have a point, and undoubtedly Anne's iconic status is why the reactions were so powerful, but the bottom line is very mundane homophobia: if lesbians were fully accepted by society, the response to Anne's queerness would not have been so visceral. (See also Rothbauer 2002 for a discussion of gay and lesbian teens in Canadian adolescent fiction.)

Homophobia also informs much of the academic debate on the 'Bosom Friends' affair. White asks "is it desirable that the word 'lesbian' should be used as Laura M. Robinson has used it, even if she has taken the use from respectable academic sources? Almost certainly not" (White 2001:49). White argues that spreading the term too thinly is "dangerous" because "we may find ourselves back in the era of witch-hunts, with special camps to straighten out teenagers who seem to be insufficiently masculine or feminine" (*ibid.*). Sadly, such special camps do exist (Anderson-Minshall 2011). Unpicking White's argument, his claim is (essentially) that we should not label Anne's desire for Diana lesbian because to do so would incite homophobia. White's avowed fear of homophobia is a beautifully disguised but no less powerful form of homophobia itself. White concludes by arguing that although the relationships between females in Montgomery's writings should not be overlooked, he argues that in the historical context precludes the reasonableness of calling these lesbian.

The historical context to which White refers is outlined in Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men*. Faderman argues that the majority of these intimate relationships were indeed sexless in the literal sense that the women did not have sex. Carol Smith-Rosenberg (1985), however, has shown that many of these relationships were indeed sexual, even if they were perceived to be otherwise. I think it is quite clear in both Robinson's paper and in Montgomery's novels that Anne's desires are neither carnally consummated nor form part of her self-identity. Nevertheless, they are queer desires in the very obvious sense that they challenge the status quo. Are they *lesbian* desires? I, for one, will raise my queer hand and admit that in the late 1970s I read and reread the sections of *Anne of Green Gables* in

which Diana appeared, drinking up the passages which were then the only ones I knew expressing same-sex female desire. It is true that in my pre-teen years I did not have a vocabulary to label my feelings, I had never had a 'bosom friend', but I recognised myself in Anne's longing for Diana, her fascination with Diana's hair and lips, and her jealousy and despair when separated. It is equally true that many straight girls read these texts and saw in Anne's intimate friendships with women and girls only the kinds of closeness they felt for their female friends.

Montgomery's rejection of a lesbian friend, Isobel, and her subsequent statement in her diary "I am not a Lesbian" (in Robinson 2004:12) has been read both literally and as homophobic panic. Montgomery's own homophobia – "I told her plainly that her passion for me is lesbian, abhorrent in the eyes of all decent people" (in White 2001:56) at least reveals that Montgomery was aware of differences between asexual romantic friendships and lesbianism. And the published version of Robinson's paper identifies an intimate relationship between Montgomery's entries in her journals and her fictional writing (2004:12–14). So is Anne a lesbian? I'd rather say she is a queer child and her queer qualities unsettle both those around her and those who read novels about her. Her queerness was a great source of comfort for this queer reader, as indeed the lack of genital contact is for those who are panicked by Anne's desires. The power of queer, then, may be regarded as residing in the reader at least as much as in the text.

The power of the queer reader has been celebrated by Pugh and Wallace (Pugh 2011, Pugh and Wallace 2006, 2008). Pugh's extended study of numerous mainstream adolescent series as well as Sanchez's *Rainbow Boys* series and Levithan's novel *When Boy Meets Boy* which include openly gay male characters identify how much of the power of queer lies with the reader. His argument is most powerful when the texts analysed are not obviously queer, and so for illustrative purposes, I shall summarize Pugh and Wallace's analysis of the queerness of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Although there are a number of romantic relationships in Rowling's series, carnal desire is at no point made a central feature of the novels, although it is clearly present in the adoration shown towards Voldemort by Professor Quirrel and Bellatrix, as well as in the relationships between Hagrid and Madame Maxime, Charlie and Fleur, and Lupin and Tonks. But these are all adults. None of the various teenage relationships in the series are consummated or queer. The novels demand a queer reading to expose the narrative's queerness.

Pugh and Wallace's original article was written before Rowling's revelation that Dumbledore is gay (they published a postscript after Rowling's announcement in 2008), whereas Pugh's chapter on the series in *Innocence, Heterosexuality, and the Queerness of Children's Literature* examines the trope of ghosting in relation to Rowling's paratextual comments on Dumbledore's sexuality. In the earlier

article, Pugh and Wallace lament the absence of gay, lesbian and transsexual characters in the *Harry Potter* world, even as they produce a queer reading which privileges the readers' role in the construction of queerness in the series (2006:263–5). One might accuse Rowling of tokenism in relation to Dumbledore in much the same way her presentation of a predominantly White world has been criticized, but perhaps she is simply not playing to stereotypes. As a 'straight-looking' lesbian who always has to announce her orientation, even to other lesbians, I experience the kind of invisibility Rowling uses in her depiction of some of her more queerly sexed characters on a near daily basis. For although Pugh and Wallace are surely right in their listings of the various ways in which the characters are marked as straight, they do not look at characters who are unpartnered. Professor Quirrel's adoration of Voldemort in *The Chamber of Secrets*, for instance, is even more sexual than Bellatrix's overt declarations of love for the Dark Lord in the final three novels in the series. Quirrel adores Voldemort so much that he takes pleasure in being physically entwined with his Master and in an overtly S/M relationship.

The only teachers we see paired are Hagrid (with Madame Olympe Maxime) and Snape's memories of his love of Harry's mother, Lily. Dumbledore's romance with Grindelwald is not revealed within the novels, only through Rowling's comments after their publication. We never see Professors McGonagall or Flitwick paired with anyone, but nothing in their behaviour suggests to me that they might be straight. The blanket assumption that characters whose orientations are not overtly marked otherwise are straight is simply ignorant. Simply drawing attention to queer or potentially queer characters in a novel is not, however, the most interesting aspect of a queer reading. Indeed, in this case, it would simply be drawing attention to the potential to read these characters as homosexual but would retain the homo-hetero binarism and thus lack the destabilizing potential of queer. Pugh and Wallace harness the rich potential of queer by reading the overtly heterosexual Harry queerly. Rather than simply considering Harry in terms of the genitalia of those with whom he becomes physically intimate, Pugh and Wallace uncover a queer subtext which adheres to the story of Harry's growth as a man and his successful completion of his quest.

Pugh and Wallace begin by observing the numerous parallels between Harry's recognition that he is a wizard and the experiences of many queerly sexed teens when they first come out. In Harry's case, he literally 'comes out of the closet' as the letters he receives from Hogwarts cause Uncle Vernon to allow Harry to move out from the closet under the stairs and into Dudley's second bedroom. If Harry had not received the invitation to attend Hogwarts, he would have attended Stonewall High (Pugh & Wallace 2006:265). The Stonewall Inn in New York was the site where the gay rights movement took off. In 1969, the Stonewall Inn was a gay pub

which was also popular with transsexuals. As a result, it was often raided by the police who had the right to arrest people who were not wearing adequate quantities of clothing marked as belonging to their own sex (this resulted in particular dressing styles, especially among the butch lesbian community as they found ways to incorporate the requisite number of items of female clothing (e.g. a bra, feminine shoes and underwear and a blouse along with men's trousers and lumber jackets, leather or that icon of lesbian clothing: a man's flannel shirt). In June 1969, the patrons of the Stonewall club decided they had had enough and when the police came to raid them, they responded by rioting. The rioting lasted for several days and led to the formation of politically aware gay rights organizations across America and Europe. By suggesting that Harry might have been sent to Stonewall, Pugh and Wallace ask "Did Rowling intend to hint that, had Harry not come out of the closet as a wizard, he would have lived an equally non-normative life as a Muggle, as the text symbolically suggests that this non-normativity could include sexual non-normativity?" (Pugh & Wallace 2006:265)

The reactions of the Dursley family closely resemble the experiences of many queer teenagers whose parents are homophobic or otherwise afraid of behaviour which does not conform to heteronormative gendered relations. Uncle Vernon roars that "I WILL NOT TOLERATE MENTION OF YOUR ABNORMALITY UNDER THIS ROOF" (*Chamber of Secrets*, p. 2; capitals original). 'Normal', in Uncle Vernon's world, equates with a world without magic, a world where bullying is acceptable and gluttony is praised. It is a self-centred world, policed by worries about what the neighbours might think. Vernon seems genuinely afraid of being linked to the world of magic, and it seems his fear stems from a concern that he, Petunia and Dudley might be tainted by Harry's wizardry. These fears, Pugh and Wallace point out, resemble the ways many subliminal homophobes fear friendships with queers in case they are assumed to be gay by association (2006:265).

Other points of resemblance between the wizarding world within the larger Muggle society and the queer world within the predominantly straight society include the occasional need for wizards to 'pass' as Muggles. Both exist within the same geographical locations, but the wizarding world is often invisible to Muggles in much the same way that queer society often seems hidden to those who are determinedly heterosexual thank-you-very-much.

That the wizards' London lies openly "hidden" from Muggle eyes resembles the ways in which queer establishments can likewise be invisible to straight eyes oblivious to their presence. When Harry asks Hagrid if they can purchase his school supplies in London, Hagrid succinctly replies "If yeh know where to go" (SS 67). Hagrid introduces Harry to a new world in which he can live openly as a wizard, and this experience parallels the experience of many homosexuals who are introduced to gay life by a more knowledgeable guide. (Pugh & Wallace 2006:266)

Pugh and Wallace's article also draws parallels between the ways in which the families of werewolves and families whose child comes out must readjust to the situation. Lupin, the werewolf, is shunned for being who he is, and children are warned to stay away from him. The hysteria surrounding werewolves resembles that surrounding child molestation. The association of pedastery with gay men and the homophobia this inspires is expressed in much the same language.

Although Pugh never suggests that Harry is anything other than heterosexual, he reveals how Harry and Ron form an erotic triangular relationship in which women (Ginny and Hermione) are trafficked (2011:97). Harry feels that he needs Ron's approval to date Ginny, as she is his sister. Ron is filled with jealousy when he thinks that Hermione chooses to stay on the quest in *Deathly Hallows* because she desires Harry. As a result, Ron feels the need to negotiate his return to the threesome through Harry, before he can lay claim to Hermione's affections. These negotiations of women in triangular relationships were first highlighted by a key figure in queer studies, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* and they serve to "clarify the homosocial foundations of many heterosexual attractions" (Pugh 2011:97).

Pugh and Wallace draw other points of comparison between the epistemology of wizardry and the place of queerness in Western society. The earlier article cautiously concludes that "there is little overt homophobia in the books" (Pugh & Wallace 2006:261) but Pugh's later chapter more confidently praises the series for its celebration of the abnormal.

[T]he *Harry Potter* series queers the traditional form of the school story by undermining the structures of normativity. As a foe of ideological normalcy, queerness subverts that which cultures uphold as normative societal values. But if one thus reads the *Harry Potter* books as queer, how queer is this series of texts that flirts with deconstructing normativity while simultaneously upholding some of its most cherished values? (Pugh & Wallace 2006:261)

The power of this queer reading lies with the reader who has the power to unearth it. The inevitable question is: can child readers unearth queer readings? A recent study of Potter fan fiction suggests that they can and do.

Catharine Tosenberger discusses on-line, slash fan fiction of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Books. She observes that the term 'slash' appeared during the 1970s as fans paired characters in *Star Trek* e.g. 'Kirk/Spock' with the '/' back slash punctuation mark and created their own stories with pairings that often diverged from those that overtly appeared within the series (2008:186). The term has been used to refer to all romantic pairings, but is generally retains its homoerotic origin. Tosenberger notes that the majority of Potter slash pairings are male/male (e.g. Harry/Draco, Harry/Snape and the very popular Remus/Lupus pairings, the

latter was picked up by the actors playing the characters in the film version (2008:197), but there are also some “Femmeslash” pairings (most often Ginny/Hermione). Tosenberger notes how these fan fictions were established long before Rowling’s announcement that Dumbledore is gay, and the most popular pairings (e.g. Harry/Snape or Remus/Lupus) have not been affected by later heterosexual pairings in the series. These responses reveal a deeply playful, thinking audience who “actively engage with a supportive artistic community as readers, writers, and critics” (2008:190) as they seek out queerness. “[W]hat slash writers have done”, Tosenberger continues, “is carve out a space for themselves where they are free to tell the narratives they wish, linked only by a common thread of queerness. Julad speaks of a space where ‘women come to be strange and unusual.’ In the Potter fandom, it is not just adult women, but young people as well who have a safe space in which to be ‘strange and unusual’” (2008:190). They also offer healthy counter-testimony to those who assume that teenage readers will blindly copy the actions of fictional characters unless warnings appear with the textual equivalents of flashing lights.

The fantasy setting of Rowling’s novels allow for pairings which cross the human/other borders as magical folk pair up with werewolves, giants, vampires and so on. These decidedly strange and unusual pairings also queer the ways in which desire is perceived. However, the most common human/other pairing – the human/animal pairing – is only present through hybrids: werewolves and shape shifters. In the following chapter, I examine how blendings of animals and teens to draw further attention to the queerness of teenage carnal desire.

The beastly bestiality of adolescent desire

The 'natural' affinity of adolescents and animals

The Romantic child is often set in what Roni Natov terms 'the Green World' (2003:91–119). The green world is an idealised view of nature, "a response to the worldliness of the world" (2003:91). Pastoral views of nature and the Romantic innocence child are intertwined. As Appelbaum observes, "childhood and nature may be perceived as socially constructed interlinked paradigms"; neither the child nor nature are 'natural' (2010:21). Often used for nationalistic purposes, this setting of the child in pastoral surroundings typically serves to emphasize the 'natural' innocence of the child, the land and the nation. The settings for teenagers are typically contrasted with the pastoral idyll of childhood in one of two ways: the natural world is "red in tooth and claw" (Tennyson, *In Memoriam A.H.H.*) or the novel is set in an urban environment.

The vast majority of the books in the corpus are set in urban surroundings, which implies that sexuality belongs to the industrialized, civilized world rather than the natural world. When nature is evoked in these works, it is most commonly in the form of an uncontrollable, and thus dangerous, desire which prevents adolescents from thinking sensibly or negotiating contraception. A less common, but still frequent, way in which the natural world is evoked is by drawing parallels between adolescent sexuality and the animal world. "Animals continue to haunt man's imagination, compel him to seek out their habits, preferences and cycles, and provide models and formulae by which he comes to represent his own desires, needs and excitements" (Grosz 1995a:278). By presenting human desires through animal forms, authors can exploit the ambivalence of the imagery to express a more finely nuanced view of carnal desire than more realistic formulations might achieve.

If the defining feature of queerness lies in the object of desire, then the love of an animal surely constitutes a form of queer desire. As noted in the previous chapter, the deviance of lesbianism is often expressed by emphasising the lesbian's animality. As we shall see in the first section of this chapter, literature suggests a seemingly seamless link between queer desires and bestiality (see also Creed 1995, Grosz 1995b). Stockton discusses this connection in relation to Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955): "What readers may not recall or notice is the crucial role of an animal

metaphor in this book. *Lolita's* queer child ... hides herself in a dog" (Stockton 2004:294). Stockton points out the numerous ways in which images of dogs are associated with the ostensibly heterosexual Dolly Haze. What makes Dolly a queer child is not a challenge to hetero-homosexual distinctions, but rather the carnal desires of a person deemed too young to be sexual. After a brief examination of other works in which dogs and canine imagery are used to signal queerness of this kind, Stockton observes that

This makes the dog a political animal granting to children a precious kind of shelter for their feelings and their growth – Some of the densest, most commingled, most experimental, most intertextual, and most telling portraits of the queer child appear in the first half or first third of the twentieth century. And they involve dogs. (Stockton 2004:299 & 311)

Animals often feature as transitional objects for adolescents, especially gay and lesbian adolescents, When they recognise the queerness of their desires. The more general queerness of adolescent sexuality is also expressed in bestial terms as adolescent characters are, with remarkable frequency, transformed into animals. Metamorphosis is the main topic of this chapter. The power experienced by adolescents who explore their carnality or who are sexually initiated whilst in a metamorphosed state is somewhat obscured – are the experiences those of the teenager or the animal? – this ambiguity surrounding the nature of sexuality has the potential to be helpful for promoting cross-generational communication between adult authors and their adolescent readers. On the other hand, transforming adolescents into animals suggests that the boundary between the adolescent and the beast is fluid, and perhaps adolescent carnality is 'bestial': wild, untameable and decidedly more base than that of adults. Once again, the trope can be used to aid or hinder communication, depending in no small part on how it is read. My discussion of metamorphosis starts with William Rayner's *Stag Boy*, which I consider a prototypical example of the ambivalent attitudes towards adolescent carnality expressed through the trope of metamorphosis and bestiality.

Towards the end of the chapter, I introduce a third way in which metamorphosis is used to provoke discussion on the relationship between power and sexuality. In works such as Lynne Reid Banks's *Melusine*, metamorphosis is used as a metaphor for depicting the sexual abuse of an adolescent character. By using metamorphosis as a metaphor for describing the abused body, texts can approach a subject which is extremely difficult for adults to discuss with young people, and perhaps shield young readers from knowing more than they wish to know. Unfortunately, the image of the abused child is so vile that such texts also contribute to the blaming of the victim. Issues surrounding involuntary sexual acts, abuse, rape and incest form the topics of the following chapter.

Canine carnalities: Queer boys and their dogs

Davy and Altschuler's first kiss in Donovan's ground breaking *I'll Get There. It Better be Worth the Trip* (1969) is instigated by Davy's dog, Fred. The two boys form a close friendship as they walk home from school together and play with Fred. During the afternoon when they recognise their carnal desires for each other, the boys have been rough-housing with Fred, trying to steal his toy. Fred evades the teenagers by hiding underneath the couch. The boys lie down on the floor to coax him out and continue the game, Fred grabs the toy and escapes leaving the boys lying on the floor laughing. The intimacy of this position results in the breaking down of the boys' inhibitions.

Mine and Altschuler's laughing dies down, but we stay on the floor. I look at Altschuler, and we smile, sort of. And I'm not sure what happens now. I think we both intend to get up and chase after Fred, but there we are, lying on the floor, Fred peering at us from across the room, us peering at Fred and wanting to chase after him again, but also not wanting to get up at all. I close my eyes. I feel unusual. Lying there. Close to Altschuler. I don't want to get up. I want to stay lying there. Close to Altschuler. ... I open my eyes. Altschuler is still lying there too. He looks at me peculiarly, and I'm sure I look at him in the same way. Suddenly Fred jumps in between us. First he licks my face, then Altschuler's, and back and forth between us. I think that this unusual feeling I have will end, but in a minute the three of us are lying there, our heads together. I guess I kiss Altschuler and he kisses me.

(I'll Get There, p. 149–50)

The boys' first kiss is presented as being an extension of Fred's doggy kisses. It is a touchingly light-hearted, credible scenario which allows the boys to pretend that their earlier physical playfulness has really been about the dog rather than about their desire to touch one another.

Fred continues to play a role throughout the boys' relationship. Although the night they do "it" remains unnarrated, it is Fred who acts as the communicational medium for the boys in all the events that are narrated. Fred provides the excuse for Altschuler's first visit to Davy's home after the boys' initial panic over their mutual desire. There, the boys' kisses are again instigated through the medium of Fred, and to cover up their embarrassment they drink whiskey and fall asleep in each other's arms. Davy's mother finds them like that and recognizes the nature of their relationship. She invites Davy's father over to discuss "this queer business" (*I'll Get There, p. 197*), and takes Fred out for a walk. Fred runs into the traffic and is killed. Davy uses his guilt over Fred's death as a way to express his feelings of guilt about his desire for Altschuler, but the boys' reconciliation also takes place through canine media. They talk about Fred and then visit the natural history museum where a stuffed coyote provides the medium for Davy to express his confused

feelings to Altschuler. Their discussion of Fred's death and the lack of graves for pets breaks the tension and enables the boys to behave like friends again as they agree to "respect" one another.

Donovan's use of a dog as a transitional object is, as I say, touchingly credible in this novel. However, by drawing parallels between Davy's feeling for his dog and his feelings for Altschuler, Donovan implies that there is something similar about the two pairings. Queer desire is defined in relation to a desired object even though "the object of a given desire does not determine the 'nature' of that desire" (Moon in Probyn 1995:9). This is unfortunate for a number of reasons. Firstly, love for animals is considered a less mature love than that between humans, and Davy's attachment to his dog is used to express his problematic relationship with the adults in his life. Davy's love for his dog is clearly greater than his love for either of his parents, and it is Fred – not one of his relatives – who sustains Davy when he is mourning his grandmother (his primary caregiver prior to the start of the narrative). Davy's love of Fred is presented as a symptom of parental neglect, and a sign that Davy is not capable of mature relationships. Davy is characterised as a boy who has been damaged by his inadequate parents, and so suggests that homosexuality is, in some unspecified way, a result of poor upbringing and inadequate parental love. The parallel between Davy's love for Fred and his feelings for Altschuler implies that there is something less mature about this desire than there would have been if Davy's desires were heterosexual.

Secondly, the brevity of canine lives compared to human lives – emphasized through Fred's untimely death – suggests a love that is transient. Altschuler and Davy agree to be friends at the end of the novel, and the implication is that their desire for one another was also just a passing phase. Thirdly, the love Davy feels for Fred, like all animal-human relationships, is characterised as caring, but also imbalanced in terms of power: Davy is the owner and Fred is subordinate. Davy also assumes more power in his relationship with Altschuler. It is Davy who decides when the boys can meet and what form their relationship will take. It is clear that Altschuler is more open to the possibility of pursuing their mutual desire. Although initially startled by their first kiss, and clearly hurt by Davy's rejection after Fred's death, in the final conversation it is clear that Altschuler is more open to having a romantic relationship than Davy. Altschuler accepts Davy's offer to "respect" one another, but the text implies that he would have preferred a more intimate relationship.

Finally, drawing parallels between animal-human relationships and same-sex relationships suggests that both break a similar level of taboo. Both are relationships which are assumed to be asexual, but the sexual desire between the boys is cast in the same light as bestiality. In other words, the parallels between homosexual desire and bestiality reveal an underlying belief that both are intrinsically

wrong and utterly deviant. This is harsh criticism to direct at a novel that, as I say, uses the narrative of a boy and his dog in very beautiful way. Were these parallels restricted to Donovan's novel, I would have no problems, but parallels between homosexuality and teenagers' love of animals are drawn too frequently to be dismissed lightly.

Horsing around: The queer carnalities of the stable

In his historical survey of animals in adolescent fiction, Walter Hogan points out that horse stories were traditionally "high-stakes proving grounds of virile manhood" (2009:17), and that girls appearing in early horse stories (such as Velvet Brown in *National Velvet* by Enid Bagnold [1935]) needed to cross-dress to compete. This tradition of masculine virility – combined with the widely held view, discussed in the previous chapter, that gender identity and sexual orientation are intimately linked – may indeed explain why horse stories are so very often associated with lesbians. In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Luce Irigaray comments that "The dominant sociocultural economy leaves female homosexuals only a choice between a sort of *animality* ... and *the imitation of male models*" (Irigaray 1985:196; emphasis in original). Elspeth Probyn (1995) offers a more positive spin on the seemingly intimate connection between lesbian desire and bestiality as she lauds the opportunities offered by the stables to enable girls to express their queer desires through their mutual love of horses.

Within children's literature, we have a separate genre of 'pony books' devoted to the topic of intimate connections between girls and their horses. An avid reader of these books in her youth, Elspeth Probyn examines "this connection of girls and girls and horses, body against body against body ... always girls and girls and horses together, with nary a boy in sight" (1995:10). Even outside the genre of the pony book, the strong attachments formed between girls through horses abound in mainstream literature such as Enid Blyton's *Upper Fourth at Malory Towers*, where the classic tomboy 'Bill' and femme new-girl, Clarissa form an unbreakable bond though their mutual love of horses. How does the world of the stables create a queer space in which same-sex desire can flourish alongside the love felt for an animal? Probyn makes references to a number of classic lesbian novels, including Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), ostensibly the first lesbian novel in English, which provide "a seamless articulation of horses, bodies and lesbian desire" (Probyn 1995:11).

In *The Well of Loneliness*, Stephen Gordon (the female protagonist) names her pony after Collins, the maid she desires, and takes pleasure in riding her. Given Stephen's difficulties in acknowledging and acting upon her carnal desires for certain women in her life, it is perhaps unsurprising that *riding* should form her

substitute. There are relatively few activities in which one gets to wrap one's thighs around a living creature, sex and riding are the only two that come to mind. Stephen Gordon is able to "enjoy her love for Collins through her horse. ... Moreover, the image of the horse meets up with the image of her lover. Drawn on by her desire, they are made to intersect at [Stephen's] body" (Probyn 1995:11). The novel appeared when the works of the early sexologist, Havelock Ellis, were in vogue. Ellis drew connections between adolescent lesbianism and later desires for human-animal bonds. Probyn accepts the image, but challenges the reasoning behind it. For her, images of lesbian desire are portrayed through the connection between masculine-women's bodies and their equestrian mounts simply because we accept the convention: "The image is lesbian because of the way it moves me to desire and of the way in which my desires moves it. The image is queer because I queer its relation to other images and bodies" (Probyn 1995:12). In other words, queerness is projected onto the image as a cultural shorthand that serves both heterosexual and queer communities alike.

The reasons why pre-pubescent and pubescent girls are so often drawn towards horses ultimately interests me less than the way the assumption that equestrian energy is a masculine force is used to make literary stables such a fascinating space for investigating gender identity, sexual orientation and desire. The intense emotional relationships adolescent girls have with their horses or form with one another in the context of the stables have been so widely discussed that the topic has found its way into adolescent fiction. In Jessie Haas's novel *Working Trot* (1983), the heterosexual protagonist, James MacLiesh, who loves riding, wonders why so much of the equestrian world is dominated by women:

the psychological theories he'd read that adolescent girls found in horses a symbol of masculinity, a love affair that substituted the one they all supposedly wanted with their fathers and that predated the ones with their boyfriends. James found the idea extremely offensive and probably wrong. Besides, where did it leave him? A boy with feminine elements in love with a (male) substitute for a boyfriend?

(*Working Trot*, p. 106)

In this novel, James's heterosexuality is reasserted, and the male virility of the stable is reclaimed. The comment is valuable as it suggests that the masculine virility of the stable has been so over-written by lesbian imagery that the stables have become a primarily queer site rather than a site of patriarchal dominance.

Despite this widespread belief that stables are a site for expressions of lesbian sexuality, in his discussion of same-sex desire in horse stories for teenagers, Hogan (2009) only discusses male homosexual desire. Of these, only Nancy Springer's *The Boy on the Black Horse* (1994) works in the same way as the lesbian classics mentioned above as it draws parallels between the love of horses and hidden

same-sex desire. The 13 year old protagonist, Gray, muses that “In a way I liked Chav more, because being around him was like riding a black stallion” (*The Black Horse*, p. 50). Unable to name the excitement and desire he feels, Gray – like Stephen in *The Well of Loneliness* – is restricted to expressing his desires through his feelings about being close to the horse. The majority of the works Hogan mentions, however, use the setting of the stables to challenge the assumption that tough, ‘masculinist’ men cannot be gay.

Hogan identifies Ron Koertge’s *The Arizona Kid* from 1988 as a key work in this trend in which masculine identity and homosexual desire are interrogated through the tradition of the horse novel. In this novel, the 16 year old protagonist works alongside his gay uncle at the Tucson racetrack and gradually overcomes some of his homophobia. In this novel, the gay character is neither the protagonist nor an adolescent and the stable setting seems exclusively concerned with establishing that stereotypically masculine men can also be gay rather than with drawing parallels between the love of horses and same-sex desire. The same sentiment lies behind Jean Ferris’s *Eight Seconds*. The novel’s title alludes to the feat of proving one’s masculinity by staying on an enraged rodeo bull for 8 seconds or more. The point of the novel seems to be that John Ritchie only realises he is gay when he meets Kit Crowe, a cowboy who is very masculine and gay. John has apparently assumed that all gay men are effeminate, and has never felt attracted by femininity, whether from men or his girlfriend. Susan Juby’s *Another Kind of Cowboy* also draws on stereotypes of feminine and masculine behaviours around horses, albeit in a slightly more subtle manner. The novel alternates between chapters which are focalised through Alex Ford (who is gay, 16, poor and has an alcoholic father) and chapters which are focalised through Cleo O’Shea (who is spoilt, rich and brat-tish). These two troubled teenagers are trained by a gay couple, Fergus and Ivan, in dressage. Their development is expressed through the way in which they relate to horses, but also in the way they combine the stereotypically feminine strength of nurturing with stereotypically masculine self-control.

In these horse stories depicting gay men, as with Donovan’s *I’ll Get There. It Better be Worth the Trip*, the animal-human relationship is used to illustrate growing maturity and stereotypical gender behaviours. And whilst all the novels mentioned so far are intended to express a generally positive view of same-sex desire, the use of animals as transitional objects hints at an unease with accepting the desiring teenager as a fully mature human.

Somewhat curiously, given the widespread acceptance that there is something queer about adolescent girls’ fascination with horses, the same tradition in literature for adults and commentaries from feminist critics, none of the novels in the corpus depict lesbian desire being formed through an animal as a transitional object. Tison Pugh (2011) offers a delightful queer reading of Laura Ingalls’s queer

desire for horses in Wilder's *Little House* series, in which he shows how horses form transitional objects of desire for Laura. It is Laura's love of horses which first attract her to Almanzo, and it is his beautiful horses which enable her to transition away from her family of birth and reorient herself towards her new life with her husband. But although Laura's desires may be queer, she is no lesbian. A positive slant to take on this situation would be that the relatively few authors who dare to write about adolescent lesbian sexuality choose not to denigrate same-sex desire between teenage girls as being bestial, temporary, immature or in any other way resembling the love between animals and humans. This is not to say that all the books in the corpus are gung ho about the desiring adolescent girl, or that her desires are never considered bestial. Uneasiness about heterosexual adolescent girls' carnal desires do draw parallels between their sexuality and animal sexuality, but they more likely to do so through metamorphosis than through transitional creatures. When the parallels are drawn through the trope of metamorphosis, however, the ambiguity that arises from the fantastic premise on which the transformation is based opens up a wide range of possibilities. Although such texts suggest a fluidity between the animal and adolescent body, this fluidity may be presented not simply as a way of denying or disguising adolescent desires, or simply dismissing them as deviant. It also opens up genuinely transformational, radical ways of understanding and empowering the desiring adolescent.

Metamorphosis: Disguising deviant desires

Lassén-Seger (2006:45–58) argues that metamorphosis into animal form is commonly used as a trope for expressing the adolescent characters' ambivalence about the changes puberty begets on their bodies and, by extension, their ambivalent feelings about their sexuality. Whilst I do not claim that all teenagers embrace the onset of sexual feelings with gusto, I do want to recall the rather obvious fact that this ambivalence is not a reflection of the *adolescent readers'* feelings, it is an expression of the *adult writers'* perceptions and concerns about the onset of adolescent carnal desire and teenagers' maturation, whether acknowledged overtly or not. And it is this ambivalence, rather than the ambivalence the teenage reader or protagonist may or may not feel that is my primary interest.

Reading the trope of metamorphosis as an expression of adult concern reveals the ambivalence surrounding this common trope. In her article on "Beautiful Beasts", Marina Warner observes that "Within today's myths of human nature, ... the child and beast don't stand at opposite ends, but are intertwined, continuous, inseparable. And yet they're in polar opposition to one another, too" (1994:63). Warner's observation seems particularly pertinent to understanding the desire

adolescent characters feel when in animal form. In their metamorphosed state, the characters' sexual activities no longer seem as threatening to the aetnonormative powers as they would in their unchanged state. The 'real child' within the tiger's or dog's body is protected from view as the animal gives way to 'instincts' and 'mates' leaving the child-self protected.

Fictional children and adolescents are far more likely to undergo metamorphosis than their adult counterparts suggesting that, for the adults who produce these works and the society that endorses them, the beastly nature of the youngster is an omnipresent source of uncontrolled power that can be unleashed at any moment. This power is presented as being fearful to the fictional adolescents, and so fearful to the adult author that the sexual element must be obscured from view. An early example of this form of writing is William Rayner's *Stag Boy* (1972). Although clearly concerned with burgeoning sexuality, it would be inaccurate to describe the fictional characters in this novel as sexually active, since the nature of their sexual activity is restricted to riding on a stag. Yet the sexualized language reveals that, as in the cases of same-sex desire discussed above, the connection between stag and woman allows the adolescent to express a desire that must otherwise remain hidden.

Shuddering with pleasure: Embracing the power of the stag

William Rayner's *Stag Boy* is set on Exmoor in the early 1970s. It contains overt allusions to J.W. Fortescue's *Story of a Red Deer* (1897), which is also set on Exmoor at end of the nineteenth century as well as overt references to the legends surrounding Herne the hunter and regional folklore.¹ Throughout the last millennium, stag hunting was popular on Exmoor (North Devon, UK), and was one of the last places where deer rather than foxes could be hunted on horseback with hounds. The hunts themselves feature strongly in both novels, both as a source of excitement and danger, but also to promote a commentary on the delicate ecosystem of the region. This is particularly prominent in *Stag Boy*, where evil characters are characterised through their interest in or establishment of intensive farming

1. There are also obvious parallels with Peter Shaffer's play *Equus*, produced the same year. Like Mary, Alan rides naked on the back of the horses and appears to enter a trance like state while doing so. Like Mary, Alan destroys the horses in order to resolve his ambivalent feelings about his sexual desires outside the animal-human bond. In both narratives, the bestial desires of the teenager are presented as being dangerous, tantalising and in need of control. They can only be temporary. Nevertheless, at the end of both the novel and the play, readers and audience are left with a sense of loss as the passion of adolescent's animal passion is tamed by the civilized world. There is a raw nostalgia and sadness that such passion is incommensurate with the demands of civilization.

techniques (such as batteries for egg production) and the development of tourism over agriculture. However, these issues are placed in the periphery and the problem that is foregrounded is a love triangle formed as two boys, Jim and Edward, complete for the attentions of Mary.

The novel begins when Jim returns to his native Exmoor to recover from asthma. He stays with the Yeandles, who are well-versed in local lore. During his absence (caused by the death of his father and his family's descent into relative poverty), his childhood sweetheart, Mary, has developed a relationship with the very wealthy son of a doctor, Edward. The struggle between the two is characterised in terms of class differences and their relationship with the surrounding nature. Where Edward is suave, wealthy and offers Mary urban pleasures in the form of car rides, dances and big houses, Jim offers a connection to childhood, a spiritual connection to the region and, later, animal lust. Forced to choose between the civilized world and the world of nature, Mary initially chooses Edward, but she is drawn back to Jim by her physical desire.

The connecting point is the hunt. Edward can take Mary deer hunting, but the impoverished Jim cannot. Deer hunting has been associated with the nobility since the time of William the Conqueror until well into the early modern era. Punishments for hunting stags were severe (including maiming, blinding or even death (Sax 1990:125). Thus the class issues raised in Rayner's novel have a long tradition. Jim, the impoverished outcast, cannot join the hunt and so goes on foot into the woods. There he finds a pair of antlers set in a helmet hidden in what appears to be a long barrow (an ancient grave). By placing the helmet on his head, Jim gains connection to a magnificent black stag. Whilst connected, Jim's human knowledge can be used to enable the stag to escape those who hunt him (for example by catching a ride on the back of a hay cart, which hides his scent, or by untangling himself from a noose). In return, the stag helps Jim to woo Mary, first by bringing her a rose, and then by encouraging Mary to ride the stag.

The image of the stag is one with a long, but ambivalent, history. On the one hand, "The stag has often been understood as a symbol of male sexuality, and the transformation could perhaps be understood as being possessed by sexual desire" (Sax 1990:127). This tradition is certainly central to Rayner's novel, however, its flipside is also apt: "the possession of the stag horns was popularly understood as a symbol for being a cuckold" (Sax 1990:130). Jim draws on the power of the stag precisely because he feels that he is being ousted by Edward; he discovers the stag's horns whilst Mary is out riding the hunt with Edward, and uses the sexuality of the stag to entice Mary to him.

Mary is able to accept her physical responses to the stag more easily than she can accept her desires for either Jim or Edward. The raw, 'natural' sexuality of the stag helps her accept her own carnal desires. Mary's rides on the back of the stag

are characterised by overtly sexualised language, but even once Mary has realised that Jim and the stag are one: "Mention of their night journeys was taboo. They were timid, too much aware of other people's opinions and of their own youth and ignorance. Only in their wordless journeys through the dark did all worries and embarrassment fall away, leaving them free and happy, and innocent" (*Stag Boy*, p. 124–5). By disguising the adolescents' sexuality in the metaphor of riding a stag, Rayner has created a space in which to comment on the mixed attitudes surrounding adolescent sexuality. On the one hand, he celebrates the freedom, pleasure and 'natural' characteristics, but on the other hand he clearly places it within the realm of taboo, as something to keep hidden, and perhaps even be ashamed of. He also expresses the idea that sexual desire is something which is irresistible, but he has found a way to enable his protagonists to express their desires and yet remain "innocent" (*ibid.*).

The irresistible urges are presented as being gender specific. Mary is seduced by the Stag Jim's bodily presence. In the last half hour before she goes to meet him for the first time, she is depicted in a state of anticipation which can easily be read in terms of sexual arousal, and which again draws on the motif of turning the sexualised adolescent into a ghostly figure:

She lay on top of the bed, tossing and turning ... How hot and syrupy the air was, with the moonlight hanging in it like a fine mist. Mary felt she was stifling and flung out her arms and legs, lying spread eagled on the bed. There was a dew of sweat on her skin and her nightdress clung to her body.

Before long she felt so restless that she simply had to get up. In the glimmering pool of the wardrobe mirror, she watched her image rise like a ghost. She climbed out of bed and drifted over to the mirror, peering at the dim reflection. Was it really her? It was so hot. So hot. Dreamily, she slipped the straps of the nightdress from her shoulders and let it slide down to her feet; then, after a moment, she stepped out of it and stood there naked. Her skin had a milky sheen in the moonlight. Her body glowed against the dark shapes of the furniture. How pale and insubstantial she looked, a phantom girl reflected in the still pool of the mirror.

(*Stag Boy*, p. 82–3)

The ghost imagery in this section serves several different functions. Firstly, it emphasises the 'mind-out-of-body' quality of the experience. This is in keeping with the fantasy mode of the novel as a whole. When Jim is connected to the stag, his human body lies in a trance-like state in the Yeandle's home. In terms of what the ensuing passage suggests about Mary's sexuality, the separation of mind and body reveals a presumed split between her physical desires and her cognitive desires. She opens herself up to a physical, embodied encounter with the otherness of stag, but abdicates responsibility for this action by questioning the reality of the encounter and even the possibility of denying such an urge.

The ghostly image appears in “the still pool of the mirror” (ibid.). The pool imagery picks up on Jim’s encounters with the stag, and underlines the connection between the green world and sexual awakening. On the one hand, sexuality is depicted as a return to the green world, and escape from the worldliness of the world into a purer, less socialised world (see Natov 2003:91). On the other hand, the mirror imagery is a trope for accessing the inner self. When Mary looks into the mirror, she has the potential to move beyond simply viewing herself internally and encounter herself as others might. What she sees is an “insubstantial ... phantom girl” (*Stag Boy*, p. 83). This suggests that, for Mary, sexuality results in a loss of self.

This sense of loss is central to each of Mary’s encounters with the stag. Her reactions are described in terms of submissiveness, implying a loss of freewill once in a state of arousal. They are also described using the vocabulary of sexual desire: she experiences “a skimming vibration [as if] some nerve of pleasure [was] being strummed in her” and is frequently described as shuddering and restless when she recalls her night encounters with the stag (*Stag Boy*, p. 106). As a result, Jim-as-human takes on an appeal that supersedes the feelings she earlier had for Edward. She submits to Jim’s request that she ride the stag.

‘Next time,’ he murmured, ‘you must ride.’

She closed her eyes in submission. His lips brushed her cheek. She remembered the pointed lances of bone near her face, the weight of the stag’s head on her breasts, the hard muscle of his body, the shuddering pleasure she had felt in his presence. (*Stag Boy*, p. 106)

For Rayner, female sexual desire is no less overwhelming or insubstantial than male desire, but the consequences, he implies, are more dangerous for girls. Although Jim experiences a potential loss of self when trapped in his mental connection with the stag, and even endangers his life, he remains fully embodied. Mary’s desire renders her submissive and insubstantial. She floats, drifts and engages with her sexuality only once transformed into a ghostlike state.

Notably, the only time that the text actually depicts Mary and Jim during one of their night rides, neither of the adolescent characters are focalised. Once again, Rayner avoids encountering adolescent sexuality directly, he only alludes to the desire and consequences of that desire being fulfilled before and after the events, but never actually during the encounter. The teens’ night ride is described by a visitor at the Castle bar in Porlock. He describes having seen “a young woman dressed in a flowing white garment, a sheet maybe, and she was holding on to the stag’s antlers” as she rode across the moor on the back of the black stag (*Stag Boy*, p. 122). Mary’s face is described as smiling, but as though she were in a trance. Although stag and rider seem real, and the man thinks he heard the sound of

hooves, he describes them as “floating over the heather” and enquires as to whether there are “any apparitions of that sort hereabouts?” (*ibid.*). Once again, animal metamorphosis combines with ghost imagery to suggest that embracing one’s ‘animal instincts’ results in a disguising of the adolescent’s desire as something too deviant to be acknowledged directly.

As time passes, Jim and Mary’s relationship on the human level also seems to develop, although they are both aware of a great disparity between the intense emotions they experience as stag and rider, and the awkwardness they feel as teenagers meeting in a deserted cottage. The potential for sexuality to damage human relationships has already been acknowledged earlier in the novel in the chapter titled ‘Kisses’. In this chapter, Mary is repeatedly and violently kissed and groped by Edward which leads Edward to believe they are closer as a couple, but leaves Mary thinking about Jim and how much she would prefer to kiss him than Edward. When the opportunity to kiss Jim arises, however, the boys prove to be more similar than Mary imagined. Jim allows the stag to access his mind, and so he behaves like a stag in rut and attacks Mary sexually. He is only brought to his human senses, and thus avoids raping her, by Mary’s declaration that she loves him. The encounter leaves them both shaken and aware that they must cease to meet as stag and rider if they are to create a human relationship.

As a feminist reader, it is hard not to wince at Mary’s declaration of love precisely at the point when Jim is trying to rape her. Since his mind is supposedly occupied by the stag when this happens, Jim is abdicated of responsibility for his actions. Mary, however, has to maintain responsibility for retaining her bodily integrity as she must protect herself regardless of whether the source of attack is human, beast or otherwise. The declaration of love as a source of protection foreshadows the ending of the novel where Mary’s love saves Jim’s life (see Bramwell 2009:45–7 for further comments on the sexism of the novel).

The novel ends on the day of the last stag hunt of the season. Jim has been torn between his desire to protect the stag from the hunters one last time, and his knowledge that he can no longer break free of the stag’s mind at will. He knows that re-entering the stag’s mind will lead to a total loss of selfhood. All night he struggles to resist the stag’s call; a struggle which leaves him “pant[ing] with desire” (*Stag Boy*, p. 144). Eventually he gives in and joins the stag as he attempts to evade his pursuers. He leads the stag to the Yeandle’s farm. Mary is already there, attempting to gain connection to Jim through his entranced human body. She recognises that it is too late to reach Jim this way, and so returns to the abandoned cottage where she takes up the helmet with antlers, thereby breaking a taboo as a female in a male body. Unlike Jim, she is able to resist the urge to pledge herself to ‘blood’ and instead pledges herself to ‘love’, even though this feels “like inflicting a wound upon herself” (*Stag Boy*, p. 157). In doing so, she

releases Jim from the stag's grip, and whilst the animal dies, Jim is reborn in Mary's arms. "Using Mary as Jim's redeemer in this manner, Rayner makes the point that both sexes benefit from an interrogation of traditional gender roles" (Lassén-Seger 2006:54). And although the interrogation is fairly limited, recalling that the work was published in 1972, the problematization of gender seems fairly developed.

In her study of the symbolism of the stag hunt, Boria Sax argues that "the hunt of the stag has usually functioned as a ritualistic taming of the forest" (1990:121). If we read 'forest' as standing for the green world of nature more generally, then it would make sense to regard Jim's salvation as a taming of the beast within. Given that Jim's 'beast' is what drives his sexuality, the novel becomes, once again, a story in which the female must tame the male, bringing him into the civilized realm. In terms of what this scene seems to say more specifically about adolescent sexuality, it might initially seem rather traditional. Firstly, it implies that 'boys will be boys'; they cannot be expected to be able to resist their physical desires. Girls, on the other hand, are better equipped to restrain their desires and so socialise the unfortunate male into acceptable forms of sexuality through romance. In this way, *Stag Boy* is very much in line with the animal bridegroom tradition. However, as Warner comments in her discussion of *Beauty and the Beast*, in other contexts it is more typically the male character who is depicted as being rational and civilised, whereas female characters tend to be associated with emotions and closer to nature (Zipes 2009:87–120). Thus the reversal of this time honoured tradition in the context of animal bridegroom stories and *Stag Boy* places the onus on the female character to civilize the animal passions of her partner.

Where *Stag Boy* differs markedly from *The Frog Prince* trope is that Mary is more attracted to Jim in his stag form than she is in his human form. Initially, readers are encouraged to feel pity for Jim who seems at a disadvantage to his rival, Edward, in every possible way. He cannot join Mary at the hunt, because he has no horse. Edward can take his clothing for granted, but Jim must take care of his trousers and shoes because his mother has worked long hours and saved hard to obtain them. Unlike Edward, Jim has neither the physical strength to jump across the stream, nor the manners to laugh off his failure. He embraces the past; Edward, the future. Jim is not approved of by Mary's father, Edward's visits are encouraged. In every way, Jim appears to be the less than ideal partner. What he does offer, however, is stability. He is a 'new male' before the 'new male' had been invented. He has already loved Mary since he was a child, he is deeply rooted in Exmoor and wishes to bind her to the land in the traditional ways. His transformations into the stag enable him to reveal his more sexual side, and so the combination fits the ideal balance between nurturing and sexual satisfaction that Buss claims is universal

(2003:5). In this way, *Stag Boy* may be less a story of a woman acting as the force of civilisation, taming her wild man, and more the story of a woman who restores the man whom Jim has always been. During the carnivalesque interlude of their night rides, Mary has been able to express herself as a wild woman, but ultimately desires a return to the status quo.

Mary's role in destroying the stag within Jim can be read in terms of domestication and submission, just as her response to the bodily encounters with the stag leave her submissive and apparitional. Nevertheless, she seems more alive and more fully herself during their night rides. Acceptance of her embodied self is liberating for Mary; it enables her to make her own decisions. Thus Mary is ambivalently both empowered and disempowered by her encounters with the stag. Recalling that this is a novel from 1972, when 'women's liberation' was only starting to enter mainstream consciousness, Rayner offers an insightful, complex view of the ways in which expectations about gendered behaviour and sexual desire often interact to the detriment of the feminine.

Stag Boy is a text which deploys metamorphosis as a means of disguising the adolescents' carnal desires, however, the disguise seems to me to have certain advantages over a more direct portrayal. It certainly does not seem malicious or fearful of the existence of adolescent carnal desire, even though the text refrains from depicting Jim and Mary enjoying direct sexual contact with one another. One of the more sophisticated features of Rayner's novel is that sexuality is only evident to those readers who are already recognise their own sexual desires. In a literal sense, Mary and Jim are not sexually active, yet their night rides clearly belong to the realm of carnal desire. As with the queer subtexts discussed in the previous chapter, less sophisticated readers, who may well have experienced the same urges as Jim and Mary but not necessarily identified their source, Rayner's novel offers a means by which to communicate at their own comfort level. For prepubertal readers, whose sexuality is not in a form that they can articulate, Mary and Jim's wordless encounters can still resonate on the level of affect, even if they do not necessarily resonate cognitively. Rayner has also found a way to pander to those amongst the adult reading audience who are not willing to engage with the idea of adolescents' sexual feelings. The text allows for the teenagers to remain – in a formal sense – 'sexually innocent', while expressing carnal desire as a driving life force. Neither Jim nor Mary can help their desires, and so they can still be perceived as children rather than adults.

By the 1990s, Rayner's insistence on preserving the carnal innocence of his characters would seem dated. Two novels by Melvin Burgess – *Tiger Tiger* (1996) and *Lady: My Life as a Bitch* (2001) – not only incorporate full coitus, they designate the on-set of carnal desires as ending childhood and marking the on-set of adolescence.

Unleashing the power of the tiger

Burgess's *Tiger Tiger* (1996) contains two characters who metamorphose. The main character who is able to shape shift is the spirit tiger, Lila. Most animal-human metamorphosis stories feature humans who can take on animal form, but Lila reverses this trend: "The girl was a camouflage, a trick, not herself. Lila was a tiger. If she could not live as a tiger, then she would rather die" (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 139). The other character who changes form, Steve, is transformed into a tiger by Lila only once. His metamorphosis is intended to continue the survival of the species. Whilst in the form of a tiger, Steve's sexual encounter takes place in a trance like state that suggests lack of freewill; he is seduced by Lila. In the process, he is permanently transformed.

Steve, as I have already noted, is only twelve years old. This is the traditional age of initiation into adulthood many societies, and yet the specifically sexual nature of Steve's initiation 'ceremony' makes Steve's age noteworthy. He is not just legally under age, his body is marked as being pre-pubertal, even though his interest in knowing more about sex has clearly been piqued. The evening that culminates in their mating begins with Steve and Lila-the-human climbing the dales together. The omniscient narrator refers to them as "two children" (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 131), thereby implying a lack of sexual maturity. Given their ages (Steve thinks that Lila-as-human is about 14 years old), this may seem neutral, but it is the only time Steve is referred to as a child and it is used just before Steve rides on Lila-the-tiger's back. This ride, unlike Mary's ride on Jim-as-stag, foreshadows the literal mating between Lila and Steve-as-tiger a few pages later.

Tonight, he was on Lila's trail. Transformed, he was no cub, either. Lila, thinking herself the last of her kind, had made for herself a tiger.

Steve never knew what happened that night. He never understood what it was that Lila wanted and why she had returned to him again and again ... or why she had turned her strength on him in this way. There were no memories, just feelings. ... There were no witnesses – only the tawny owl ... saw two tigers, frost in their shaggy coats, mating that night under Pen-y-Ghent. (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 137)

Although exposed to the elements ("frost in their shaggy coats"), Steve and Lila's sexual encounter is rendered invisible by lack of witnesses and, in Steve's case at least, lack of memory.

He had no memories of the previous night, no knowledge of having been a tiger. But he knew that Lila had made him an unimaginable, unaccountable gift, and that he would never be the same again. He had grown up overnight in a way no one had ever done before. She had left inside him forever a streak of the tiger in his soul. (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 140–141)

This absence of memory and the transient quality of Steve's sexual encounter mean that, as Lassén-Seger notes, Steve's initiation is only partial: Steve gains "insights into adult secrets that lie outside the realm of innocent childhood" (2006:260), but he is still 'innocent'. In this way, Burgess, like Rayner before him, seems to both have his cake and eat it. He can maintain the image of Steve as a sexual innocent, and yet endorse – even celebrate – his capacity for desire.

Steve's sexual encounter with Lila brings about a permanent metamorphosis as he is transformed from boy into a man whose soul is streaked with tiger. In this way, Burgess's novel supports the very traditional belief that adults and children are irrevocably different from one another. The very concept of 'a rite of passage' is premised on the belief that the individual going through the process moves from one state to another, distinctively different, state. Despite his reputation as a radical writer, Burgess's presentation of the loss of virginity as a means of transforming a boy into a man relies on a rigid division between children and adults. Oddly, the novel seems to leave little space for adolescence as a transitional phase, and so harps back to older models of adult-child relations. When Steve is returned to human form, he is permanently changed: there is no middle ground.

There is no middle ground for Lila either. She pays for the ability to extend her magical powers to Steve with her ability to shift into human form. After their sexual encounter, she is totally tiger. Although Burgess has clarified that this is her primary form, Lila is undeniably lessened in a way that Steve is not. She is pure beast; there is nothing in the text to suggest she has retained a streak of humanity in her soul. She may not have a soul.

The association of loss with coitus – as I have frequently noted – is not unusual. What makes the loss associated with Lila's sexual encounter with Steve remarkable is that it is not Lila's first sexual encounter. Lila is transformed by both the sexual acts included within the story, as both result in the conception of cubs. Lila is yet another example of the virgin-to-mother trope evident in so many of the novels in the corpus. The conception of her first set of cubs by Sirrah transforms her into a mother, but results in no loss of magical powers. Her encounter with a human results in a loss of self, she is somehow degraded. In his comparison of human and animal carnality, Burgess seems to favour the beast. In both *Tiger Tiger* and *Lady*, Burgess presents bestial sexuality as a better light than human; his animal characters only mate when they are in season.

Seasonal desires and the desire of being in season

The first scene in which readers see a connection between Lila and Steve is focalised through the male protagonist. Steve watches Lila entice and slaughter a sheep with minimal force. Her humane killing is contrasted sharply with that of

the other tigers in the tiger park, who do not possess the ability to transform themselves into human beings. As the term 'humane' implies, Lila's behaviour indicates that she has supposedly taken something of her human self into her tiger self. As she eats, Steve and Lila meet one another's gaze with a look that is profoundly sexualised:

[T]he eyes of the tigress met those of the boy over the dead sheep. Lila stopped and stared; and her eyes held him and entered him. Just as the sheep had done before him, Steve felt his legs grow weak and his neck turn to jelly. He clung to the wire for support and bowed his head. Were it not for the wire, the tigress could command him to wait, as the sheep had waited, while she padded down to him. And just at the moment, he wouldn't have minded. He was her creature. ... 'Lila,' whispered Steve. Lila was magic.

He always sought her out when he went to the Tiger Park, which he did almost every week. She did this to him from time to time. It was a sort of game. Lila liked to tease him.

(*Tiger Tiger*, p. 7–8)

After Steve has left the tiger park, the narrative shifts to Lila, and we discover the source of her sexual energy: she is in season for the first time. Steve's reaction to her, however sexualised the language may be, is not itself sexual. He is "her creature" and is willing to submit to her desires but, at this point in the narrative, he does not comprehend the nature of his desire for her.

Steve's submissive pleasure in the face of Lila's sexualised energy is one of the most radical elements of Burgess's novel, especially given the boy's youth. The normal relations of patriarchy are overturned as Burgess creates a male character who is literally rendered immobile by his response to the female's 'teasing'. The scene takes place in the midst of a kill, which highlights the tigress's deadly powers, made manifest through her claws and teeth. She is, nearly literally, the deadly *vagina dentata*, and Steve's response suggests that engagement with the 'wrong sort of girl' can lead to a total loss of selfhood. Yet Burgess manages to avoid preaching by clarifying that the danger of Lila's sexual appeal lies in the disparity of strength. She is *vagina dentata* only so long as she and Steve are not in the same form. His desire for her when she is in her human form and their mutual desire when Steve is transformed into a tiger are not frowned upon.

Steve first encounters Lila in human form when he goes out to collect milk and enters the barn where Lila has hidden the two remaining tigers, Donna and Will. Steve accidentally spills milk on her, and the milk running over her "astounding skin" (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 44) reminds us that, despite her girlish appearance, Lila is a mother whose cubs have just been murdered. She has covered part of her body with a blanket and, in a reversal of the first scene, submits herself totally to Steve's will. Steve, unable to interpret Lila's actions, is struck by his desire.

[Steve's] heart was still pounding. She was the strangest thing he had ever seen ... but she was only a girl after all, a slightly built girl. She was a few years older than him, a little bigger. She appeared to be naked under the blanket wrapped around her shoulders, which he thought he recognised as one he had seen before, lying around in the barn. Her nakedness scared him, although he couldn't help trying to peer and see her body under the blanket. She was beautiful and exciting. She looked as if she could be very strong. (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 45)

Lila is no longer in season, on the contrary, she is still lactating, yet she is still highly desirable: Steve “cannot help” his desire to see her naked body. In the wild, male tigers may kill tiger cubs in order to bring the female into season again. Lila's cubs have been killed by a male human, and so it seems fitting that it is a human male who benefits from Lila's returning fertility. Lila's body is desirable and yet it inspires fear in Steve. His first action is to push away his desires as if they were something shameful, and he rushes to find clothing to hide her body from his view. Once she is covered up, Steve feels “a lot better” (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 48).

Despite the ridiculous combination of clothing she wears, Lila “only wanted a few rings in her nose and ears and her hair cut short and she would have been a proper teen-dream” (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 49). The short hair and facial piercings Burgess suggests Lila-the-human might need to complete her look are noticeably features which signal rebellion against adult norms but domestication in animals. Steve inadvertently longs to domesticate Lila; a desire which grows once he recognises that she is simultaneously both tiger and human. “He wanted her to stay as a girl forever” (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 108). In this modern play on a traditional Selkie story, Steve's desire for Lila to reject her “true shape and nature” (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 123) in order to become the ideal mate is overturned as Lila turns Steve into a mate that suits her. Significantly, she turns him into a tiger, not because she desires him, but because she believes that all her cubs have died and there are no other tigers left in the world. “When there no tigers left, she had invented one. There was life growing inside her already from the magical union of the previous night” (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 139).

Ultimately, Lila's animal lust is not *recreational* but *procreational*. Despite the seemingly uncontrollable sexual desire she arouses in Steve, Lila's sexuality turns out to be very restrained. She is only sexually active when she is in season, and thus only has sex twice during the course of the novel. On the first occasion, Lila's knowing choice of sexual partner is presented as being a specifically human trait: “But as with people, so with tigers” (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 13). Lila very specifically picks out her first mate, Sirrah, and very deliberately avoids mating with the alpha male, Tiny; she leaves him “roaring his rage and frustration” (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 12). So, despite her seemingly irresistible sexuality, she is able to protect her body and she takes responsibility for doing so – and this is referred to as a human trait. Her control over her sexuality is presented as highly empowering. She forces Sirrah to

chase her, and face his fears of Tiny as he does so. Since Steve is also described as being “on Lila’s trail” (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 137), we may assume that she demands as much from him. The description of the way in which she evades Tiny, by using the wind direction to hide her scent and wriggling through the fence into Sirrah’s section of the park foregrounds Lila’s tiger-self. Yet despite the detailed descriptions of spray markings and tiger calls, Lila’s call to Sirrah is uttered in “a human-like voice” (*Tiger Tiger*, p. 12) reminding us that Lila’s need to hide, silence and protect her sexuality from unwanted males is paralleled in most of the fiction about sexually active teenage girls intended for an adolescent readership. It is clearly Lila’s responsibility to guard herself as she cannot expect males to control themselves in the face of her irresistible sexuality.

In this way, Burgess ridicules the idea that bestial sexuality is less restrained than human sexuality, and reveals his ambivalence towards female desire. Humans are one of the few species whose sexuality is largely separated from their procreative desires, and unrelated to fertility cycles. Furthermore, Lila’s need to protect her body from an unwanted sexual partner, woven into comments on Lila’s human qualities, means that Burgess’s presentation of sexuality in this novel is far less radical than one might expect from the *enfant terrible* of British adolescent literature. *Tiger Tiger* toes the traditional line far more than many other novels containing sexually active teenagers including his own return to the topic of uncontrolled animal bestiality and being ‘in heat’ in his 2001 novel, *Lady: My Life as a Bitch*. This is the novel that Reynolds uses as the basis for her claim that “writing about sex, sexuality and relationships between the sexes [is] one of the most radically changed areas in contemporary children’s literature” (2007:114) with which I began this enquiry.

In terms of how metamorphosis and other animal-child tropes are used to depict carnal desire, part of the change Reynolds identifies can be attributed to changes in the ways in which animals are viewed. Marina Warner has suggested that the latter half of the twentieth century saw a shift during which the status of animals has changed ([1994] 1995, especially Chapter Four). Rather than being unequivocally lower in status, she argues that praise for the natural world has raised the status of beasts beyond even that of the noble savage. For Warner, the animal kingdom has now become utopian, an escape from the horrors of mankind. Whilst I agree with Warner that images of animals and the natural world have become more complex in recent years, such that one can no longer as simply assume that adopting an animal form automatically indicates a fall or loss of status, the example texts in the corpus depicting adolescents who are or become sexually active in a transformed state always signal an entry into an uncivilized state. For some of the characters in the corpus, such as Sandra Francy in Burgess’s *Lady: My Life as a Bitch*, this entry is not entirely unwelcome.

In the heat of dog days

Sandra Francy, the sassy 17 year old protagonist of Burgess's *Lady: My Life as a Bitch*, is a flirtatious, sexually active, knowing adolescent who refuses to curb her libido to suit other people's ideas about how she should behave. Already from the first page of the novel, Sandra's sexuality seems to be unrestrained and yet she initially seems to be in control. She appears to enjoy her own promiscuity and revels in the attention she receives from all and sundry. As she puts it: "I want everyone to fancy me. I'd like the money in your pocket and the dirt on your shoe to turn around and look at me when I go past" (*Lady*, p. 4–5). Her hyperbolic desire to be desirable shows how Sandra experiences her sexuality as a powerful force of energy and power. And this, Lassén-Seger argues, is what makes *Lady* so terrifying for adult readers (2003:153). Nevertheless, the novel begins with Sandra recognising that she has had enough.

I'd been off my head lately. And it's been great, you know? Really, really great. The best time I'd ever had. Only, I was getting fed up. Well, not fed up – tired. It'd been going on a long time. It'd been a lot of boys and a lot of late nights (*Lady*, p. 2–3)

Sandra's desire to curb her sexuality is not expressed as a concern about her 'slutty' reputation; she genuinely seems to have enjoyed herself. Her desire to change is ostensibly motivated by internal factors such as being "fed up" or "tired" (*ibid.*).

Nevertheless, Burgess is not as positive about uncontrolled sexuality as his protagonist's behaviour might suggest. Despite her effervescence, Sandra does not seem to be as in control of her situation as she would like: she knows she won't be able to stop herself from having a fling with Wayne, even though this will delay her plan to reconnect with her old girlfriends. She is even somewhat relieved when the absence of a private space in which to have sex with Wayne provides an external obstacle. Unable to control her carnal desires, Sandra is grateful for the social taboo against having sex in public. In this way, Burgess can simultaneously celebrate his protagonist's *jouissance* and underline the value of societal regulations. The result is an opening text which ambivalently combines the frenzied thrill of a first kiss with the narrator's saddened reflections on what happened as a result of her temporary loss of control. Caught up in her own sexual excitement, Sandra knocks the drink out of the hand of a tramp who calls her a slut. He accidentally transforms her into a dog as a result.

The key point Burgess seems to want to underline in *Lady* is that Sandra's metamorphosis does not actually result in much of a change. The use of Sandra's voice as narrator supports the sense of continuity between her human-self and her dog-self. The word 'bitch' in title of the novel plays with the idea that women and dogs have a natural affinity. And yet, for all her faults, the one thing Sandra does

not do is bitch about her friends and attempt to blame anyone other than herself for her behaviour and its consequences. Equally, there is nothing 'ladylike' about either Sandra or Lady. The wordplay allows for stability of character and so suggests that Sandra was always a bit of a dog.

Each of the key scenes concerning Sandra's behaviour once she has been transformed into a dog is paralleled by another scene in which she behaved similarly when she was a girl. For instance, the opening scene depicting Sandra's last day as a girl shows the character delighting in the attentions of two boys: Wayne and Dobby. Wayne is one with whom she feels partnered and with whom she wants to have sex, but she revels in the attention she is simultaneously receiving from Dobby. She and Wayne are just considering the problems of finding a place to have sex when the incident with the tramp takes place. This scene is compared with Sandra-the-dog's (Lady's) first heat when she is followed by Fella, with whom she feels more affinity, while she revels in Mitch's attentions. The sex itself is overtly compared as Sandra cheerfully comments "I was a virgin twice – once as a girl and once as a dog. How many people can say that?" (*Lady*, p. 125). She then recounts in great detail the stories of both events, and the similarities are emphasised: the lack of a suitable place, the speed of the event, the pain, her initial disappointment, being comforted by her partner and finally enjoying copious amounts of sex with relative strangers. In other words, Sandra's sexuality, which caused her loss of self in the very overt sense of metamorphosis, is not dramatically altered by her transformation from girl to bitch.

Other paired events include Sandra's two transformations. The evening of Sandra's menarche, a transformation from girl to woman, is spent in sisterly bonding with her elder sister, Julie. Sandra's account of this evening is interwoven and paired with an evening of brotherly bonding in an allotment shed with Fella and Mitch the night she is transformed from girl to dog. The menstrual blood of menarche is replaced by the blood of the recently killed rabbit they bring as a gift. Both passages underline the transformation as a rite of passage, and both underline Sandra's initial alienation from her body. In both cases, it is a brother (or brother surrogate) who helps Sandra connect her mind and body and so complete the rite of passage.

In the human story, Sandra's younger brother, Adam, keeps asking "personal questions" about the details of Sandra's bleeding, which she experiences as being irritating and invasive (*Lady*, p. 22). When Sandra snaps that she doesn't know, Adam's response "But you must know, it's your body" (*ibid.*) connects menstruation to Sandra's body and self, whereas Sandra has only connected it to sanitary towels and painkillers. Initially, their mother supports Adam's right to be curious, but when Sandra turns the tables and suggests that "you tell him how much blood you have" (*ibid.*), Burgess skilfully creates a positive spin on the place of

menstruation in society. It is not a taboo subject, but it is private and it is a topic that connects women.

In the dog story, Fella helps Lady to see the possibilities her new bodily form offers. "What's so great? ... Your nose! Your mouth, your feet ... The freedom to be yourself!" (*Lady*, p. 45). Having connected Lady's mind with her transformed body, Fella reconnects her dog-self with her former girl-self:

You think what's happened to you is awful, some sort of disfigurement, some sort of handicap. It's not. It's a miracle. *You are more you than you have ever been before.* You're wonderful and beautiful – no really, every dog is beautiful. Take my advice. Don't worry about being human. You're better off as you are.

(*Lady*, p. 42–3; my italics)

These comments beg the question: how is Sandra better off as a dog than she was as a girl? The most obvious answer concerns her freedom from responsibilities. She does not need to study, plan a career, worry about money and, if she does ever have children, she won't need to take care of them for long. In other words, she can remain a child forever. And so Lassén-Seger draws connections between *Lady* and the long established literary tradition of killing off fictional child characters in order to preserve them in a state of perpetual childhood (2006:229–231). This is an interesting variation on the trope of the 'natural' child, not least because Sandra-as-Lady is particularly delighted that she can now have as much sex as wants, with whom she wants and where ever she wants. However, the price she pays for this, Nikolajeva points out, is a permanent descent within the human-animal hierarchy, thereby revealing "the male writer's contempt and fear of a wild and uncontrollable female" (2010a:135). For although Sandra now thinks of herself as having a totally unrestricted sexuality, a closer reading of the text reveals that Lady only has sexual desires within the very restricted time period when she is on heat. And even when she is on heat, she chooses her sexual partners with more discretion than she did as a girl.

Shortly before her transformation, Sandra has sex with a complete stranger, purely to annoy her sister and declare her sexual autonomy. However, even Sandra has to admit that this behaviour is self-damaging: "I felt dirty and used and horrible even though I'd done it myself. Horrible!" (*Lady*, p. 83). In the event that parallels it once she is a dog, Sandra-as-Lady attracts the attention of a "well fit" Alsatian (*Lady*, p. 120) during her first heat. This time, she resists the temptation even though he is "just a dog – but what a dog!" (*Lady*, p. 121). Sandra's decision to avoid sex is made of her own free will – as a dog no-one would criticise her for having sex with the Alsatian, but now she chooses her sexual partners with greater care than she did as a girl.

The one sexual activity which is less restrained once Sandra is a dog is masturbation. Lady blushes at the realisation that Ed, her former pet dog, might also have been human and realises he would have seen her masturbating when she was just “a little girl” whose breasts were “flat little pimples” (*Lady* p. 49). As a human, Sandra clearly embraced her carnality from a very early age, although she initially viewed it as something private. However, her thoughts on the shame associated with masturbation are worthy of further comment. Sandra-as-Lady suddenly realises that she is feeling ashamed that someone might realise that she has been masturbating, even though the interjection ‘you know’ in her comment “You know what I mean – having a diddle down there” (*Lady*, p. 52) serves to establish that, despite the secrecy surrounding masturbation, it is very common behaviour. Read as a comment from Burgess to his adolescent readers, it is hard not to interpret this as a didactic comment that teenagers should not feel ashamed of exploring their bodies. Expressed through the voice of the adolescent character, the didacticism is rendered more palatable, albeit no less instructional. Sandra overtly rejects shame, by laughing in its face:

I saw the funny side of it and I started laughing to myself. ... We don't have to worry about things. You can do what you want. I was finding the whole idea of being ashamed at playing with myself a bit funny. Why feel guilty about that? We dogs, we just do what we want to do. We don't have to trouble ourselves about who we do it with or who else is in the room at the time. What for? It's just natural, isn't it? I sat down and gave myself a good licking right there and then, in the middle of the pavement. I didn't care if the whole street was looking, and neither did the street. It was great. (*Lady*, p. 52–3)

Despite the overt message, which glorifies the only completely safe sexual practice, Burgess's comments have the unfortunate effect of inducing more shame. The scene in *Lady* recalls the (in)famous exchange in Judy Blume's *Forever* (1975) when Michael asks Katherine whether she is a virgin, and when she replies that she is, he responds “Don't get defensive, Katherine. It's nothing to be ashamed of” (*Forever*, p. 28). Roberta Seelinger Trites comments on this exchange

I read those words and cannot help thinking, “Shame never crossed my mind until Michael said no one should be ashamed.” The passage reminds me of an injunction against thinking about pink elephants: we cannot help it once we have been told not to. ... *Forever* doth protest too loudly: the reader may learn to feel shame about sex from being told not to feel ashamed. (Trites 2000:88–9)

Much has changed in the three decades since *Forever* was published. Sandra is a far more sexually liberated, sexually confident character than Katherine. And yet, Trites's comments on *Forever* resonate in my ear when I read Sandra protesting her own lack of shame. It is utterly unlike the ways in which the text challenges the

taboo of speaking about menstruation whilst still acknowledging the right to privacy. It is also unlike the complete lack of shame Deenie displays in Blume's novel, named after the protagonist. In *Deenie*, the narrative focuses on Deenie's feelings about having to wear a back brace, but incorporates so many descriptions of Deenie masturbating that the novel is Blume's most widely banned book. At no point does *Deenie* suggest there might be something shameful about satisfying her own sexual desires. Moreover, Sandra underlines the fact that her lack of shame stems from the freedom of her transformed state. As a girl, she implies, shamefulness is part and parcel of masturbation. Only dogs can be free from shame. So for all its libratory humour, Burgess's attitudes are ultimately very much toeing the socially endorsed line.

I find Sandra to be an extremely likeable character; there is much to be said for her joyful response to whatever life offers her. Whether it is the freedom to have sex with a stranger or being transformed into a dog, Sandra tends to make the most of her situation, and her optimism is contagious. So it is hardly surprising that reactions to the novel have often been very negative as reviewers fear that teenage readers will automatically wish to emulate the protagonist. However, as I have already noted, there is no credible evidence to indicate that young readers will automatically fall into the identification fallacy, and emulate fictional characters (see also Nikolajeva 2010a:185–202, 2010b). Indeed, the slash fiction phenomenon discussed in the previous chapter reveals a savvy reading audience. Just as Burgess's other well-known work, *Junk*, enabled adolescents to see what they might (or might not) be saying “no” to if they choose to try heroin, *Lady* allows adolescents to see what might (or might not) happen if one allows one's sexuality to become the dominating force in one's life. For all its humour, *Lady* is ultimately as keen to warn its young readers of the dangers of sexual behaviour that steps beyond societally endorsed norms as *Forever* was in its day. Sexually active adolescent girls, Burgess seems to argue, are worse than dogs, because at least a bitch restricts her sexuality to certain specified seasons.

Burgess is renowned for his willingness to expose teenage life in all its “warty glory”, an attitude that has earned him the reputation *enfant terrible* (Burgess 2004:297). Nevertheless, Burgess's ambivalence towards Sandra's sexual desires indicates quite how troubling female sexual desire remains, even for those authors who purport to celebrate the onset of carnal desire. My examination of Burgess's novels in which the protagonists are sexually active whilst in a state of metamorphosis reveals that, for all the surface-level subversiveness, they ultimately support a number of traditional values. These include beliefs in the capacity of sex to transform a child into an adult and that, by becoming sexually active, adolescents challenge adult authority. Burgess responds to these assumptions by pointing out the dangers of uncontrolled sexuality. The animal form and the notion of being ‘in

heat' or 'in season' is used by Burgess as a metaphor for embracing the actuality of sexuality, whilst promoting the benefits of restricting one's sexuality. Much the same can be said of Peter Dickinson's *Eva*.

Eva (originally published in 1988 but still in print at the time of writing) is an early eco-critical novel set in a dystopian future when humans have destroyed virtually all the world's natural habitat. The eponymous protagonist is rescued from an incurable coma at the age of 13 by being inserted into the body of an adult chimp, Kelly. Since *Eva* has grown up around chimps (her father is a scientist who specialises in them), she is able to come to terms with this transformation remarkably well. *Eva's* need to find a balance between her human and animal selves is used to shed light on the on-set of carnal desires. *Eva* wears children's overalls to "hide the sexual swellings on the rumps of the females, which people who didn't know about chimps always found bothersome" (*Eva*, p. 47). As Applebaum points out, *Eva* "is effectively robbed of self-expression. Furthermore, in order to maintain *Eva's* image as a child, and so culturally constructed as sexually innocent, she is forced to suppress her sexually matured chimp body as it conflicts with popular notions of childhood" (2010:28).

Initially this repression also takes the form of medication to suppress oestrus but, as these leave her feeling "sick and low" (*Eva*, p. 109), *Eva* simply refrains from being with the other chimps when in season. By the time she would have been 16, however, *Eva* rebels, and decides that when she next comes into oestrus "she was going to let Sniff mate with her, if he wanted, which he presumably would. Why not? You couldn't choose some of this life, and not all of it" (*Eva*, p. 219). The lack of *jouissance* in this description is continued in the epilogue which depicts *Eva*, some 24 years after the transition, preparing to die. From her thoughts we learn that although she is fairly indiscriminate about whom she mates with, and is uncertain who has fathered some of her children, this is because chimp societies do not place the couple before the society: "your affection was for the group, and your love, if you were a female, was for your own mother and daughter" (*Eva*, p. 240). Like Burgess, Dickinson presents carnal desire as a bestial quality, but one which does not disturb the status quo. Controlled by oestrus, adolescents who are transformed into animals control their sexuality better than humans. Uncontrolled desires are expressed through metamorphosis into fantasy creatures: vampires.

The femme fatale or vagina dentata

Fear of the desiring female is hardly a rare phenomenon; images of the alluring siren, the *femme fatale* who seduces the men on whom she preys abound in the popular imagination. Elizabeth Grosz observes that the image of *femme fatale* draws on imagery from the insect world. The women-as-insects who "haunt the

imaginations and projections of men [are] ... the black widow spider and the praying mantis" (1995a:278). Grosz's choice of verb – 'to haunt' – may simply be artistic, but I see a direct connection between the horrified male reaction to female insects which destroy their mates and Castle's notion of ghosting. When human sexuality is expressed through bestial forms, it is 'ghostly' in three (related) senses. It is not as immediately visible; the imagery creates a distance between what is observed and that which is understood. It expresses something which is fearful, a fear which may or may not be overtly recognised. And, finally, it has the power to linger in the mind; because it expresses ideas obliquely, it takes longer to interpret and so gains a hold on the imagination.

"These two species [the Black Widow spider and the praying mantis] have come to represent an intimate and persistent link between sex and death, between pleasure and punishment, desire and revenge which may prove significant in understanding key details of male sexuality and desire" (Grosz 1995a:278). Why is the image of the desiring woman so frightening? Roger Caillois claims that "of all the insects [the praying mantis] is the one whose form most reminds one of the human form", not the form of a man praying, but of a man having sex in the missionary position (in Grosz 1995a:281). One can see the likeness, but resemblance is grossly exaggerated: it requires considerable imaginative effort to form connections between the mating of spiders and the mantis with human sexual acts. The connection is not borne out of an immediate visual recognition of similarity, but rather through a perceived connection between the *femme fatale* and the behaviour of this species of insects. Only once the connection is formed on the behavioural level is the visual field distorted and the human form of the mantis or spider becomes visible to the eye. Once that connection has been established, however, it opens up the truly fearful: the *vagina dentata*.

This dangerously alluring woman has always been present in the literary imagination, but recently we have seen an explosion of this trope as numerous works draw on the vampire motif. Although always popular, the recent boom in vampire literature is in no small part due to the commercial success of Stephenie Meyer's 'Twilight'-series. The degree of Meyer's success indicates that her beautiful vampires, who look like humans despite harbouring bestial desires for blood, are resonating to a chord that strikes deep within our current understanding of adolescent sexuality.

The cover of *Twilight* connects the Christian fall from immortality to the Vampire motif. It depicts the outstretched hands of a girl holding a red apple. This allusion to Eve's temptation of Adam is evoked when Bella tempts Edward to take her, literally body and soul. In a reversal of the story of *Genesis*, however, immortality can be gained from the 'descent' into the world of vampires. Superficially, Meyer writes against the tradition of the female vampire as *vagina dentata*; the creature

who seduces her prey, only to turn on her unsuspecting mate and bite him. In Meyer's fictional world, it is Edward who has the powers to bite. But although Meyer has created a virtuous vampire, she has not abandoned the traditional voluptuous vamp: Bella is depicted as a seductress who constantly tempts Edward to lose control. When she emerges as a newborn vampire, she is "indisputably beautiful" (*Breaking Dawn*, p. 372), even in her own estimation. She quickly puts her "dizzying beauty" (*Breaking Dawn*, p. 373) to work as she toys with a black market trader. So although Meyer has changed some surface elements, the underlying tradition of the voluptuous vamp remains untouched.

All the male vampires in Meyer's fictional world are described as being beautiful, but not as sexually predatory as the females. Female vampires, including Edward's sisters, are always dangerous. Rosalie kills for revenge, and even Alice is described teeth first after Bella becomes a vampire: "the light sparkled off her teeth, another eight color rainbow" (*Breaking Dawn*, p. 359). Why is the female so dangerous? Turning to the insect world in search of the origins of the *vagina dentata*, Grosz cites evidence demonstrating that the female mantis devours the male's brain purely to prolong and improve coitus (1995a:283). The desiring female, for the mantis at least, presents a very concrete threat to the male's existence. It is, as Grosz observes, an image which "is rife with the possibilities of projection" (1995a:282) as it represents "an intimate and persistent link between sex and death, between pleasure and punishment, desire and revenge" (Grosz 1995a:278–9). In the human world, Grosz argues, there is no necessary connection between death and sexuality, but they "have become inextricably linked ... by linking sexual pleasure to the concept of death and dying, by making sex something to die for, something that in itself is a kind of anticipation of death (the 'little death'), woman is thereby cast into the category of the non-human, the non-living, or a living threat of death" (1995b:284).

Meyer's saga draws heavily on the same traditions. Bella lacks vampire teeth for the first three volumes of the saga, so in this sense she is not quite *vagina dentata*, despite her numerous attempts at seducing Edward. Her intense carnal desires do indeed present sex as "something to die for", something which anticipates her coming death, and which very literally casts her "into the category of the non-human, the non-living, [AND] a living threat of death" (Grosz 1995a:284). Her desire makes her careless; she trivialises death:

Edward had drawn many careful lines for our physical relationship, with the intent being to keep me alive. Though I respected the need for maintaining a safe distance between my skin and his razor-sharp, venom-coated teeth, I tended to forget about trivial things like that when he was kissing me. (*Breaking Dawn*, p. 15)

Bella knows exactly what the rules governing her physical relationship with Edward are, why they exist and when she is breaking them. The rules are also clear

to the reader, and resemble those posed by many parents and promoters of 'True Love Waits'. Edward's ability to contain Bella's desire allows her to walk the border line, enjoying 'adult' freedoms without 'adult' responsibilities. Meyer earns her adolescent readers' devotion by refusing to trivialize the strength of their desires: it takes vampire-like strength to resist the pull of carnal desire. As with the other novels involving metamorphosis, however, Bella's transformation reveals that a decidedly ambivalent attitude towards the desiring female.

Even very liberal writers, like Block seem afraid of female desire. As I noted in my discussion of *Cherokee Bat and the Goat Guys* in the previous chapter, Cherokee's partial metamorphosis when she dons her half-sister's wings made from donated feathers, the pants made from hair donated by the wild goats of the Canyon and the stolen horns she is transformed into "wild creature, a myth beast, a sphinx" (*The Goat Guys*, p. 235). Sexual desire, more specifically in this case, possessive sexual desire impacts badly on Cherokee. She becomes monstrous, devilish: her very being threatens the order of the mythological version of LA she inhabits. It is only the intervention of the adult world (Coyote, and Cherokee's parents) that restores the balance. The misogyny evident in Cherokee's partial metamorphosis is transparent. Witch Baby's wings create the image of an angel; the profoundly neurotic character is sweetened and tamed by her gift of wings. Raphael exudes masculine sexuality when wearing the goat pants, but the novel is more critical of Cherokee's jealousy than Raphael's enjoyment of the way he appeals to girls who listen to the band. And even Angel Juan, who steals the devil-like horns, is depicted as being capable of containing the sexual energy he gains when wearing it. Cherokee's transformation turns her into a monstrous, devil-like creature whose sexual desires threaten the world order.

The overwhelming message of all the novels discussed in this chapter so far is the animalistic qualities of adolescent carnal desire is profoundly disturbing. In the use of animals as transition objects for same-sex desire, in the animal transformations by Rayner, Burgess and Dickinson and in the fantastic transformations by Meyer, bestial images are sharply gendered ways of expressing this fear or mistrust of adolescent, especially female adolescent, desire. Barbara Creed (1995) cites Dijkstra's study of feminine evil in *fin de siècle* art which frequently depicts men, especially Semitic or negroid men, in semi-bestial forms such as satyrs and centaurs. In *fin de siècle* art, bestial forms were used (perhaps subconsciously) with racist overtones, suggesting that the boundaries between Jewish or Black men and uncivilized beasts were fluid. By the time the books mentioned in this study were published, sensibilities had changed sufficiently for such associations to be recognised and reviled to the point that they would, thankfully, no longer have been acceptable. However, all the above mentioned books foreground gender in their use of the metamorphosis trope.

Dijkstra's study revealed far fewer women caught in a semi-transformed state. Such works do exist: Isobel Lilian Gloag's painting of 'The Kiss of the Enchantress' (1890), for instance, depicts a figure whose upper half is a beautiful woman and lower half is a snake seducing a knight, and mermaids have long been a popular topic in both art and literature. Nevertheless, female figures caught between the world of the beast and the world of mankind are noticeably less common than their male counterparts (see also Coward 1999). Women in human form *do* appear in these paintings; they dance and cavort with the satyrs, centaurs and untransformed beasts in Dionysian excess. Dijkstra interprets this by observing "there was no need to find a symbolic form to represent [woman's] bestial nature [as] women, being female, were, as a matter of course, already directly representative of degeneration" (in Creed 1995:97). The uncivilized female body was presented as having a natural affinity with the world of beasts. This would be the more negative explanation as to why none of the lesbian novels in the corpus feature an animal as a transitional object of desire: their desires are already bestial.

Indeed, in the corpus I found only one author who used the metamorphosis trope as a way to shed positive light on adolescent girls' carnal desires: Kate Thompson's *Switchers* trilogy (1994–1999). In her discussion of the series, Anne Markey comments on how the motif of metamorphosis ('switching' in these novels) is used as a metaphor for sexual awakening. In the first novel, *Switchers*, Tess transforms herself into various animals, but only when she is alone. Like masturbation, "it is a solitary, secret pleasure to be pursued for the orgasmic release it promises" (Markey 2011:134).

Letting go was the most difficult part, because the moment of changing was a bit scary. For that moment, brief as it was, it felt as though her mind was dissolving, and everything around her became vague and fluid and insubstantial.

(*Switchers*, p. 36)

Later, she meets other switchers and learns more about her powers. She also discovers the intense, liberating thrill and pleasure that can be gained from switching with another person. Her relationship with Kevin, another Switcher, is not sexual but the language of their transformations is rife with carnal pleasure.

In the second novel, *Midnight's Choice*, Tess befriends Martin, whom she discovers is a vampire. Tess initially transforms herself into a vampire to avoid being attacked by Martin, but is clearly thrilled by the power it offers. She feels invulnerable as she and Martin hunt for prey on the streets of Dublin. Her experience of feeding on the body of a woman satisfies her in ways that clarify that vampirism is Thompson's way of representing transgressive sexuality. In the morning, she is riddled with guilt, and the climax of the novel sees her destroying Martin's ability to be a vampire as well as choosing not to become one herself.

The novels disguise carnal desire by expressing the characters', especially Tess's, desires through metaphors that may not be immediately transparent, especially for pre-teen readers who form the target audience of these novels. Since most ten year olds have not experienced carnal desire in a form they recognise, Thompson's way of articulating sexual longing, like Rayner's some three decades earlier, offers a finely poised balance between celebrating the on-set of desire and telling readers more than they are ready to hear.

More excitingly, I think, is that Thompson's presentation of sexuality does not denigrate female desire. Although she operates on a purely metaphorical level, the implied 'message' is liberating. Anne Markey sums it up well:

Thompson never represents sexuality itself as transgressive or repugnant, but instead shows it to be a potent drive that can be liberating if its fulfilment is achieved consensually, while imprisoning if it depends on guile and a show of superior strength. As with everything else in life, sexuality is presented as involving choices whose resolutions can either be negative or positive, depending on the extent to which individuals facing decisions believe in themselves and are willing to form their own judgments. (Markey 2011:135)

The use of metamorphosis to 'hide' the representation of carnal desire thus allows Thompson to be more liberal minded and positive about adolescent sexuality than the realistic novels discussed in the previous chapters. These radical views are only possible because the body of the child is allowed to remain 'innocent'; Tess's experiences as she transforms and in her metamorphosed state affect her thoughts about the world she inhabits, but they do not result in a changed body. She is still *virgo intacta* at the end of the trilogy, and she decides to remain human (which also means that she decides not give way to her bestial desires).

For Tess, as indeed for all the characters in the novels discussed in this chapter so far, the decision as to whether or not to allow full reign to their 'bestial desires' rests with them. In the final section of this chapter, however, I wish to examine a work which uses the animal-human metamorphosis trope to express not the adolescent's desires, but the impact of incestuous desire on the adolescent body. In Lynne Reid Banks's *Melusine* (1988), the protagonist, Roger becomes aware that the owner of the guest house in which Roger is staying is sexually abusing his daughter, Melusine. As a result, the teenage girl turns into a snake.

Shrinking from the awful form: Sex and the Serpent

The *Melusine* myth has a well-established history in French literature, and seems related to the Celtic Selkie myths. In the most basic form of the legend, Mélusine

is a beautiful fairy who is transformed into a snake from the waist down once a week (like the enchantress in Gloag's painting mentioned above). She manages to keep this a secret by making her husband promise never to see her on this day. Needless to say, the husband breaks his promise and finds his wife in this transformed state. She flees, and the family prosperity ends as a result. Many variations exist, but the constant features include the alluring nature of Mélusine's beauty when in human form – she attracts men even though they sense there is something eerie about her – the broken contract and her disappearance. Of these, it is noteworthy that only the first is retained in Banks's *Melusine*.

Banks's *Melusine* is focalised through Roger, a British teenage boy on holiday with his family in a run-down chateau in France. He is instantly drawn to the owner's daughter, Melusine, whom he meets when she is milking the goats, although he senses there is something rather strange about her. Roger is alert to his surroundings, but only semi-comprehends what he perceives. On his first night in the chateau, he is aware of a movement in his bedroom, which he initially thinks must be an intruder and then dismisses as rats. After repeated exposure to this rustling and other glimpses into Melusine's world, Roger realises that the sounds he hears come from a huge serpent, whom he gradually comes to understand is Melusine in a transformed state. Roger's capacity to sense things he does not fully understand is repeatedly used to maintain dramatic tension, but also to give a sense of his burgeoning sexuality. He fantasises about Melusine's naked body whilst he is showering, but does not appear to comprehend the nature of his desire. More importantly, for the purposes of the plot, he senses there is something wrong with the relationship between Melusine and her father after he sees her sitting in her father's lap. Later he takes up his concerns but even is unable to fully articulate the nature of the problem. His father grasps the problem and explains that "A man who lives without a wife, like Monsieur Serpe, can get very lonely. Especially in a remote place like this, with no adult company. And if he's got a young daughter, sometimes he can get – a bit fonder of her than he ought to" (*Melusine*, p. 90). Roger recognises that his father is talking about abuse, but has apparently thought abuse was restricted to strangers until his father informs him that "Nobody likes to tell kids this, but I'm afraid it happens a lot inside families as well. Especially between fathers and daughters" (*ibid.*). With all the information now available, Roger becomes instrumental in exposing Monsieur Serpe's crimes (he has also abused Melusine's elder sister) and bringing about his downfall. The novel ends with Roger returning to the chateau to find the reborn Melusine (she has literally cast off her snake's skin): Melusine has taken ownership of the building and is busy restoring its fortunes.

Banks's use of snake-human transformation and her adaptation of the traditional Melusine legend are profoundly disturbing, as indeed any novel on the

subject of incest can be expected to be. The precise nature of the disturbance, however, is somewhat dependent on the reader's familiarity with the Melusine legend. If we take the snake-human transformation out of its mythological context, it aptly expresses many of the aspects of incestuous abuse victims experience. As a girl, her lack of subjectivity is expressed through her lack of voice (she speaks English with Roger, but poorly), her androgynous body and the focalisation through Roger, which presents her as an object viewed from a male perspective (McCallum 1999:51ff and Lassén-Seger 2006:180). When she is a snake, Melusine is further marginalised and silenced. Not only does she lack voice, Roger is not certain she is even capable of understanding human speech in her transformed state. This total loss of subjectivity, the inability to articulate experiences, is an apt depiction of many victims of incestuous abuse feelings.

Moreover, Melusine is ashamed of her body in this form, which reflects the experiences of sexually abused children aptly. Melusine is horrified when she learns that Roger has seen her swaying to the music of a snake charmer in a nearby town. She forces Roger to pretend that he has not seen her behave in that way, as though it were she who has done something shameful, not her father. Sadly, like many incest victims, Melusine's desire to hide the abuse that has been wrought on her body is based on an accurate perception of how society will react. Although Melusine is unquestionably the victim, her body is evidence of one of society's most reviled crimes. The snake form her body adopts expresses society's difficulties in confronting incest and accepting the victim. Roger is afraid of her body, even though he realises how important it is that he should accept her. When she comes into his bed in snake form, she is "unsure of her welcome", but Roger realizes "he must touch her now, let her know that he was with her, not afraid of her, that, as much as an ordinary person could, he understood, and did not shrink from her in this awful form" (*Melusine*, p. 119). The use of the snake form expresses the abjection of the incestuously abused victim's body. Banks's presentation of the abused body as fearful reflects how both victim and society feel about the victim's body, rather than offering a more hope-inspiring view. It is, as Lassén-Seger explains, "a complex and powerful metaphor for what abuse has turned her into. Her snake's body is ... a disempowering physicalisation of her shame", but it also offers Melusine a site of refuge (2006:182). Roger, and thus the reader, never learns whether Melusine's nightly visits to Roger's room are solely a way of hiding from her father (as it presumably is on the night Roger and his family arrive) or whether Melusine is directly seeking Roger's help. The two never discuss the nightly visits when Melusine is in human form, but Roger's recognition of Melusine in her snake form is a way for Banks to express how he "is forced to see the person behind an act he finds otherwise incomprehensibly abominable" (Lassén-Seger 2006:182), and in this way offers solace.

The disturbing aptness of the snake transformation offers no solace to readers seeking redeeming meaning from the novel. For readers familiar with the original Melusine legend, Banks's rewriting is disturbing in other ways: it can be read as a way of blaming the victim. According to legend, Mélusine is an enchantress, a seductress; men cannot help feeling drawn towards this beautiful siren. Presumably, Banks intends her readers to connect this with Roger's infatuation and society's more general fascination with incest: we are drawn to the abject, even as we are repelled by it. Unfortunately, however, presenting Melusine as a seductress implies that she is complicit in her own abuse. Just as Humbert Humbert wishes to convince the gentlewomen of the jury that Lolita seduced him, so Banks's novel implies that Monsieur Serpe was seduced by his daughter's exciting body.

The contract breached in Banks's rewriting of the legend is not between adults – husband and wife – but between adult and child. In the original legends, the family's prosperity is dependent on Mélusine's presence in the home, which implies a more even power balance between husband and wife than one might have expected in the medaeval era. In Banks's rewriting, the contract is the socially endorsed taboo of familial relationships, and it is breached within a relationship where the power is decidedly imbalanced. So even though the story ends with Melusine flinging open the doors of the chateau she now owns to the evening sunlight, a movement which represents the return of good fortune to the house of Serpe, even Roger recognises that a full recovery will take much longer.

Melusine was a fairly early attempt to breach what Michael Cart identifies as one of the last taboos in literature for the young: incest (1996:202). It is a brave attempt which acknowledges the complexity and ambivalence of the emotions felt by both victim and observer. In the end, it focuses on the presentation of prevailing attitudes as they *are* rather than as we might hope they could *become*, and this seems to me a generalisation one can make about all the novels which draw on animal-child connections or metamorphosis as a trope for expressing adult authors' thoughts about adolescent sexuality. Whether they suggest that queer adolescents are somehow bestial, or that heterosexual desires offer an uncontrollable force that cannot be curbed, or that desiring adolescent girls are a danger to themselves and those around them, all the novels discussed in this chapter end up toeing the conservative line. They offer complex insight into adult fears about adolescents' desires, which often seem to be balancing the willingness to acknowledge teenagers' carnality and a deep ambivalence. When teenagers are compared to animals, they are inevitably presented as being less mature than adults. Their bestiality marks the impropriety of their desires.

The abjection of abused adolescents

In the autumn of 2012, the British media whipped into a frenzy of reporting on cases of sexually abused young teens. The story at the centre was that of Jimmy Saville, a popular Radio and TV host in the 1970s whose show *Jim'll Fix It* was a household name. Each week, the bizarrely clad Saville would read letters from children asking him to make their dreams come true, and then Jim would “fix it” for the children to compete against their favourite athlete, travel by balloon, dance down Broadway or whatever their dream might be. The posthumous accusations that, throughout the period the show was being aired, Saville took advantage of his image as a man who made children’s dreams come true to abuse tens of youngsters has shaken the British public. Newspaper reports on the enquiries nearly always enter the lists of the ten most downloaded articles from the previous day. Even after the shootings at Sandy Hook school in Connecticut, interest in the British press rapidly returned to the ‘Saville-gate’ scandal, thereby revealing that fascination with the sexual abuse of youngsters outstrips all other concerns for the well-being of the young. The sexually abused body invites strong – but incompatibly mixed – reactions. Horror and disgust are combined with fascination. Although this fascination – in the case of Saville reportage a fascination that borders on the obsessive – is expressed as a concern for the abused youngsters, one does not have to scratch much beneath the surface to find elements of titillation in the detailed accounts of particular cases.

Newspaper reports are intended for an adult audience. They form part of the passive ideology of authors writing about involuntary sexual acts, a topic which appears with note-worthy frequency in fiction for teens, especially in literature published from the 1990s onwards. Precisely what constitutes involuntary sexual activity is not as clear as one might expect. Will in Burgess’s *Tiger, Tiger* does not choose to become a tiger and to mate with Lila, but the situation is not presented as though he were being abused, despite his young age. Even in more realistic works, such as *Sushi Central* (Duncan 2003), discussed in the chapter on queer adolescents above, what constitutes abuse is not transparent. In *Sushi Central*, the protagonist – Calvin – actively seeks out the opportunity to pose for a pornographic photo-shoot, but although the activity begins voluntarily, Calvin ends up feeling defiled when he is photographed having anal sex. And, as my discussion of sexual relationships between teens and adults showed, there is a thin line between

voluntary and involuntary sex when one member of the relationship has decidedly more power than the other. In depictions of cross-generational sexual relationships, however, there is a tendency to emphasize trauma, even when the sexual acts seem voluntary to the child or adolescent.

In this chapter, I focus on depictions of involuntarily sexually active adolescents. The use of the term 'sexually active' to refer to victims of rape is something of a distasteful misnomer. Nevertheless, the child or teenager who has engaged in sex becomes the 'knowing' child identified by Anne Higonnet (1998). Victims of sexual abuse 'know' more about certain facets of adult sexuality than most adults do. They are described as having 'lost their innocence.' But although there is widespread conviction that, "children being innocent, the wickedest thing one can do to them is to rob them of their childhood" (Grylls 1978:140), the abused child is not always recognised *as a child*. Once childhood has been 'lost' or 'stolen' or 'robbed', the victims, in cultural terms, are no longer children, but they are also not adults; they are objects of "cultural fascination" (Marshall 2009:223). In addition to using the expression 'sexually active' to clarify that I continue to be concerned with the transition into the 'knowing child', I also use the expression to signal that I am referring to full coitus. Slut-calling and other forms of verbal abuse, when it does not occur alongside physical acts of sexual abuse, have been excluded from this discussion. Although critics such as Leora Tannenbaum (2000) have drawn attention to the long term impact and trauma of slut-calling and malicious gossip amongst teens, such acts do not result in the victim becoming a 'knowing child'. The victim may or may not be sexually active and 'knowing', but – unlike the act of rape – the act of slut-calling is not the cause of the change in status from 'innocent' to 'knowing' child.

I begin this chapter by discussing novels in which abuse can only be inferred. The acts take place off-stage. I then arrange the rest of the material ... roughly in the order of the severity of the abuse, or at least the represented severity of the crime for the victim. I start with a discussion of Barry Lyga's *Boy Toy* (2007) which focuses on the long term impact of a sexual relationship between a thirteen year old boy and his female teacher. The novel draws attention to how, during the grooming phase, the older woman affected the young teen's mind-set, and how this 'knowledge' impacts on his ability to form relationships with girls of his own age in his late teens. This novel, and the novels with which I shall end the chapter (*Push* and its sequel, *The Kid*, by Sapphire), draws attention to the victim's potential for pleasure. That some victims do experience physical pleasure, and even reach orgasm, during unwanted sex has been a taboo subject, even in writing for adults. The appearance of this topic in literature which is also marketed for teens indicates that society has become more open to discussing sexual abuse from the victims' point of view. It would be easier not to muddy the waters and

acknowledge that many victims of sexual abuse, especially incestuous abuse, also care deeply for their abuser. This admission signals a respect for the adolescent readers' ability to handle complexity, but also indicates that the implied readers are expected to be far more 'knowing' than they were even in the early 1990s.

I start with *Boy Toy* because this novel enables me to clarify the parameters of sexual abuse, especially when compared to Burgess's depiction of a pupil-teacher relationship in *Doing It* (2003). I also consider sibling incest which, although depicted as consensual in the few novels to depict such relationships, is subject to such stringent social taboo that the actants' guilt undermines the impression that their sexual activity is truly voluntary. Although seemingly very different from teacher-pupil relationships, these novels enable me to map the borders of what constitutes sexual abuse before examining clear cut cases of rape.

My discussion of rape begins with off-stage depictions. In many novels, the act of rape is not actually narrated. It may be represented by a blank line in the text or break between chapters. Alternatively, it may appear as a mystery: the reader is told that something has happened, and must endeavour to discern precisely what occurred. The refusal to narrate is, without exception, a way in which adult authors can protect young readers from knowing more than they are willing to know.¹ Yet using absence as a narrative tool is a risky strategy: how do readers work out what has happened? How do authors guide young readers to understand the nature of abuse? And what does their treatment of both the fictional teenage character and the adolescent reader imply about how adolescents are perceived? In responding to these questions, my discussion of off-stage sexual abuse attempts to shed further light on the centrality of bodily integrity in constructions of adolescence.

When rape appears on-stage, it almost always occurs in the child or teenager's home, and the assailant is either a parent or *in loco parentis* (for instance, a teacher in the boarding school to which the eponymous protagonist of Burgess's *Nicholas Dane* (2009) is sent). When the source of danger is located in the supposedly safe-space of the home, the young victim is further disempowered. He or, more commonly, she appears to have nowhere to turn and must either leave the home and face the dangers of the street or find some way of resolving or accepting the abusive home situation. One of the remarkable features of these novels when viewed as a whole is that they *all* attempt to move towards resolution. No matter how extreme the abuse or bleak the character's prospects seem to be, the novels all offer some "promise of happiness" (Inglis 1981). This may seem benign, but I ask whether this insistence on redemption does not further compound the abuse as the narratives can also be read as blaming youngsters who cannot recover for their failure to thrive.

1. See Kokkola 2003:15–46 and Kokkola 2002 in which I draw on the work of Leona Toker (1993) to discuss silence as a form of protection in the context of Holocaust fiction.

Another feature which stands out when novels depicting sexual abuse are examined as a group is the sudden foregrounding of race in representations of rape. So far, my enquiry has treated race as though it were a neutral category, although it clearly is not. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the novels examined so far have featured White characters. I do not consider it to be a coincidence that the novels and theoretical analyses that raise the issue of race to the fore also feature victims of sexual abuse. Although I do not wish to point the finger at any one work or author, when one examines the corpus of novels as a whole, there is an insidious tendency to connect victimhood with racial and/or ethnic minorities. For instance, even though Melusine is not a racial minority in her home country of France where the story is set, she is presented as though she were because the novel is focalized through the British boy, Roger, and is forced to speak English. Moreover, it is only a minor exaggeration to claim that when fictional teens are racially marked, they are marked as being Black. Hispanic, Asian, indigenous and other characters of colour are almost absent in my corpus and Jewish teens are rare, even though I have actively sought out examples.² The few examples of sexually active Black adolescents in the corpus cluster around depictions of abjection, unwanted pregnancies, violence, sexual abuse and the total loss of subjectivity associated with invisibility. As this chapter makes its way from 'least abusive' to 'most abusive' the foregrounding of race increases, and so I shall return to this issue at the end of the chapter.

Articulate absences and speaking silences: Off-stage depictions of abuse

In *Disturbing the Universe*, Roberta Seelinger Trites discusses Weetzie's rape in the first few pages of Francesca Lia Block's commercially successful *Weetzie Bat* series. Weetzie and her best friend, Dirk, set out in search of an idea partner. Both end up having one night stands during which they are raped. Although both are willing to have sex with the men they meet, the acts themselves are involuntary, but remain unnarrated as can be seen in the following extract:

Weetzie clung to Buzz's body as they rode his motorcycle through the night. ... Buzz lived in a basement of an old house. The walls were covered with graffiti for his band, Head of Skin, and there was a mattress in one corner. Weetzie glimpsed the handcuffs for a second before Buzz had her down on the mattress. She kept her eyes on the bare bulb until it blinded her.

In the morning, Weetzie tried to wake Buzz

(*Weetzie Bat*, 9–10)

2. The only racially marked characters who are sexually confident in the corpus are the Jewish Jody in Klein's *It's OK If You don't Love Me* (1977) and the African American Rebecca in Woodson's *The Dear One* (1991). Rebecca is carrying an unplanned pregnancy to term.

Weetzie willingly clings to Buzz's body as they set off on his motorbike for his apartment. Everything in her behaviour signals that she is willing to have sex, but she is still pinned down and handcuffed against her will.

For Trites, Block's Weetzie Bat books send the clear message that teenage sexuality is acceptable only within established relationships. Weetzie's failure to "guard her sexuality", Trites argues, results in her being beaten up and raped "in a blaming-the-victim scene" (2000:93). The point I would like to make about this "scene" is that the rape is not narrated, it can only be inferred by a reader who is already familiar with the idea of involuntary sex. After all, Weetzie wakes up beside Buzz the following morning, which means she stayed the entire night. She deliberately tries to wake him up, which suggests she would like to talk to him. And her departure from the apartment does not seem to be hindered by the handcuffs, so presumably she has been released from their grip at some point during the night. There is a good deal one can infer from the text, but Block refuses to spell out exactly what has happened. The text adjusts itself to fit the level of reader involvement – precisely how much effort the reader wishes to invest in working out what happened – and also how much the reader already knows.

This technique of framing the act of rape with silence is fairly common in the text. Janey, in Margo Lanagan's *Touching Earth Lightly* is left naked and dead, sprawled across a car in a recycling lot in a position that parodies Christ on the cross. Chloe instantly recognises what has happened to her beloved friend, but readers are left free to decide for themselves how much of this grisly event they wish to imagine. Similar silences appear in Waite's *Game Girls* and Lanagan's *Tender Morsels*. In the latter novels, the violent scenario is set up, then there is a blank line, and then we witness the consequences. In the former, the victim is semi-conscious but badly beaten, in the latter, the victim attempts to commit suicide. These silences protect their young readers from the details of rape, but – unlike Block's *Weetzie Bat* – leave them in no doubt as to the severity of the crime. (Neither Weetzie nor Dirk seem unduly traumatised by their experiences, and both are soon out looking for partners again. In contrast, the characters in the three novels mentioned in this paragraph either die or wish to die as a result of the rape.) In addition to protecting their young readers, these silences also reflect the experiences of many victims of rape as they find themselves unable to tell others about what has happened to them.

Forced recoveries: Extending trauma?

In Laurie Anderson's prizewinning novel *Speak* (1999), Melinda finds herself unable to tell anyone that a popular high school jock raped her. As the title suggests, the novel focuses on the difficulties she has to give voice to her experiences. Even

though she is the narrator, she does not tell the reader what happened until near the end of the novel. Her revelation is presented as part of the narrative of recovery that I noted was evident in all the stories of abuse contained within the corpus. Melinda's inability to speak is not the only way in which she expresses trauma. In addition, her formerly good grades plummet; she self-mutilates and hides in a closet. Although the people around her – former friends, her family, her teachers and, indeed, the reader – do not know what is troubling her, they all recognise that something is deeply wrong. Her superficial friend, Heather (a new girl who latches on to Melinda because she recognises that they are both outsiders), ends their friendship because Melinda is “different”, “just so weird sometimes” and has “a reputation” (*Speak*, p. 123–5). Melinda's commentary on the difficulties Heather has in making these comments contain the same acerbic humour evident in the rest of the narrative, but also point to the uneasy awareness that something is wrong which everyone who spends time in Melinda's presence (including the reader) share.

For Don Latham (2007), Melinda's reactions render her queer because her presence challenges the status quo. For me, however, Melinda does not evoke the power of queer as she lacks the subjectivity to challenge the established order. Latham is certainly right in identifying the disturbing effect she has on others, but this stems from revulsion and fascination – the abject – and not the empowered nature of queer acts. Her inability to speak – to return once more to the work of Lacan and Kristeva – reveals her experiences lie outside the semiotic order. This unarticulated response to Melinda's body, I suggest, is a subliminal recognition of Melinda's abjection. Everyone knows something is wrong, but this knowledge takes place within the symbolic order; no-one seems capable of finding a way to address the issue.

Christine Wilkie-Stibbs observes that “Loss of language is the symptom of the abject status of all these child figures who share in the same semiotic space of effacement through their mutual experiences of becoming hidden or defaced bodies ... Loss of language makes them into nonsubjects” (2008:91). However, the abject cannot remain repressed and Melinda does find ways to express herself. Indeed, a surface reading of the novel suggests that this is a straightforward novel of recovery in which the victim works through the traumatic incident moving from silence to voice. This is the dominant trope of trauma literature, evident in all the narratives of survivors discussed so far in this chapter (Josh recovers after he has spoken to his former abuser, Liga's recovery is supported by talking to Annie, Weetzie and Dirk share their experiences with one another.) In her summary of this trope in relation to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Tannert-Smith explains

The traumatic event is shown to destroy the victim's existing framework of reality, leading to a sense of shattered subjectivity and the gradual reorganising of the self in relation to the new emergent reality. ... the past intrudes upon the present and the damaged psyche takes refuge in cycles of repetitive play and reenactment or a pervasive numbness and speechlessness that serve to disconnect the self from emotions and external stimuli. Finally, the act of speaking or of narration becomes the primary avenue to the protagonist's recovery. (Tannert-Smith 2010:398)

This movement from silence to speech, evident in trauma narratives of all kinds, seems benign. In many cases this message of hope may indeed be helpful and productive (McCormack 2002). And so I shall start by outlining the main features of this type of narrative, illustrating it with examples from *Speak*, before I suggest why this focus on recovery may not be quite so benign after all.

Melinda does not tell the reader why she is selectively mute, but her views of her silence are markedly different from those of the adults in her world. The adults express frustration with her:

"Why won't you say anything?" "For the love of God, open your mouth!" "This is childish, Melinda." "Say something." "You are only hurting yourself by refusing to cooperate." "I don't know why she's doing this to us." (*Speak*, p. 133)

Although they all recognise that something is troubling Melinda, the adults in her life assume her silence is volitional and take it as a personal affront. From Melinda's point of view, her silence is not a choice. Indeed she seems to want to be able to talk, but cannot. She explains that "It's getting harder to talk. ... Every time I try to talk to my parents or a teacher, I splutter or freeze. What is wrong with me? It's like I have some kind of spastic laryngitis" (*Speak*, p. 59).

Unable to articulate herself through language, Melinda expresses herself through art. At Christmas, her parents give her a sketch pad and charcoals because they have noticed her drawing. This recognition that she exists is enough to bring tears to her eyes: "I almost tell them right then and there. Tears flood my eyes. They noticed I've been trying to draw. They noticed. I try to swallow the snowball in my throat. This isn't going to be easy" (*Speak*, p. 83). Melinda's relief that her pain has been witnessed is evident. But as she tries to find a way to tell her parents about her rape, they become restless, the moment passes and Melinda's rape remains unnarrated. The novel repeatedly returns to scenes like this in which Melinda expresses frustration with her inability to express herself and her strong desire to tell others about what happened to her. For this reason, it is perfectly valid to read the novel as a narrative of recovery, and Melinda's decision to talk to her art teacher – the event with which the novel ends – as a sign that all will be well. However, it is worth noting that the novel ends *before* Melinda speaks. She tells the reader and her former best friend in writing, but does not verbalise her experience to anyone. For Chris McGee, this is one of the main strengths of the novel.

McGee draws on the work of Foucault to point out that the imperative to speak – to confess – is a way of prolonging the victim's powerlessness: "power demands that you speak, but it demands that you speak its truth rather than your own" (McGee 2009:175). McGee thus reads Melinda's inability to speak as an expression of Melinda's subversiveness, and declares his belief that "reviewers and critics project an empowerment narrative onto the book that often resists these trappings, except in its last few chapters" (*ibid.*). For McGee, Melinda's silence throughout the novel is an assertion of her refusal to accept the aetnonormative world order and, as such, one expression of her own power in the situation.

Drawing on the work of Elaine Scarry, McGee focuses on the 'unsharability' (the term is Scarry's) of pain. In her now seminal *The Body in Pain*, Scarry draws attention to how pain brings about a total breakdown in communication as the experience cannot be communicated and the body itself destroys the capacity for speech (for instance, by going into spasms). Returning to my earlier assertion that the boundary between abusive and non-abusive carnality is marked by abjection, it is worth noting that if she were to narrate her rape, Melinda would take the event into the semiotic order. When she does reveal what happened to the reader, all the details are left out. The layout of the text and the fragmented observations she makes as she recalls not the rape itself but her disbelief that it was happening. In this way, the absence of narration signals the abject which cannot be repressed.

Afterwards, Melinda enters the kitchen and tries to call the police, but cannot speak. She sees her reflection in the window: "Who was that girl? I had never seen her before" (*Speak*, p. 158). Like many other trauma narratives, Anderson makes use of mirrors as a way of expressing the protagonist's fragmented sense of self and bodily abjection. Melinda's violent loss of virginity is presented as transformational: she no longer recognises herself afterwards. She has become another person. Melinda's rejection of the person she has become is symbolised through her removal or covering up of mirrors. The only mirror she can bear to look in is the three way mirror in her mother's shop which offers "reflections of reflections" (*Speak*, p. 145), a fragmented view of the self which reflects her inner state. This imagery may seem rather mechanical and obvious, but is appropriate for an audience whose lack of familiarity with imagery and symbolism is woven ironically into the narrative itself.

Melinda can and does express her pain through her art work, through her mutilated lips and hands and through her silence. If she were able to speak about it, she would by force be moving towards a narrative of healing as the abject would enter the semiotic order. During the time period covered by the novel, Melinda is not ready to heal. As Tannert-Smith notes in her discussion of the novel, "we do demand that children recover from trauma – and recover quickly – and our narratives enforce that process" (2010:117, see also Farrell 1998). Like Tannert-Smith,

McGee also identifies this desire to force Melinda to speak and to heal as being an adult desire: "this 'empowerment narrative,' as we might call it ... is very appealing for many *adult* readers" (McGee 2009:174; emphasis added).

As already noted, this desire seems benign: to leave the adolescent alone in her trauma seems cruel. Yet this well-meaning intention, several critics have observed, only ostensibly addresses the adolescent victim or reader, but is predominantly a projection of *adult* fears and the *adult* desire to preserve the notion of childhood innocence. Katharine Capshaw Smith (2005) questions whether the fascination adults have with images of children in pain is not a projection of the adult need for reassurance, an extension of the desires identified by Rose in *The Impossibility of Children's Literature*. Marina Warner ironically dubs this tendency "the Oxfam syndrome" (1994:47) as she refers to images of the suffering child used to simultaneously draw pity and horror. These images of child victims are now a ubiquitous way of manipulating adults into donating money. These donations, in turn, enable the donors to feel they have helped return hope and innocence to the world. In a work of literature, there is no equivalent outlet to the financial donation, which increases the desire for resolution and recovery.

McGee observes how in *Speak* these adult desires are reflected in the desire to force Melinda to confess what is troubling her, and also in the way adults impose their own values on her. McGee's analysis points to how every day these impositions are, their ubiquity is of course partly why they are so successful in maintaining the adult-adolescent power hierarchy. For instance, Melinda expresses herself through her art, but then resists putting what her art is intended to express into words. She allows her teacher and a friendly classmate to express their views. Later, her teacher kindly remarks "I'm seeing a lot of growth in your work. You are learning more than you know" (*Speak*, p 142). In his discussion of this exchange, McGee notes that this can simply be read as an unhappy teenager struggling to express herself to a wise and caring adult. But his analysis also draws attention to how the 'wise' adult seemingly knows more than the adolescent about what she 'knows'. Mr Freeman has granted himself insight into Melinda's mental world and claims greater knowledge over her chosen form of communication: art. He ends the conversation by offering to hear what she has to say, and at the end of the novel it is indeed Mr Freeman to whom Melinda makes her confession. Her road to recovery, McGee observes, means accepting the aetnonormative world order.

[W]hen the confessor confesses, she is not simply confessing a secret but admitting that she must confess, that this is the person to whom she must confess, and that every secret must be turned into discourse. Power desires that everything is seen and made visible and, in disciplinary terms, that the individual knows there is no place outside of scrutiny.

(McGee 2009:185)

No longer a child as a result of her carnal knowledge, Melinda's only route out of her situation is to accept the aetnonormative world order which demands that she *speak*, and bring her experience into the semiotic order.

For McGee, the problem is specifically related to the power imbalance between adults and children. For the feminist philosopher, Lynne Pearce, class values are also at play. Drawing on the work of Berlant, Pearce demands that we

reconsider exactly *how* innocent, human and, indeed, *necessary* the condition of 'looking forward' really is. ... [Longing for something which may never happen has the] capacity to inure subjects to potential (and repeated) loss. ... [T]his 'hopeless hope' might seem like a twenty-first century reworking of nineteenth-century 'deferred gratification', [but] it seems to me that its more serious menace lies in *the collective 'expectations' that the (elite) few can impose upon the many.*

(Pearce 2010:156; italics original)

If trauma narratives are read solely in terms of the protagonists' journeys of self-growth from victimhood to subjectivity, then recovery becomes an imposition. Pearce draws our attention to the fact that this desire for hope is predominantly middle class, and that to impose expectations of growth may further disempower those at the lower end of the economic scale. Stasis is understood as an individual failure rather than a societal failing.

I will return to Pearce's discussion towards the end of the chapter when I discuss Sapphire's *Push* (1996) and *The Kid* (2011) where poverty, race and illiteracy feed into the victimisation of the protagonists. Staying solely with the implications for adult-adolescent relations, we can observe that Melinda's silence is perceived as being "childish" (*Speak*, p. 133). Melinda frequently expresses the desire to return to childhood, and hails fifth grade as the happiest era of her life, when she was old enough to play out on the street, but not old enough to go off the block. Her bedroom, decorated during that year, remains a shrine to her desire to remain a child. It is contrasted with her closet at school, which she decorates with works that she express her pain in the present moment. In Tannert-Smith's (2010) reading of *Speak*, she draws on Kristeva's discussion of the adolescent novel to show how being traumatised and being a child have been conflated. If adolescence is defined as a liminal state – a time of in-betweenness and uncertainty – then trauma is a way of extending that childlike state. Recovery and adulthood are similarly conflated.

Melinda's recovery may ring a false note, but the corpus contains fictional characters who are subjected to far worse abuse. Melinda is the victim of an isolated act of abuse, indeed it is the fear that her attacker might hurt her friend that provides the impetus for her to reveal her secret in writing and his physical attack that forces her to cry out. Her parents may not provide the emotional support she needs, but her home environment is safe. For many youngsters, unfortunately, the

source of threat is a parent or someone *in loco parentis*, and the attacks are frequent and take place in the home. In addition to the betrayal of being abused by someone who is expected to protect one from harm, someone whom the victim may well love, when rape takes place in the home, the victim must face the possibility that speaking out may result in the loss of her home (see Reimer 2008 for the implications of the loss of home). Here too, however, we find novels that conflate trauma and adolescence and, in doing so, inadvertently blame the teenage victims for their failure to grow up and move on from their traumatised state.

The borderlands of abuse: Willing victims?

Josh Mendel, the Jewish protagonist of Barry Lyga's ground-breaking novel *Boy Toy* (2007), looks like a perfect high school student: he has an unbroken record of A grades behind him, and is particularly talented at mathematics. But Josh is no geeky nerd: he is also the attractive star of the school baseball team. Despite all these factors in his favour, Josh is clearly not happy. He suffers from flashbacks which he calls 'flickers', and he clearly carries a great burden of guilt and shame, which seem to be connected to an incident that took place when he was twelve years old. He and his best friend play spin the bottle with two girls at the girls' suggestion. As a result, he and Rachel hide in the closet to kiss. Josh does something – precisely what is not revealed until near the end of the novel – and as a result Rachel rushes out of the closet and Josh's life changes. The novel is set five years after this event, and is narrated by Josh. Through the 'flickers' and through Rachel's persistent affection, readers are gradually able to piece the story together. The process of piecing the narrative together is akin to the way in which a detective novel works, as each flicker and each exchange with Rachel provide clues as to what has taken place.

Once restored to chronological order, the narrative is very simple. At twelve, Josh is picked out by his 24 year old history teacher, Eve Sherman, as being sexually advanced. Under the guise of needing Josh to take some tests for a graduate-school project, Eve arranges to spend time alone with him, first at school and then later in her own home. Josh's middle class mother has just returned to fulltime work and everyone seems delighted with the arrangement, even Eve's rather childish husband. Each step in the grooming phase is recalled as Eve tests Josh's ability to keep secrets, and tricks him into seeing her in sexually compromising positions. Eventually the relationship develops to kissing, sexual foreplay and finally full coitus. Eve teaches Josh to pleasure her in the ways she likes, and this typically includes rough sex and S/M games. It is at this point that the incident with Rachel in the closet takes place.

After much meandering, readers eventually learn that Josh frightened Rachel by moving too quickly from kissing to rough sex play. Rachel ran upstairs to her parents and her brother crying. Initially Josh is regarded as the criminal, but the authorities soon establish that Josh has been abused. Eve Sherman is brought to trial and sentenced to prison. At the time of the narrative, five years after the event with Rachel, Eve has been released from prison early for good behaviour. This, in itself, does not affect Josh greatly. He is more affected by Rachel, who is keen to re-establish their friendship and even to date him. By this time, Rachel has become a sexually confident young woman whose mission in life appears to be ridding Josh of his demons. After Josh tries but is unable to have sex with Rachel, he finally reveals how guilty he feels about having let Eve down. He still believes he was in love with her and she with him. Then, in the final pages of the novel, Josh meets the recently released Eve, who explains to him that he is innocent and that she groomed him from the start. This revelation releases Josh from his guilt and, in a highly unrealistic conclusion, he is cured of 'flickers' and able to make independent decisions about his future.

Despite the novel's crude insistence on a happy ending at the expense of the credibility fostered up until that point, Lyga's novel is praiseworthy and bold in its presentation of the sensitive subjects of grooming and pleasure. He is by no means the only author to tackle such topics. In *Nicholas Dane* (2009), the British Melvin Burgess attempted to depict a male teacher grooming boys in a care-home which is also a boarding school, but since Nicholas quickly senses there is something odd about Mr Creal from observing other boys' reactions, and so readers are encouraged to view his seemingly kind behaviour suspiciously from the start. Mr Creal is not developed as a character, he is a caricature of a paedophile. His relationships with the boys are so clearly abusive that neither the reader nor Nicholas ever consider the potential for pleasure. Even in Burgess's earlier novel, *Doing It* (2003), which includes a teacher-pupil relationship, the grooming phase is dealt with quite perfunctorily. Moreover, in that novel, the boy, at seventeen, is old enough to be having sex, albeit not with his twenty year old teacher! The gap between teacher and pupil in *Doing It* would not be considered abusive outside the school setting. Eve Sherman is also young, but she is twice the age of Josh, and the novel clarifies that Josh's confusion over the nature of their relationship is part of the abuse.

Lyga also takes a decidedly high risk in his depiction of specific sexual acts in *Boy Toy*. In her widely cited review of the novel when it was awarded the American Library Association for Best Book for Young Readers in 2008, Ilene Cooper describes these descriptions as being "so graphic, they border on soft porn" (2008:n.p). Her example comes from an early adventure into oral sex:

She dropped to her knees and unbuckled my belt, then skinned down my pants, and underpants. I was ready for her already, and she dived down, darting her head like a starving bird.... She stopped. 'Watch me,' she groaned. 'Watch.' (*Boy Toy*, p. 204)

However, although the novel makes it clear that Josh and Eve have frequent and varied sexual activities, this is the most extreme example in the novel. Other incidents are more related to voyeurism as Josh delights in sneaking peeks at Eve's body, when he assumes that she is unaware that he is doing so. These explicit descriptions invite readers into a situation which resembles that of Josh. If the readers do indeed find the scenes pornographic and sexually arousing, then – like Josh – they will also be likely to experience a sense of guilt. For the teen reader, the guilt will come from having taken pleasure from witnessing acts of sexual abuse, for Josh the guilt comes because his sexual pleasure during his encounters with Eve lead him to believe that he is not being abused. Even five years later, he still believes they were in love with one another. Lyga's trust in his readers' ability to discern that the presence of pleasure and the ability to perform sexually do not reduce the abusive nature of the relationship is impressive, and overall it would seem that he gets the balance right. This is largely because of his depiction of Josh's relationship with Rachel which reveals the long term damage. Despite his extensive sexual experience, Josh is, in many ways, less 'knowing' than Rachel. Emotionally, he is still a twelve year old boy with little sense of how human relationships can work; he is a figure who invites pity not envy.

Lyga offers nothing to alleviate his readers' guilt at enjoying the titillation offered by the explicit sex scenes, and indeed it is hard to imagine what he could do without overtly wagging the finger and withdrawing the trusting relationship between author and reader he has established. Guilt and shame seem to lie at the heart of defining the borders between voluntary and involuntary sex to a greater extent than mechanical knowledge of "who does what to whom and how" (Reynolds 2007:117). For Neil Postman, in his lamentation of the loss of childhood, shame and guilt are important socialising agents. He argues that the shame that arises from knowing things we should not know "is an essential element in the civilizing process" (Postman [1982] 1994:48). Shame – in Postman's view – is a way in which differentiation between adults and children can be enforced and concretised in social practice. As he explains, "From the child's point of view, shame gives power and authority to adulthood. For adults know, whereas children do not, what words are shameful to use, what subjects are shameful to discuss, what acts are deemed necessary to privatize" (Postman [1982] 1994:86). Indeed, he goes so far as to claim that "*without a well-developed idea of shame, childhood cannot exist*" (Postman [1982] 1994:9; italics original).

If we accept Postman's view, then the knowledge of sexual acts readers of Lyga's novel gain is offset by the guilt they feel at being titillated by abuse. Guilt and shame help to define the borders of what is and is not acceptable. For Postman this translates into the borders between adolescence and adulthood. Returning to the novels depicting cross-generational desire discussed in the chapter on queer sexualities above, this would imply that Cordelia's lack of shame in Chambers's *This is All*, and Ben's lack of shame in Burgess's *Doing It* signal that these 17 year olds are already adults: they 'know' too much to be children.

One of the many flaws in Postman's argument is that he conflates all forms of shame, rather than providing a nuanced discussion which would distinguish between the appropriate shame of an abuser and the inappropriate shame of a victim of sexual abuse. And in the voluntary cases of cross-generational sexual relationships, the egotism of Cordelia and Ben becomes a virtue or at least a sign of maturity. Josh is over-burdened by the guilt he feels, he is ashamed that he did not protect Eve and that, as a result, she went to prison. Even at seventeen, he still feels ashamed of himself, his behaviour and his knowledge. In part, this sense of shame is what marks him as remaining a child; when his discussion with Eve releases him from his guilt, he is able to make adult decisions about his life. In this way, the novel appears to endorse Postman's view that shame is essential to the maintenance of clear borders between adulthood and adolescence, but as the novel clarifies, Josh should not have experienced this guilt in the first place. He has done nothing wrong. Eve too, the novel clarifies, feels ashamed, but this does not render her a child. Moreover, since the majority of the novel focuses on Josh's inappropriate feelings of guilt, Eve's guilt is easily overlooked.

Shame is also the emotion that dominates the siblings Jordan and Michelle in the Australian author Sonia Hartnett's novel, *Sleeping Dogs* (1995). Jordan and Michelle are lovers as well as siblings. The incest taboo is both historically and culturally specific, although greater sanctions between children and parents than between siblings seem universal. Indeed, sexual relationships between siblings were encouraged in Ancient Egypt as a means of maintaining the purity of the line of the Pharaohs. Nevertheless, Anglophone novels for adolescents are produced in societies which actively proscribe and legislate against sibling incest as well as sexual relations between parents and children. My interest in the sibling incest portrayed in Hartnett's *Sleeping Dogs* stems not from any need to pass moral judgment on the pair, but rather in considering how this illegal pairing – and the guilt, shame and fascination it inspires – sheds light on the borders between voluntary and involuntary sexual activity as well as the borders between adulthood and adolescents. I do not find it coincidental that I could have drawn exactly the same conclusions from the other sibling incest novel in the corpus: *Forbidden* by Tabitha Suzuma (2010).

Novels for adults depicting sibling incest (e.g. Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden*, Paulina Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale* and Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*) tend not to judge the lovers too harshly, although all expose a sense of unease. This unease is exploited as the authors invite their readers' fascination with the forbidden. In Hartnett's *Sleeping Dogs*, like McEwan's *The Cement Garden*, the incestuous relationship between the brother and sister is depicted as being the outcome of the dysfunctional family in which they live. The difference is that McEwan's sibling pair take on the role of mother and father in the family after their parents die, whereas the parents of Hartnett's Jordan and Michelle are very much alive and present. In *Sleeping Dogs*, the sibling pairing is presented as being a direct consequence of parental abuse.

The novel is set in the Australian outback, and the isolated setting is integral to the presentation of the Willow family as being cut off from the rest of society. The Willows live on a run-down farm, where their tyrannical father, Griffin, earns a living by exploiting tourists who stay in their caravans on his poorly run campsite. Griffin is a two-dimensional figure who bullies both his five children and the guests at the campsite. Nothing in the novel explains or excuses his tyrannical behaviour. The mother, Grace, is equally two dimensional and as abusive, albeit in an entirely different way. Grace has withdrawn into her own world; she no longer leaves the house or even opens the curtains. Her children are expected to care for her, rather than the other way around. She is a tragic character, and her comments reveal that each of her children were conceived when Griffin was drunk, and presumably she was raped. Nevertheless, her emotional dependence on her children and her refusal to acknowledge, let alone protect, her children from her husband's physical and more obvious emotional abuse further compounds the abuse her children, especially Jordan, suffers. Only once has she taken Jordan to a doctor for treatment after one of Griffin's attacks, but the doctor's disapproval left her feeling too ashamed to seek help again.

The fully developed characters in the novel are the children and an unusual visitor to the campsite, the artist Bow Fox. Unlike the usual visitors to the campsite – impoverished 'White trash' families who can afford no better – Fox stays on at the campsite for some time to paint pictures of the landscape. He is fascinated by the Willow family, and physically attracted to Michelle. He tricks Michelle's much younger brother, Oliver, into revealing family secrets. Fox realises that Jordan and Michelle are lovers, and implies that he will expose the family in some way, but the siblings band together to concoct a plan in which Fox is mauled by the farm dogs and left exposed to the relentless sun. The sleeping dogs of the title that should be left to lie are thus both the metaphoric secrets of the family that would best be left to lie and the physical dogs that are deliberately provoked to protect the family secret. Fox's revenge is to write to tell Griffin, which leads Griffin to shoot

Jordan.³ The family then sell up and move on, taking a further layer of family secrets with them.

As the above synopsis indicates, this is a dense novel and sibling incest is only one element within a complex web of concerns. Although presented as being a direct consequence of the family's isolation and the abusive parenting the children receive, Jordan and Michelle feel guilty about their relationship, even as they feel compelled to continue it. In an early scene, before it is entirely clear to first time readers of the novel that the siblings are lovers, Michelle upbraids Jordan for defending himself against one of their father's frequent physical attacks. As her father's favourite child, Michelle, unlike Jordan, is rarely beaten. When Jordan was 18, he fought back and knocked his father over. Michelle was horrified. She argues

that, in a way, they deserved to be hit, both of them. They knew what they did wasn't *right*: you read about it in books and it was never right in them. If Griffin hit Jordan, wasn't that a sort of punishment for them? And if they were being punished, didn't that give them the freedom to go on doing what they did? 'Do you see what I mean, Jordan?' she'd asked. 'Sometimes, two wrongs *can* make a right. Can *give you* a right.'

(*Sleeping Dogs*, p. 18; italics original)

Her admonishment assumes that, as their father, Griffin has the right to dominate them, but also that Jordan's beatings atone for the sins they commit and allow them the freedom to behave in unacceptable ways: since Jordan has already received the punishment, he is free to sin. Jordan is at first "incredulous" (*ibid.*), but accepts her argument and allows his father's beatings to continue.

These insights into Michelle's warped morality reveal her awareness that she and Jordan are crossing the boundaries of acceptability, but "it appears to hurt no one. It causes no trouble and no great punishment comes down from the sky to blight them" (*Sleeping Dogs*, p. 58). Bow Fox's response is even more revealing: he is both fascinated and disgusted by the pair's relationship. Sibling incest is abject. Although it may – as in Jordan and Michelle's case – be volitional, it is still deeply disturbing for both those in the relationship and the reader. As McPherson notes,

3. The brother in Tabitha Suzuma's *Forbidden* also dies. Lochan commits suicide to protect Maya. Maya considers committing suicide but decides not to as she needs to mother her younger siblings. Like the siblings in McEwan's *The Cement Garden*, Maya and Lochan have formed a heterosexual nuclear family in the absence of their parents. The death of both brothers – Lochan in *Forbidden* and Jordan in *Sleeping Dogs* – functions as a warning to the young reader as, despite the great sympathy for the plight of the youngsters in both these teenage novels, they are punished for crossing the borders of acceptability. See Nikolajeva (2012) for a discussion of the couple's feelings of guilt.

The incestuous relationship between Jordan and Michelle is abject. Their ignorance, whilst inhibiting a clear knowledge of the reasons, does not prevent them from acknowledging they are committing a wrong, a sin. Hartnett ensures that their relationship is positioned as abject by locating their meetings as clandestine and illicit, from which follows a strong sense of wrongdoing.

(McPherson 1999:20)

As a result of their isolation and abusive parenting, Michelle and Jordan can find no other way to express their desiring bodies than through their mutual desire. They are painfully aware that their behaviour is not sanctioned by society, and so attempt to keep it secret. All the other siblings know and collude with them to hide it from the outside world and their parents. But as Kristeva observes, the abject cannot be fully repressed, and the relationship is exposed to Bow Fox.⁴

Fox's fascination reveals the other side of the abject: although we long to expel the abject from within our midst, we are also fascinated by it. Kristeva illustrates this by discussing reaction to a corpse. The corpse confirms that our fears of death are well-founded. We long to reject it, to expel it from our midst and, in doing so, reject death ... but of course we cannot. Nor can we reject the fact that every society will contain individuals whose sexual desires push them beyond the borders of the acceptable into the realm of the abject. These borders are not absolute; they are subject to the vagaries of time and culture. However, we instantly recognise when the border has been crossed because the body of the transgressed becomes abject. Josh in *Boy Toy* frequently comments on how differently he is treated by his parents, peers and teachers since the court case revealed the full story of his relationship with Eve to the public via the internet.

Abjection thus marks the borders I seek to identify in this chapter. Sex becomes abusive at the point at which it is written on the body, when our gut response is both fear and fascination. The body of abused child is abject. It is, as Julia Kristeva describes, "the jettisoned object that is radically excluded, which draws towards the place where meaning collapses" (1982:2). Victims of sexual abuse may inspire pathos but they also inspire disgust and voyeuristic allure. The abject is expelled: the victim of sexual abuse is no longer a true child but not an adult either, she belongs outside the semiotic order, but she cannot be ignored. As Christine Wilkie-Stibbs observes, "Far from being silenced by the process, however, it returns

4. Not all novels depicting sibling incest treat the relationship as abject. Burgess's *Bloodtide* presents the magical pairing of the opposite sex twins – Siggie and Signy – as part of the gods' plans to defeat the tyrant, King Conor. The disturbing quality of incest is reduced because the single sexual act takes place whilst Signy is metamorphosed. Siggie does not realize he has had sex with his sister until he recognises himself in the child born of their coupling. (See Bradford, Mallan, Stephens and McCallum 2008:144–147 for a fuller discussion of this novel and its sequels.)

to the subject as the continuous and stark reminder that what is abjected is the projection of self that is impossible to be disowned" (2008:93). In the novels discussed below, the rejection of abject adolescent is constantly undermined by a fascination with sexual victimization (see also Marshall 2009).

To sum up, my argument is that sexual activity becomes abusive at the point at which it renders the victim's body abject. The abject also marks the boundary between adulthood and adolescence in that individuals who are rendered abject are expelled from both categories and thus from the semiotic order. This may seem fairly arbitrary, and indeed this definition allows for fluctuations in the border, but in the novels mentioned in this chapter it helpfully clear. Reflecting back on the novels mentioned above, for instance, abjection provides a clear means by which we can distinguish between Lyga's *Boy Toy* and Burgess's *Doing It*. In *Boy Toy*, Josh is painfully aware that people are both disgusted and fascinated by what has happened to him. His fears that everyone is gossiping about his relationship with his teacher are confirmed when his baseball coach goads him with the remark "You never slept with me, so I ain't about to take it easy on you!" (*Boy Toy*, p. 29). Equally, Bow Fox's reaction to Jordan and Michelle's relationship in *Sleeping Dogs* speaks to the abjection of the incestuously desiring body. In contrast, although Ben also has sex with his teacher in *Doing It*, his body is never marked as abject, any more than Cordelia's body is marked when she enters into an affair with a married man in Chambers's *This is All*. Using abjection to define the borders of acceptability, I now wish to investigate clear cut cases of abuse, and examine what these presentations of abject adolescents reveal about societal views of childhood today.

Unheimlich homes: On-stage rape in the home

The use of framed silences to depict sexual abuse, I have suggested, protects young readers from knowing more than they are ready to know but also reflects the difficulties many victims have in speaking about their abuse. It can also reflect the unwillingness of others to hear, and this is perhaps most often true when the abuse takes place in the home and the perpetrator is a parent or parent substitute (McCormack 2002). Cynthia Voigt's novel, *When She Hollers* (1994), depicts just one day in Tish's life; the day she 'hollers' (i.e. speaks out about her abuse). At seventeen, Tish has endured years of abuse from her step-father. On the day in question, she places a survival knife on the kitchen table and declares that she will fight back if he ever comes into her bed again. Tish has broken the silence, she has 'hollered', but she is not heard. Her step-father says she is lying and questions what is really wrong, perhaps she is pregnant by her boyfriend? Her mother withdraws

and refuses to intervene. Her younger (half)brothers join in the teasing. No one takes either her claims or her threats seriously.

Tish leaves for school already realising that she will have to return home. All day she tries to find a way to tell someone what has happened that they can hear. Finally she ends up in the office of her friend's father. He is a lawyer, and when she tells her story, he arranges documentation that will help her prevent further abuse (but does not provide her with any means of finding retribution or recovery from past abuse). Similarly, Tiny in Ruth White's *Weeping Willow* (1992) is not believed when she first tells her mother about her stepfather's abuse, although when he threatens her younger sister, Tiny finds a new way to tell others and in doing so releases unexpected strength in her mother. Another feature which these novels share is that the father substitute is not prosecuted. Indeed, hardly any novels in which an adult acting *in loco parentis* (as step-fathers, uncles or boarding school teachers) is the abuser prosecuted (and only the female abuser, Eve Sherman in *Boy Toy*, is incarcerated within the space of the narrative, although we do learn that the abuser in Grant's *Uncle Vampire* will be). I find this surprising, as I expected these novels to reassure readers that solutions could be sought. Instead, reassurance seems to take the form of proposing that abuse happens to other teenagers, living in other places and/or other times. *Weeping Willow* is set in small town America in the 1950s, and the abuse of eponymous protagonist of Burgess's *Nicholas Dane* (2009) by his teachers is set against the background of 1980s music, both 'historical' settings for the teenage readers of these novels.

One of the few novels to offer retribution is a fantasy novel, Margo Lanagan's *Tender Morsels* (2008). Liga's father's dies when a local witch realises that he will continue raping his daughter unless she intervenes. Like the historical settings of *Weeping Willow* and *Nicholas Dane*, the fantasy setting of *Tender Morsels* serves to make the narrative a story of abuse that happens to other people (see also Doane and Hodges 2001:2 & 31–45). For my purposes, however, I am more interested in what Lanagan's fantasy setting reveals about perceptions of adolescence. What we find is that the trauma of sexual abuse renders the adolescent unstable and, although there is some compassion for this abused teen, this novel also conflates instability with adolescence. Recovery and adulthood are again conflated as a single goal.

Escaping trauma: Refusing recovery?

Tender Morsels (2008) by the deservedly acclaimed Australian novelist, Margo Lanagan, is a richly complex, feminist revisioning of the fairy tale *Snow White and Rose Red*. Lanagan's novel begins with a back story which explains how the mother came to live in an isolated cottage alone with her two daughters, and who the

fathers of her children are. It is a powerful novel which does not focus exclusively on girls' transitions into womanhood, but also examines womanhood for women who do not become mothers and the world of the crone (see Korkkola 2012b). By extracting only Lanagan's presentation of the abused teen for scrutiny in this section, I do a disservice to the novel as a whole, yet the very fact that a writer as sensitive as Lanagan should fall prey to the temptation to conflate abjection with adolescence and recovery with adulthood is indicative of how pervasive this disturbing view of adolescence has become.

Tender Morsels is set in two separate worlds. The primary world is a pre-industrial, quasi-mediaeval, deeply patriarchal world in which magic and witchcraft are commonplace. In this world, Liga lives in an isolated cottage with her widowed father. The novel proper begins when her father, Da, tricks her into aborting a foetus. Readers gradually learn that Liga has been regularly sexually abused by her father since her mother's death. After the conception of her third child by her father, Liga manages to hide her pregnancy until she is well into her second trimester. When Da finally realises what has happened, he obtains the means to procure yet another abortion, but is killed on his way home, and so Liga is able to carry the child to term. Liga plans to raise her daughter – Branza (Snow White) – alone in the forest, but she is trapped by a group of village boys and gang-raped. Unaware that she has conceived another child – Urdda (Rose Red) – during the rape, Liga decides to kill both Branza and herself rather than raise her child in such a violent world. A magical force – the Moon baby – intervenes and sends Liga and her daughters into the secondary world of the novel: the land of Liga's heart's desires.

The secondary world is an Arcadian world where violence, sexual desire, alcohol and money have been banished. In this idyllic, feminine world, Liga raises her daughters undisturbed. In *From Mythic to Linear*, Maria Nikolajeva observes how childhood is constructed as a distinct period of time (2000). All the features she identifies are to be found in the land of Liga's heart's desires. In effect, the two world setting of the novel is a physical separation of the worlds of childhood and adulthood. It is also used to represent the common notion that abuse brings about the 'loss' of childhood. In the primary world of the novel, Liga's father starts to sexually abuse her after her mother's death. Doane and Hodges (2001:19–20 & 25) identify the social isolation of the daughter as part of the master narrative of the incest memoir, and observe how the master narrative also associates incest with poverty, a feature of nearly all the novels mentioned here. Sex and death – two well established tropes for expressing the on-set of adulthood and, thus, linear time – mark the premature end of Liga's childhood and a forced entry into adulthood. The land of Liga's heart's desires is childhood: a pastoral landscape where nothing ever changes.

Inevitably, breaches are formed between the primary and secondary worlds. A powerful witch – Miss Dance – intervenes and brings the two worlds together again. As a result, Liga is forcibly returned to the primary world, the world of adulthood. The time in these two worlds should have stayed the same, but the ‘key-joint’ has been cracked. As a result, “the times have slid out of place” (*Tender Morsels*, p. 312), and time passes much faster in the world of Liga’s heart’s desire than it does in the novel’s primary world. Unlike the pattern Nikolajeva (1988:659) identifies in her extensive corpus of fantasy novels, time in the novel’s primary world does continue whilst Liga is away in her secondary world. She is gone for just over ten years in the primary world, but ages about twenty-five years in the process.

The distortion of time between the worlds is woven into the novel’s depiction of the three stages of womanhood. Whereas Nikolajeva’s study of time showed a relentless movement away from the circular, idyllic time of childhood towards the linear time of adulthood, Lanagan’s novel allows her characters greater fluidity as Arcadia is presented as being literally another world. Liga starts her life in a linear world and her childhood is marked by death and sexuality, features normally associated with adolescence and the on-set of linear time. Her early adult life is, by way of contrast, spent in idyll. When she returns to the primary world of the novel, her desires, her body and expectations about her desiring body are no longer synchronized. This distortion of the time elements enables Lanagan to offer a complex commentary on female desire (Kokkola 2012b), but it also – perhaps inadvertently – implies that Liga is somehow immature or childish for being so traumatised by her father’s sexual abuse and being gang raped by the group of village boys.

The Moon-baby sends Liga into the land of her heart’s desire, childhood, in order to recover. Liga’s response to her rescue – “I do not deserve this!” – is described as “miss[ing] the mark”: “The forces behind these events ... did not take account of such small things as Liga’s deserving or Liga’s not. To them in their vastness, she must look as blameless as her baby” (*Tender Morsels*, p. 64). The comment forces the question: how does Liga’s blamelessness differ from that of her baby daughter?

In a discussion of Francesca Lia Block’s rewriting of Grimm’s Little Red Cap and All Fur in “Wolf”, a short story in her collection *The Rose and the Beast*, Elizabeth Marshall connects victim power with the girls’ empowerment movement, rape education and the master narratives of the fairy tale. Marshall observes that feminist rewritings of traditional fairy tales, like Lanagan’s *Tender Morsels*, celebrate the power of their female characters precisely in proportion to the expectation that they will be violated. For although Warner claims that traditional fairy tales “offer the consolation of an image reflected back, of a wrong unmasked, of authority shaken and realigned” (Warner [1993] 2003:132), this movement seems

to be reliant on a yoking of victimhood with empowerment so as to preserve the 'innocence' of the victim.

This conflation of victimhood and innocence with empowerment is, perhaps, inevitable: one cannot challenge a stereotype without first drawing attention to its existence. Since a primary goal of feminist revisions of fairy tales is to challenge the inherent patriarchy of these dominating narratives in Western literature, they must assume patriarchal powers as a given which, in turn, means defining the female body as a "rape space" (Marshall 2009:218; Hall 2004:5, see also Bacchilega 1997). Lanagan's novel presents Liga and her daughters as potential 'rape spaces'. Whilst the daughters are protected in Liga's Arcadian world, victimhood provides the source of Liga's empowerment. A young witch's sympathy for Liga as victim brings about the death of Da, and the Moon baby's rescue is a direct result of her gang rape. On the surface, this might appear to celebrate girl power, but because the agency Liga gains relies "on a kind of 'victim power,' which ties the girl's agency to her identity as victim" (Marshall 2009:218), it maintains the allure of victimhood.

Lanagan does, however, also incorporate some resistance to this master narrative of victim power. Upon her return to the primary world, Liga is severely criticised by Miss Dance for having stayed too long in Arcadia. Miss Dance is angry that Liga has kept her daughters in a childlike state for too long. Her eldest daughter, Branza (Snow White), "has not had enough of a true life to even conceive of her own heart's desire" (*Tender Morsels*, p. 328). Miss Dance seems harsh, especially in the light of all that Liga has suffered, but the truth of her statement is revealed when Branza begs to be returned to Liga's world, an appeal that is effectively a request for assisted suicide. Through Miss Dance, we hear the voice of Lanagan admonishing parents who overprotect their children, leaving them depressed and ill-equipped to face a real world which will inevitably contain people and actions that would hurt or upset them. The novel thus communicates the view that childhood and adolescence are different states, and supports the view that the transition from girlhood to womanhood has discrete developmental stages. Unfortunately, it also implies that Liga's retreat into Arcadia as a result of her abuse is infantile. Adulthood and recovery are demanded.

Very recently, however, there has been an admission in writing for teens that recovery is not always possible. These narratives of adolescents damaged beyond repair raise race to the fore. I shall begin my examination of this recent trend in relation to Sapphire's novel *Push* (1996) and, to a lesser extent, its sequel *The Kid* (2011). Whilst the former novel can, and often is, read as a celebration of the protagonist's rise from speechlessness to voice, Sapphire also resists the imperative to offer hope. Her novels proffer a bleak view of the world. That her narratives of despair are some of the very few novels in the corpus to depict desiring Black teens seems to be far from coincidental. I conclude with a discussion of human trafficking

in which hope is also denied, and which again foreground race in the relationship between 'knowledge' and 'innocence'.

Narratives of hope and despair

Trites (2006) describes the tradition of dividing fiction for adolescents into two major categories: novels of social hope and novels of despair. The former dominates the market as most adults working in the children's literature industry agree with Natov that books for children "must not leave the child-reader in despair. And although what evokes hopelessness varies from child to child ... [a] poetics for children requires a delicate rendering of hope and honesty" (Natov 2003:220). Trites further divides these novels of hope according to whether they focus on personal growth or on wider improvements in society. The protagonist in novels of social hope is typically a morally sound character in a morally corrupt society who rises through personal endeavour. The character's growth may even suggest that the society will be improved by the protagonist's actions and growth. In many ways, *Push* by Sapphire would seem to fall into this category.

The narrator-protagonist of *Push* is the illiterate, but articulate Precious Jones. Precious begins her narrative when she is sixteen years old and seven months pregnant with her father's second child. Her first child, Little Mongo, a girl with Down's Syndrome, was born when Precious was just twelve. The narrative begins when Precious is thrown out of school for being pregnant, but starts attending an alternative literacy programme where she receives her first proper education. Much of the novel depicts Precious's struggle to become literate and readers can chart her progress from being someone for whom "all the pages look alike" (*Push*, p. 5) to becoming a poet. However, towards the end of the novel, Precious learns that her father, Carl, has died of AIDS and that she is HIV positive. The novel is set in 1989, when treatments for HIV were in their infancy. As a result, her diagnosis is, effectively, a death sentence. This is confirmed in the sequel, *The Kid*, which starts with Precious's funeral.

Push thus contains two interconnected plot lines. On the one hand, it provides a narrative of social hope in that, like Celie in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983) to which the novel makes numerous references, Precious is a morally sound character who develops from being a silenced, illiterate object to become a speaking, writing, literate subject. Like Celie, Precious is more sinned against than sinning. Although she has not been mothered herself, she is determined to be a good mother. Her nascent maternal skills, her protection of her son, Abdul, her pride in his development and her concern for his cognitive development all suggest that she has the capacity to become an excellent mother. All of her achievements require her to *push*: to work hard and commit herself to her endeavours. The fact that she and some of the other girls in the alternative school manage to rise above the circumstances

which left them outcasts can be read as suggesting that there is reason to hope that society can change and that education provides the key to such change.

In the reverse direction, Trites refers to novels of despair. Here she no longer distinguishes between personal despair and societal despair: “novels that imply that some problems cannot be overcome tend to conflate the idea of personal despair with social despair. I therefore collapse them into one category, novels of despair” (Trites 2006:11). Trites provides two examples of such novels, but does not further develop her ideas on this topic. I shall attempt to do so here by drawing on the work of Lynne Pearce who seeks to consider how a feminist reader can mobilise the power of affect for politically motivated readings. For *Push*, like *The Bluest Eye* to which Sapphire’s novel covertly alludes, is also a novel of despair. It does not shy away from depicting the long term consequences of Precious’s abused childhood: her daughter is so severely damaged she will be institutionalised for life (*Push*, p. 84). Despite the great gains Precious makes in terms of her literacy development, her absolute levels of literacy remain so low that she is unlikely to find any employment beyond that which the social services suggest: caring for infirm White people as a live-in aid receiving less than the minimum wage and being separated from her son, Abdul. More importantly, she has contracted HIV from her father and, given the date when the novel is set, we can assume that she will develop AIDS and die leaving Abdul to the mercy of a social welfare system that Sapphire portrays as being deeply flawed. The sequel, *The Kid*, confirms this despairing message as it starts with Precious’s funeral and follows Abdul’s path through foster homes, abusive boarding school and onto the street. Despite his talent as a dancer, he earns money from prostitution, molests younger boys and is eventually treated as a suspect in post-9/11 New York.

Given that *Push* is marketed as an adolescent novel and novice readers will come to it with expectations of a happy ending or at least a resolution, it is unsurprising that most readers focus on the narrative’s uplifting tale of emerging subjectivity. Since Precious gains so much from becoming literate, it would be unethical to ignore the narrative of hope. Yet to focus on this exclusively would overlook Sapphire’s engagement with the abject nature of incestuous abuse and its long term consequences. Sapphire’s commitment to a radical left position is very clear, and she guides her fairly inexperienced readers to see *both* the narrative of hope *and* the narrative of despair.⁵

5. *Push* was recently made into a film, *Precious*, directed by Lee Daniels. The film’s ending is happier than the novel and several of the scenes I focus on here have been removed. For instance, the film reunites Precious with her daughter, which does not happen in the novel. As a response to the novel, the film points to the very great difficulties of finding ways to make narratives of despair palatable for readers or viewers. Readers and viewers not only expect happy endings, they like them and are more willing to pay to watch or read an uplifting narrative than a depressing one.

Push can and, I argue, *should* be read as both a novel of hope and a novel of despair. Precious concludes her story with the uplifting comment “I got to get up to the level of high school kids, then college kids. I know I can do this. Ms Rain tell me don’t worry it’s gonna work out. I still got time” (*Push*, p. 139), and with a description of her reading to Abdul. This offers readers the opportunity to read the novel exclusively as a narrative of hope, and the repeated allusions to *The Color Purple* encourage this view. But readers who focus exclusively on this part of the novel overlook significant parts of the novel as a whole. Moreover, they are denying the horror of Precious’s situation as they attempt to force her life to offer them redeeming meaning.

Precious also longs for a happy ending. She notes that her teacher, Ms Rain, disapproves of *The Color Purple*’s “fairy tale ending” (*Push*, p. 83). Precious, however, is delighted by it:

I would say, well shit like that can be true. Life can work out for the best sometimes. Ms Rain love *Color Purple* too but say realism has its virtues too. Izm, smizm! Sometimes I wanna tell Ms Rain to shut up with all the IZM stuff. But she my teacher so I don’t tell her to shut up. I don’t know what “realism” mean but I do know what REALITY is and it’s a mutherfucker, lemme tell you. (*Push*, p. 83)

The discussion of *The Color Purple*’s happy ending is just one of many places in where Sapphire points out the dangers of focussing exclusively on the positive narrative and pushes her readers towards recognizing narratives of despair.

Expectations of happiness, or at least redemption, may not seem unreasonable. When Pandora released the miseries of the world, she also released hope. When writing for young readers, who represent adult hopes for the future, the need for hope may seem self-evident. Kimberly Reynolds observes that “Many writers, editors, publishers, and critics argue strongly that no matter how realistically it [life] is presented, if they are intended to be read by children, books should end on a note of optimism, or at least hope” (2007:89). Reynolds is critical of this stance, especially when applied across the board to works which, like *Push*, are intended for adolescents. Blanket calls for happy endings, Reynolds continues, overlook “the fact that children’s literature caters for readers from birth to sixteen, from different backgrounds and with different needs, sometimes including the need to acknowledge disturbing experiences and overwhelming feelings of despair, anger, and frustration” (2007:89). Like Reynolds, I find it wholly appropriate that works acknowledging “ugly feelings” (Ngai 2005, Pearce 2010:152) are available to adolescent readers, but not only because such works may reflect their personal experiences. Learning to recognise genuine despair, and learning to read in ways that do not trivialise genuinely hopeless situations is part of the process of becoming a skilful reader. At some point, young readers must learn to read texts

which do not meet their expectations, and learn how to read without imposing their expectations and desires onto the text. The desire to see only hope and ignore despair is particularly hard to resist.

An empirical study by Thompson (2006) reveals some of the problems that arise when readers focus exclusively on happy endings. Thompson read *Push* with a class of women's studies students, who were politically motivated and experienced at looking at how power functions in the societies depicted in realistic fiction. Even so, these predominantly White, predominantly middle class students blamed Precious for not leaving her abusive situation earlier, and were offended by her admissions that she experienced orgasms during her father's sexual abuse (Thompson 2006:33). Although these students pitied Precious, their desire to seek a happy ending precluded them from seeing how Precious is trapped by a system that has robbed her of the capacity to choose (see also Angelides 2004).

On her arrival at the alternative school, Precious meets the secretary who, after a series of misunderstandings, finally realises that Precious does not know what an 'alternative' is. The secretary then explains that "an alternative is like a choice, a different way to do something" (*Push*, p. 26). Precious's response indicates that this is not merely a vocabulary problem. She is genuinely unaware that there are options open to her. Sapphire drives home this point in a scene that must have been overlooked by the students in Thompson's class since it clearly reveals the paucity of alternatives available to Precious and her son Abdul.

When Precious leaves the hospital with week-old Abdul, she returns to her mother's home, not because she wants to, but simply because she has no other choice. "But when I git home from the hospital Mama try to kill me" (*Push*, p. 73). This is a literal, not figurative statement. Bruised, dazed and homeless, Precious returns to the hospital, but arrives as one of the few people to have recognised her predicament, Nurse Butter, is leaving. Nurse Butter is not unkind, just busy. She is rushing off to collect her child from day-care. Nurse Butter is not wealthy, but she is living the life Precious desires: she is educated, and she earns enough to pay for child care. Nurse Butter passes Precious on to another nurse to whom Precious is "a problem got to be out they face" (*Push*, p. 77). Precious is forced to take up the only 'option' now available to her: she must go to the homeless shelter known as the 'armory'. But Precious lacks both body armour and *amour*, love. During the one night she spends there, Precious loses her few remaining possessions, and comes close to losing her shoes.

Readers, like those in Thompson's class, who criticise Precious for failing to leave her abusive home earlier clearly overlook this scene and others like it. They fail to recognise just how limited Precious's resources are. And even those readers who do recognise the limitations within which Precious must operate may, for political reasons, choose to focus on Precious's journey to becoming "queen of the

ABCs" (*Push*, p. 81), thereby celebrating her agency in the face of adversity, as Precious does. However, there are also occasions on which we should be wary of reading for such redeeming meanings.

Reading the novel exclusively as a narrative of hope might seem a fairly benign action, since such a reading would foreground Precious's subjectivity. Yet as Pearce points out, the refusal to recognise that some lives do indeed lead nowhere is a means by which privilege can remain unacknowledged. In *Push*, Sapphire challenges her readers to recognise social failings which hold back even the most impressive individuals who, like Precious, raise themselves out of their overwhelmingly difficult situation. Sapphire's particular goal would seem to be to highlight how race, class, sex and fat-prejudice intersect to render Precious wholly without the resources she needs to work the system to her advantage. Moreover, I am somewhat disturbed that, like Liga in Lanagan's *Tender Morsels*, Precious's primary source of empowerment comes from victimhood.

Precious's route out of her abusive home arises directly from her abuse. After her night at Armory House, shelter is found for her primarily because she is the mother of a young baby. Although fictional, this account is supported by sociological research that finds that becoming a parent in ones teens can result in an improved social situation amongst the working classes and/or socially isolated (Duncan 2005, 2007). However, this is not the demographic who usually reads novels. *Push* is not designed to be read by girls like Precious; it is a politically aware novel that addresses itself to a more sophisticated readership. As a result, the intended readers of *Push* can take comfort from the fact that this abuse takes place to someone who is 'not like me'. This distancing is also evident in the most extreme form of abuse present in the corpus: human trafficking and subsequent prostitution.

Victims of vice: Prostitution and the loss of innocence

Prostitution is a topic that appeared in Victorian stories for children. In her discussion of 'Street Arabs', Elizabeth Thiel identifies numerous hints that the poor may turn to prostitution in stories for children published in the late nineteenth century (2008:43–71), and historical novels like Paterson's *The Sign of the Chrysanthemum* (1973) and Mary Hooper's short story 'Charlotte' (2010) continue the idea that prostitution was a problem of a bygone age for contemporary readers. A recent novel by Patricia McCormick, *Sold* (2008), a novel based on the author's years of working as an investigative reporter on the Indian sub-continent, draws attention to the continuance of teenage prostitution today. The novel traces the story of Lakshmi, a Nepalese girl who is sold into sexual slavery in India by her step-father. Written and marketed for English speaking teenagers in the wealthier parts of the

world, *Sold* presents prostitution as something that happens to other people – in another place – it is not something that is likely to affect the intended reader's everyday life, but it is something the reader is expected to know about (Kokkola, Valovirta & Korkka 2013).

In a study of the similarities in discourse surrounding the depiction of 'white slavery' and 'sex-trafficking', Jo Doezema identifies a number of recurring motifs which are also present in McCormick's *Sold*. These include "innocence; youth and virginity; deception and violence" (Doezema 2000:31). Doezema notes that accounts of girls destined for prostitution are typically presented as naïve young virgins, usually from the country (2000:24–28). The cover of McCormick's *Sold* exaggerates Lakshmi's youth by depicting a girl much younger than the 13 year old protagonist's stated age in the narrative. The full frontal gaze of a pre-pubescent girl wearing a rough shawl stares out at the reader. Her mouth is covered to hide her expression and to indicate her lack of voice. She looks no more than nine years old. The novel's opening is set in a Nepalese village where Lakshmi and her mother tend their crops and attempt to earn money to buy a new tin roof. Despite the emphasis on their poverty, the cruelty of the drunken step-father and the difficulties of daily life, the early part of the novel is a celebration of mother-daughter relationships and of the women's intimate connection with the soil and growing plants.

Presented as a series of snapshots written as though Lakshmi were speaking in the present tense, the formal features of the text do not allow her to anticipate her future, only to reflect upon her immediate past, which emphasizes her naïveté. Readers are encouraged to feel more knowledgeable than Lakshmi: Lakshmi has never tasted Coca-Cola, does not know that there is more than one city in the world and has never travelled by bus or train. The long description of Lakshmi's journey from her village home in the Nepalese Himalayas across the border into an unnamed Indian city (presumably Kolkata) is designed to make the reader feel more knowledgeable than the protagonist-narrator. McCormick introduces a good deal of information about sex-trafficking, but how quickly readers pick up on this will depend on what they already know. For instance, in the scene in which Lakshmi's step-father sells her to a trader for 400 rupees (about 4€), Lakshmi comments "I don't understand at all. A great deal of money has just been paid for work I have not yet done" (*Sold*, p. 60). The "new auntie who smells of amber and jasmine and possibility" (*Sold*, p. 50) has factored Lakshmi's lack of hips and plain facial features into the price paid. Readers will recognize that Lakshmi will not be going to work as a maid as she assumes, but precisely how much they understand about what is happening depends on what they already know. If they know nothing about sex trafficking, they will learn more alongside Lakshmi and never be left feeling ignorant that they did not know about trafficking before they began reading.

In the Indian brothel, Lakshmi discovers that several of the women working there have been compelled to do so by poverty and social circumstance. Pushpa, a woman suffering from lung disease, came to the brothel to work when her husband died and she could find no other way to support her two young children. Shilpa became a prostitute because her mother was one “It is the family trade” (Sold, p. 173) and Monica returns to the brothel because she has been disowned by her family and does not wish to bring shame on her son. These women’s stories introduce young, Western readers to the ways in which poverty can leave an individual without other choices. The women are presented as victims: and their victimhood is central to the pity that McCormick is attempting to evoke from her young readers. The narratives encourage readers to align themselves with these victims, and in doing so they position the reader as someone who is equally innocent albeit not necessary ignorant.

Although I admire McCormick’s commitment to this human right’s issue and her bravery in bringing stories of trafficking to light, her reliance on the stereotypes of innocence and victimhood as a way of inviting concern disturbs me. Doezeema’s (2000) study also highlights how any signs of subjectivity amongst trafficked women can lead to the loss of sympathy and a refusal to provide even the most basic forms of aid (they may well be imprisoned in countries where selling sex, as opposed to buying sex, is a criminal activity). It seems that any lack of innocence is treated as grounds for dismissing the victim, expelling the abject. Moreover, this insistence on presenting victims as ‘other’ people who live in ‘other’ places and ‘other’ times disturbingly marks the reader as White and middle class and victims as impoverished girls of colour. As with *Tender Morsels*, empowerment is yoked with victimhood in a way that “ignores the perpetrator as well as the social, cultural, and institutional factors that make rape, especially domestic sexual violence against girls, a reality” (Marshall 2009:222). This valorisation of victimhood extends beyond the age and sex of abused adolescent. Precious is held back not only because she is a young woman, but also because she is morbidly obese, impoverished, illiterate and Black.

Racially marked bodies: Seeing the invisible

As this study has repeatedly shown, the sexually knowing adolescent is a very visible presence. Even when disguised as an animal or attempting to hide an incestuous relationship, she makes her presence felt. When the gang of village boys see Liga in the forest, her knowing body is immediately perceived; she cannot remain invisible even though she would like to do so. The overwhelming majority of these characters have been White. When Sapphire raises the issue of race to the fore, she offers new

insights into the ways in which the sexually knowing adolescent is perceived, but she also draws on a long tradition in which incest is perceived by “white and prosperous ... as a problem of the poor and black” (Doane and Hodges 2001:31). And the same applies to those forced into prostitution (Kokkola, Valovirta & Korkka 2013).

In their sensitive and insightful investigation of the connections between race and the master narrative of incest, Doane and Hodges comment on the view that “incest in the black family cannot be discussed without confirming myths of black deviance. It may be better not to tell. This form of silence, silence as social discretion, is one that tacitly supports racialized, patriarchal prerogatives” (Doane and Hodges 2001:32). In writing a narrative of incest in a Black family into existence in *Push*, Sapphire breaks this wall of silence and, unlike Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* or Walker in *The Color Purple*, also seals off the mitigating histories (such as Cholly’s abuse by White men or Pa’s status as stepfather rather than biological father). The results are admirable. My concern is not that Sapphire’s narrative is weak, but the paucity of novels depicting characters of colour, and even fewer that feature empowered teens. Doane and Hodges (2001:125–7ff) summarise newspaper debates surrounding the novel which suggest that Sapphire’s focus on the most depraved individuals within the African American community is a way in which the predominantly White publishing industry can maintain an offensively racist image of Black family life, whilst appearing to offer voice to the disempowered. The validity of their point is borne out by the absence of positive portrayals of sexually active characters of colour in my corpus.

Jacqueline Woodson attempts to reverse the seeming connection between race and sexual abuse, but unfortunately does so by reinforcing the connections between class and abuse. In her novel, *I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This* (1994), the narrator-protagonist Marie is African American, middle classed and the friend of Lena Bright, who is ‘White trash’. At first Marie is reluctant to believe Lena is being abused, she’s convinced that “Nobody really does that kind of stuff. Not to their daughter”, but Lena convinces her that they can, they and that “you can’t do anything about it if it’s your father” (*Tell You This*, p. 55). The only way Lena can avoid abuse is to run away from home and stay away, but since Lena has not yet finished school, let alone college, she has effectively been trapped in poverty for the rest of her life, and is likely to suffer further abuse on the streets. This mechanically written problem novel is more problem than novel. The reversal of rich and Black vs. poor and White is a tokenist reversal that draws heavily on the master narrative that incest and sexual abuse only happen in low income families.

Precious’s family is decidedly troubled. Having decided to abandon ‘social discretion’ in favour of speaking out about incest within a Black family, Sapphire offers an insight into how race factors into Precious’s individualised victimhood. Race, Wiegman observes, is intimately connected to an “epistemology of the

visual" (1995:18). We determine what we know, by what we see. Yet, as Sara Ahmed has observed in *Queer Phenomenology*, what we do with our bodies determines what we can do. Our interactions with the world around us offer manifest opportunities for expanding or curtailing the range of things we do and can do. A simple example drawn from Ahmed is that of lifting weights. If one chooses to lift weights, then one's body is shaped by that activity and it becomes better equipped to lift other weights. Equally, if one chooses to overlook race, one will weaken one's ability to see race. Sapphire refuses to allow her readers to languish in what Ahmed describes as the "bad habit" that is Whiteness (Ahmed 2006:129–31). Sapphire uses the trope of invisibility to force her readers to see race.

Push, and to a lesser extent *The Kid*, allude to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), who has been rendered invisible by a racialised gaze. In Ellison's novel, the nameless narrator famously introduces readers to his plight by explaining that

I am an invisible man ... I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms ... people see everything and anything except me ... they refuse to see me. (*Invisible Man*, p. 3)

Equally, people refuse to see Precious, despite her gigantic body size, to the extent that she feels invisible to herself.

Invisibility in works in the Ellison tradition, use the metaphor of invisibility to suggest a total lack of agency, of a denial of the right to exist or what Toni Morrison refers to as "willfull critical blindness"; the refusal to take matters of race into consideration (1992:18, see also Morrison 1989). Although by no means the only major writer to play with the artistic possibilities for commenting on social issues opened up through metaphors of invisibility, "Ellison's metaphor ... has assumed a life of its own" as a fully articulated critique of racism in American society in the first half of the twentieth century (Stewart 2009:181). As it has developed, more recent deployments of the metaphor of invisibility offer a social critique which extends beyond race to incorporate other causes of loss of agency. Stewart observes that "Trauma, including physical or sexual abuse, is probably the most common factor leading to invisibility. As a result of the trauma, characters are often depicted as withdrawing to the point of psychic invisibility" (2009:182fn). The connections between race, sexual trauma and invisibility are, Stewart continues, "echoed in the discourse of marginalization in adolescent and YA literature" (2009:182). So although we would do well to remember that race, sexual abuse and adolescence all offer scope for marginalization in ways that are decidedly disparate, points of commonality are often emphasized through the metaphor of invisibility.

Precious feels her own invisibility acutely. Early on in the novel she expresses this invisibility through the image of the vampire: "my muver – my whole family, we more than dumb, we invisible ... I know who they say I am – vampire sucking

the system's blood" (*Push*, p. 30–1). Precious astutely observes that society – as represented through teachers, nurses and social workers – is unable to see her and her family. Her use of the vampire metaphor signals how her invisibility and her socio-historical heritage intertwine.⁶ As Stewart observes,

Precious is not a ghost ... but the characterization of herself as a vampire signals that same eerie, frightening response. Her cultural and historical heritage – a product of a violent history – contributes to her dislocation and displacement
(Stewart 2009:185)

Sapphire astutely uses her protagonist's vantage point to offer a commentary on the ease with which society can literally turn a 'blind eye' towards sections of the community. To be fair, Sapphire also demonstrates how Precious's inability to co-operate with the authorities that represent society (her teachers at her first school, the police and nurse when she gives birth to her first child) contributes to her invisibility (see also Kokkola 2012a).

Precious's invisibility does not, however, solely arise "because those who hold the power of the gaze, most of whom are white, refuse to see her" (Stewart 2009:186). Precious is also invisible to those who share her social and racial predicament most closely: her family. Readers first become aware of Precious's invisibility in the school context. Piecing her story together, we learn that by the second grade she has already been force fed by her mother and repeatedly raped by her father. The abuse literally renders her immobile: she sits silent at her desk for the whole day. Invisibility initially seems to be a voluntary survival strategy. At first she is taunted by her classmates. Unpleasant as these taunts are, they reveal that Precious's obese body was visible. By refusing to respond, however, she becomes invisible. She becomes so dependent on her self-imposed invisibility that she does not dare to move, and so wets herself on a daily basis. The school's response is simply to make her repeat the year. They do not seek the source of the problem. She becomes so invisible that she is allowed to pass through the system, even though, at the age of sixteen, despite regular attendance, "page 122 look like page 152, 22, 3, 6,5 – all the pages look alike to me" (*Push*, p. 5).

6. The vampire motif has also been widely used in the context paedophilia to explain why children who have been abused grow up to become abusers themselves. Although Sapphire depicts Precious's son, Abdul, passing on his sexual abuse at the hands of the monks to younger boys in the Catholic boys home, she does not reinstate the vampire motif. In Cynthia Grant's *Uncle Vampire* (1993), the use of vampire imagery is used to represent specific acts of sexual abuse in a form that will be incomprehensible to a reader who does not already know something about incest. In the novel, Carolyn is regularly raped by her Uncle Toddy, but his night visits are described in terms of 'drinking blood' and 'feeding'. The novel does not reveal whether Uncle Toddy was also abused as a child, but it is one of the few novels in which the perpetrator ends up imprisoned.

Although the school contributes to Precious's invisibility, education provides the key to her ability to regain her visibility when she starts specialist literacy classes. The literacy classes at Each One Teach One enable her to reclaim her body through language; the abjected body enters the symbolic order as Precious finds ways to express what has happened to her first in writing and then in speech. Like Melinda, Precious must convert her experiences into a form desired by others: she writes and speaks her experiences into words, and adopts her middle class teacher's value system. For the most part, this is positive but Sapphire is adamant that full recovery is not possible. *The Kid* underscores the narrative of despair in *Push*, and refuses to allow readers to become complacent about Precious's narrative of hope.

The Kid starts on the night before Precious's funeral. Nine year old Abdul spends the night with Precious's school-friend, Rita. Although Precious has managed to live up to the narrative of hope as a loving mother to Abdul, neither she nor Rita have managed to escape the extreme poverty of the poorly educated. Through flashbacks, we learn that she never came to terms with her body, and would mutilate it when she thought Abdul was sleeping. Neither she nor Rita were able to form stable relationships, and after the funeral Abdul is placed in foster care. He gets lost in the system, which is signalled by a forced change of name. He is viciously attacked by his foster brother in his first placement and then sent to a Catholic boarding school run by monks. He is regularly abused by two of the monks there, and starts to abuse younger boys in the same way. As the novel twists and turns, hope emerges as Abdul learns to express himself through dance. Unlike *Push*, however, Sapphire never allows her readers to become fixated on these glimpses of hope, and forces the reader back to face the narrative of despair. A long, drawn-out build up to an important dance performance leads not to an account of his success on the stage, but a blank line and a new chapter in which Abdul is being interrogated for terrorist activities under heavy medication. Unlike her earlier novel, Sapphire refuses to allow readers of *The Kid* to hope.

Hope is deeply connect to the notion of the child as *tabula rasa*, a central notion within Romantic views of the child. The abused child is not a blank slate. Choices made by others have limited Precious's and, to an even greater extent, Abdul's potential to become, and this loss of potential renders Sapphire's mother and son less than fully human.

Encountering the abused adolescent body

In conclusion, I wish to consider the wider implications of the sexually abused adolescents discussed in this chapter. Josh, Melinda, Liga, Precious, Lakshmi and others I have not been able to discuss in depth have become fairly common

characters in literature for older teens published in the third millennium. In the 1980s, such figures are absent. Emerging in the mid-nineties with works such as Cynthia Voigt's *When She Hollers* (1994) and Francesca Lia Block's *The Hanged Man* (1994), the number of these novels has increased to an extent that it can be understood as reflecting a change in society. Let me be clear, I am *not* suggesting that sexual abuse has increased – fairy tales and other stories stemming the oral tradition have been mapping incest, rape and abusive relationships within marriage since time immemorial – what I am suggesting is that writers from the mid-nineties onwards have been expressing their concerns directly to the teenage population. Adolescents at the beginning of the third millennium are expected to know about abusive relationships. Yet each of the teenage victims in the novels are not merely individuals, they also represent a view of the world. What do these novels about abuse say about the state of adolescence?

In *Radical Children's Literature*, Kimberley Reynolds astutely observes:

The wounded child may symbolise a damaged self, but it may equally stand for a damaged culture; this means that if the image of the self as a child can be kept intact and unviolated, the myth of innocent childhood that Rose maintains is central to the well-being of adults and the work of children's literature remains in place individually and socially. (Reynolds 2007:90)

Following Reynolds's logic, two mutually compatible explanations as to why the numbers of severely wounded children have increased present themselves. Firstly, these novels may reflect concerns that our culture has been damaged beyond repair. Secondly, we may no longer need our children to be innocent in the ways that Rose described. In our literature for teens, adults are presenting themselves as the perpetrators of extreme violence, and sharing their concerns about social change with the very group that has been portrayed as becoming increasingly vulnerable as a result. On the one hand, this can be read as a warning/threat, but it also reveals a willingness to speak to teenagers as equals.

If we accept that the abused adolescents in these novels represent their cultures as a whole, they reveal a society on the brink of collapse. Caught at the last possible moment when change is possible, they challenge the adult world to see them and intervene. Rendered abject by their abuse, these teenagers have been pushed outside society, but they are not simply being punished for failing to protect their bodies. They have come to stand for all that is wrong with the world, all that we would like to abject. Nevertheless, the perpetrators of the problems are not the teenagers themselves, but the adults. Even so, the novels retain their commitment to the aetnonormative order (Nikolajeva 2010a), and the "hidden adult" (Nodelman 2008). They do not offer an apology for the fictional adults' behaviour. Indeed, there is still a strong tendency to blame the teenage characters for

failing to protect themselves, and the rendition of the abused adolescent as abject verges on arrogance as the teenager is further disempowered by the demand that she recover.

On a more positive note, these novels also demonstrate that the authors assume that their readers are already 'knowing' children with whom they can discuss such distressing topics candidly. Many of the fictional victims are actually younger than the intended readers of these novels. This over turns the established trend in publishing that young readers prefer to read about people of their own age or slightly older (Aronson 2002:3). The narrators and/or focalisers of these novels still tend to be a similar age to the intended reader, but much of the novel recalls earlier parts of their lives. Josh's abuse began when he was twelve, so much of Lyga's novel depicts him at that age through Josh's 'flickers'. Liga and Precious are both abused from a very early age and *The Kid* follows Abdul's life from nine into adulthood. This age gaps implies that the teenage readers of these novels are expected to care for and about society, younger children and to take on responsibilities that have been absent for some decades. To sum up, these novels about abuse encourage adolescents to take on the duties and accountability of adulthood without being offered the freedoms and privileges.

The end of innocence and the on-set of knowledge?

Adolescence is a great source of adult angst. In the public media, in politics and in literature for youth, signs of that concern are viscerally tangible. Adults worry about the pressures that cause teenagers to display symptoms of extreme stress including eating disorders, cutting and other self-harming activities, depression, suicidal thoughts and so on (Reynolds 2007; Kokkola 2011c). On the other hand, adults also perceive teenagers as a source of menace, a threat to civilization as they form gangs, engage in violent crimes including murder or are simply more savvy about the technologized world we inhabit than their parents. Adult concerns about adolescents sexuality and carnal desires combine concerns about and fears of adolescents. Teenage pregnancy is a problem for the adolescent who must forego the freedoms of their teenage years, but also presents a threat to society as they are regarded as being incapable parents and a financial drain. Sometimes this conflation of concerns for and about adolescents is less clear cut. For instance, all the novels depicting same-sex desiring teens in the corpus are written by liberal authors who wish to support teenagers during the coming out phase. They side with the teen character and implied reader against the homophobic society, and in doing so express concern for the adolescent. However, in acknowledging the fears and trepidations of many queerly desiring teens, these texts inadvertently present same-sex desire as a 'problem' about which adults and teens should be concerned.

The forms these concerns take are fascinating subjects in their own right, but can detract us from seeing the larger web of concerns which are structuring these debates. Rather than simply rehashing the findings of the previous chapters, in this conclusion I return to the original question of what these representations of carnally desiring teens reveal about our conceptualisation of adolescence. Since sexuality and desire straddle concerns *for* and *about* teenagers, they reveal a society which is ill at ease, a society which is uncomfortable talking to its young on the same footing as adults, but unclear whether the goal is to protect youngsters from "the worldliness of the world" (Natov 2003:91) or the world from the unruliness of the young. The incompatibility of these desires has resulted in a level of ambivalence that is, at times, hypocritical.

In his defence of Romantic childhood, Neil Postman suggests that hypocrisy – although generally lauded as distasteful – may also proffer outcomes which benefit both society and the young.

The problem being discussed here is the difference between public knowledge and private knowledge by full-disclosure media. ... I am well aware that the word *hypocrisy* is sometimes used to describe a situation where public knowledge and private knowledge are rigidly kept apart. But the better face of hypocrisy is, after all, a certain idealism. In the case of childhood, for example, secrecy is practiced in order to maintain the conditions for healthy and ordered growth. Childhood, as we ideally think of it, cannot exist without a certain measure of hypocrisy.

(Postman [1982] 1994:92–3)

For Postman, secrecy is a way of protecting the child from harm. Sexuality and carnal desire, for Postman and others like him who would like to preserve youth as a time free from the responsibilities of the adult world, constitutes what Bernard Harrison terms “dangerous knowledge”: knowledge that “has the potentiality to set the established structures of myself in motion towards change” (1991:3). It is knowledge that causes us to be ill at ease, things we would rather not know about because once we know we must be open to change.

Harrison and Postman are surely right that there are kinds of knowledge – for instance that some parents and others acting *in loco parentis* abuse their power and sexually molest those entrusted in their care – are indeed disturbing. We would rather not know because we would rather such things were not true. The obvious danger of turning a blind eye, as the discussion of Precious’s invisibility in the previous chapter demonstrated, is that it renders us incapable of protecting those who are most vulnerable. Moreover, as Zornado explains, the seemingly benign desire to protect children often justifies other acts of abuse.

Paradoxically, adult nostalgia for childhood more often than not carries a latent relational narrative between adult and child that justifies adult domination – often violent and terrifying domination – over the child, following the questionable premise that the adult can “make” the child a good person. (Zornado 2001:xviii)

This ‘domination’ can take the simple form of denying access to information. Judith Levine and Jocelyn Elders take up this point to argue forcibly that lack of knowledge *causes* young people to take unnecessary risk.

In the Forward to Levine’s *Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex*, the noted sexologist Jocelyn Elders suggests that lack of information and the promotion of abstinence only sex education is fuelling a “crisis”:

In America we are in the midst of a sexual crisis. We lead the Western world in virtually every sexual problem: teenage pregnancy, abortion, rape, incest, child

abuse, sexually transmitted disease, HIV/AIDS, and many more. Yet when the Surgeon General issues a call to action on sexual health urging a comprehensive sex education, abstinence, and other measures to promote responsible sexual behavior and advocates that we break our “conspiracy of silence about sexuality,” we want to fire the Surgeon General. (Elders [2002] 2003:ix)

Elders and Levine share a common conviction that keeping sexual secrets places children in “peril”. Writing as they do, in opposition to a governmentally endorsed social movement, they combine the desire to speak plainly in opposition to what they see as the fear mongering that drives parents to accept the desirability of the ‘sex education’ offered by the conservative right, especially those promoting abstinence with their own brand of fear mongering. Elders claims we are in the grip of a “sexual crisis”, Postman also evokes the language of crisis in his lament on the “disappearance” of childhood (1982), and even the psychoanalytically informed critic Karen Coats refers to adolescence as a “crisis of identity” (2004:137).

So it would seem that the one thing everyone is in agreement about is that we are currently facing a “crisis” that centres around adolescence. Well, excuse me Chicken Licken, but I’m having a hard time working up a sense of anxiety about this particular crisis. The statistics do not suggest that the sky is about to fall on our heads. Levine summarises numerous studies conducted by respected research institutes which show that, although the numbers of sexually active teenagers in the U.S. rose significantly between the 1950s and the 1970s, there has been very little change between 1970 and the late 1990s. Furthermore, the change between the post-war era was really only a change in female sexual behaviour. The number of males having sex did not change significantly, but noticeably more girls were sexually active. Levine cites surveys indicating that in the mid-1950s only 3% of girls under 15 had had sex, by the mid-1970s the figure had risen to 10% and twenty years later it had reached 20% ([2002] 2003:xxv). Expressed like that, the numbers can be used to suggest a growing ‘crisis’. However, as Levine also points out, these figures only answer the question whether or not the respondents have ever had sex, it does not consider how much sex they have had or even what constitutes ‘sex’. In the most recent survey cited by Levine, more than half the ‘sexually active’ boys who answered the questionnaire admitted they had had sex less than ten times during the previous year (although it was unclear how they defined this). So although it seems fair to accept a small majority (c.a. 50–55% according to the studies Levine cites) of 15–19 year olds are sexually ‘active’ in the strict sense that they are not virgins, they are not very sexually active in terms of the quantity of sex they are having. Equally, although the numbers of teenage parents is rising, especially in the U.K., the more detailed studies of Simon Duncan and his colleagues (2005, 2007) indicate that these do not result in lowered social outcomes for either the teenage parents or their children. There is always cause for concern when the topic

affects our youth, but not panic. Expressing ourselves in the language of crisis is not conducive to genuinely promoting well-being amongst adolescents and throughout society.

Can literature for teenagers offer the voice of reason? Fiction for teens is a place where adults can communicate directly with adolescents, and unlike teacher-child or parent-child discussions of sexuality, it is a site less imbued with embarrassment and the need to maintain personal boundaries. As the previous chapters have shown, many of the novels are committed to maintaining this discourse of panic and crisis. For the most part, such novels and short stories reflect a desperate desire to hold on to the last dregs of hope that the innocence of childhood can be shored up and protected. This, I proposed from the start, could explain why the adolescent years are represented as being filled with emotional turmoil, identity confusion and instability as well as desires which are considered 'adult'. This focus on *sturm und drang*, holds only a brief historical precedent even within the Western world, yet it has become normalised to an extent that bears no relation to social-historical reality. If the turmoil of adolescence has become real in the Western world, it is because we have collectively chosen to make it so. It serves a social purpose: when adolescents are defined in this way, the younger child can remain innocent for longer. This is particularly evident in the novels depicting adolescents being punished for failing to curb their sexual desires, discussed in Chapter Three. Those punishments – pregnancy, parenthood, loneliness, disease and death – also expressed a fear of teenagers, a fear that teenagers are out of control. Unable to delay sexual gratification long enough to obtain or use contraceptives, teenagers are presented as being willing to risk death to satisfy their carnal desires. It is an image that does not square with the 'less than ten times a year' libidos of teenagers answering questionnaires.

At the outset of this study, I cited Kimberley Reynolds's observation that "children's literature participates in shaping – it does not merely reflect – changing attitudes to young people" (2007:114–115). Following her lead, the discourse of panic and crisis has certainly entered literature for the young and is undeniably contributing to the maintenance of the *sturm und drang* view of adolescence. Reynolds's study draws attention to what she terms 'radical' children's literature. Within the realm of 'radical', Reynolds incorporates experimental form as well as topics previously considered 'unsuitable' for children and teens.

Jack Zipes offers a nuanced definition of what a radical children's literature might offer.

"Radical" is a word that has often been misunderstood and been confused with extremism of some kind. The word "radical," however, stems from the Latin *radicalis*, which means "having roots" or "being rooted." Radical qualities form the essence of a person or a thing. A radical person is someone who endeavors to

understand the world by going to the root of a phenomenon, issue, or problem. A radical literature, especially a radical children's literature, wants to explore the essence of phenomena, experiences, actions and social relations and seeks to enable young people to grasp the basic conditions in which they live. (Zipes 2007:vii)

A 'radical' literature for teens about teenage sexuality and carnal desire, according to this definition, would be a literature that tries to get to the root of the phenomenon of desire and would situate that desire within the entirety of the society they inhabit. It would be a literature that endeavours to speak honestly and openly to its readers, which invites dialogue and refuses to either condescend or to pander to the youngster's lack of experience and/or knowledge. Does such literature exist or is it even possible?

Maria Nikolajeva has argued that (2010a:203–4) adults cannot undermine their own authority, even though they may appear to question their right to such powers, especially in their deployment of the carnival mode. Yet carnival always ends with a return to the established order, even if that order has been somewhat altered as a result of the carnival period (Bakhtin 1984). For Nikolajeva, the power imbalance will always become manifest in the text, no matter how much an author might pander to the reader or pretend that it were not so. Very recently, however, David Herman (2008) has readdressed the issue of intentionality to reveal how the form of a text can reveal the desires of the author and how, as critics, we might examine those forms without falling into the intentional fallacy. So just as I have pointed out that texts which attempt to be very liberal (for instance in their presentation of same-sex desire), can inadvertently end up presenting queerness as a cause of loneliness and isolation, texts written with the genuine desire to communicate openly and honestly with teenagers may be able to overcome the power imbalance. Authors who do not consider adolescent carnality to be an encroachment on adult territory are more likely to present carnal desire with an even hand. And from slashfiction and queer studies as well as empirical studies of children reading we learn that when our texts do not challenge the status quo, teen readers can claim their own power.

Sexuality and carnal desire undoubtedly form what Deborah Britzman has termed "difficult knowledge" (1998:117). Difficult knowledge incorporates all that children wish to know, but do not; all that they do know, but resist, as well as that which they half know, but cannot put into words. Like Harrison's "Dangerous knowledge", difficult knowledge awakens a sense of discomfort: the lack of ease at being told secrets, quite possibly against one's will. But of what, precisely, does this dangerous or difficult knowledge comprise? What is it that teenagers 'know' when they 'know' about sex from a book? For book knowledge is most decidedly not the same as carnal knowledge, as Grosz succinctly puts it "the sensations of

voluptuousness, the ache of desire have to be revived in order to be recalled"; kinaesthetic knowledge can only be 'known' in situ (1995b:195). The novels and short stories discussed in this study assume that their adolescent readers know "who does what to whom and how" (Reynolds 2007:117) – i.e., about the 'mechanics' of sexual acts, but a radical literature would move beyond the mechanics towards the roots. A radical literature would not focus on the mechanics of "who does what to whom and how" (*ibid.*), but would place that in a larger context. And so any novel that foregrounds carnality, situating it as the 'problem' of the novel, cannot be deemed a radical work.

Meyer's 'Twilight' series, with its overly long build up to the unnarrated pleasures of Bella and Edward's wedding night foregrounds carnal desire to an extent unmatched by any other work in the corpus. Indeed, desire occupies Bella's thoughts to such an extent that she does little other than hang out with her boyfriend: she watches TV, does the laundry, goes to school and cooks for her father. Sexual desire has killed all her other human desires – for self-development, physical development, intellectual advancement and so on – long before she loses her human form. It is not the slightest radical, nor does it offer obvious routes to empowerment. Fortunately, however, the internet has enabled us to see that canny teenage readers are also enjoying taking the mick out of the series and writing their own counter-narratives.

A radical work might also respect the reader's right not to know, to genuinely choose asexuality. In recent years, sex education, carnal desires and other aspects of adolescent sexuality have been so foregrounded in public debate, literature and other media that the asexual teen has become the new shibboleth. In a survey of girls' culture in England 1880–1915, Sally Mitchell comments on how critics of today tend to read these works in terms of sexual repression. The Victorian assumption that adolescents were asexual, and that – with care – this asexuality could be extended to allow more scope "for self development and for vocational, mental, emotional, and intellectual independence" meets with approval from Mitchell (1995:165). For girls, romance and heterosexuality offer points of initiation into the patriarchal mind frame, and reduce their opportunities for focussing on other matters. Paradoxically, she argues, the sexual libertarian attitudes of the third millennium has reduced girls' horizons and restricted their options; the world of the adolescent girl of the first decade of the 21st century revolves around 'catching' a man (as Meyer's novels evidence) far more than it did for girls a century earlier. Further support for Mitchell's claim can be found in sex education manuals from the same era. Edith Belle Lowry's *Confidences: Talks with a Young Girl Concerning Herself* (1910) sets the onset female sexuality in a context which also covers other matters including home making skills and dealing with sex discrimination for

women in business and politics (see also Campbell 1979). Today's sex education manuals segregate sexuality from other aspects of an adolescent's life.

Texts which celebrate the adolescent's right to be asexual have not featured in the corpus since it was comprised of texts depicting sexually active and/or carnally desiring teens. However, I celebrate novels that move beyond the mechanics of "who does what to whom and how" (Reynolds 2007:117), and incorporate the adolescent characters' desires into the wider task of growing up. Angela and Tycho's mutual desire in *The Catalogue of the Universe* by Margaret Mahy is set within a far larger web of concerns, and their mutual loss of virginity is not narrated. Equally, Jacob's desires in Aidan Chambers's *Postcards from No Man's Land* (1999) are placed within a context of historical awareness, debates on euthanasia, nationhood, literary influence, complex family relationships to list just some of the other major issues Jacob contemplates in between his blossoming desires for Hille. Again, the novel places sexual desires in a larger context and leaves the mechanical aspects unnarrated. What the teenage reader of either of these novels 'knows' about sexuality as result of their reading is rooted in the social context.

Although contemporary teenage readers are presumed to know so much about the mechanics of sex that the details can be left unnarrated, they are typically treated as lacking experience in applying that knowledge, and this can result in decidedly overt didacticism, even in seemingly radical novels. For instance, Burgess's *Junk* was much lauded for its portrayal of hitherto taboo topics of heroin addiction and teenage prostitution, its insistence on reminding teens to use condoms and the potentially harmful consequences of sex makes it far less radical than his reputation suggests (see also Kokkola 2011a). Equally, Waite's novel depicting three teenage girls opening their own brothel – *Game Girls* – seems radical in terms of plot material, but quickly moves to warning the readers how little they really 'know' about sex (Kokkola, Valovirta & Korkka 2013). The girls in Waite's novel suffer because they have mistakenly assumed that their knowledge about sex gives them agency. In pointing out how little they really know, Waite warns her readers to think again about what they really know.

A truly radical novel could not wag the finger, foreground the punishment of the teen, warn her of her ignorance, take pleasure in flouting what she does not know. A radical text would address the young reader as someone who perhaps knows less, but is not less intelligent or less emotionally developed. Precisely which novels fulfil these criteria will vary from reader to reader depending slightly on the what one considers to be "the essence of [the] phenomena [of desire, the] experiences, actions and social relations" in which it occurs (Zipes 2007:vii). What shocks me is that several of the works I consider among the most radical are also amongst the oldest novels in the corpus.

I began this study with a review of novels depicting the loss of virginity. Amongst the early trio of novels daring to depict this activity on-stage – *Forever* by Blume, *It's OK If You Don't Love Me* by Klein and *Breaktime* by Chambers – the latter two satisfy all my requirements for narratives which treat adolescents as fully participating members of human society. These are novels that accept that adolescent desires are no less significant than adult desires, and place those desires in a wider context without scolding or suggesting that there is something deviant about them. These are empowered teens who live rich and full lives.

The success of Chambers in the early works in the dance sequence did not last. Cordelia Kenn in the final novel, *This is All*, thinks of little else but sex. This vast, unruly novel lacks the complex interiority of *Breaktime*, *Dance on my Grave*, *Now That I Know* and *Postcards from No-Man's Land*. Cordelia is as flat a character as Meyer's Bella. The movement towards radical literature that Reynolds celebrates in *Radical Children's Literature* is by no means linear. We are undoubtedly seeing radical new ways of expressing desire (e.g. in Block's *Violet & Claire*) of who can desire (e.g. the carnal desires of older women in Lanagan's *Tender Morsels*), the objects of that desire (e.g. the love of the stag in Reyner's *Stag Boy*) the expression of desire (e.g. the orgasms Precious has when raped by her father), and asexual desires (e.g. Precious's love of her son in Sapphire's *Push*) as well as the freedom of the reader to read back and produce counter narratives (Pugh 2011, Tosenberger 2008), there is no coherent, single stranded movement towards a radical new view of adolescence.

For the most part, literature produced for adolescents reveals an increased expectation that teenagers 'know' a great deal about sexuality. As a result, novels no longer protect their readers from learning more, not even about difficult or dangerous knowledge, such as abusive sex. This lack of protection does not always go hand-in-hand with increased trust. For although third millennium writers acknowledge that teenagers today, as a group, are more knowledgeable about sex than their counterparts in the 1950s, this is not always welcome information. For most of the authors of the narratives in the corpus, adolescents are simply sexy sinners or delinquent deviants.

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