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**“Ungrown-up Grown-ups”:  
the Representation of Adolescence  
in Twentieth-Century  
New Zealand Young Adult Fiction.**

A dissertation  
presented in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
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## **Abstract**

Behaviouralists consider adolescence a time for developing autonomy, which accords with Michel Foucault's power/knowledge dynamic that recognises individuals' assertion of independence as a crucial element within society. Surprisingly, however, twentieth-century New Zealand Young Adult (YA) fiction tends to disempower adolescents, by portraying an adultist version of them as immature and unprepared for adult responsibilities.

By depicting events through characters' eyes, a focalising device that encourages reader identification with the narratorial point-of-view, authors such as Esther Glen, Isabel Maud Peacocke, Joyce West, Phillis Garrard, Tessa Duder, Lisa Vasil, Margaret Mahy, William Taylor, Kate de Goldi, Paula Boock, David Hill, Jane Westaway, and Bernard Beckett stress the importance of conforming to adult authority.

Rites of passage are rarely attained; protagonists respect their elders, and juvenile delinquents either repent or are punished for their misguided behaviours. "Normal" expectations are established by the portrayal of single parents who behave "like teenagers": an unnatural role reversal that demands a return to traditional hegemonic roles. Adolescents must forgive adults' failings within a discourse that rarely forgives theirs. Depictions of child abuse, while deploring the deed, tend to emphasise victims' forbearance rather than admitting perpetrators' culpability.

As Foucault points out, adolescent sexuality both fascinates and alarms adult society. Within the texts, sex is strictly an adult prerogative, reserved for reproduction within marriage, with adolescent intimacy sanctioned only between couples who conform to the middle-class ideal of monogamy. On the other hand, teenagers who indulge in casual sex are invariably given cause to regret. Such presentations operate vicariously to protect readers from harm, but also create an idealised, steadfast sense of adulthood in the process.



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## Chapter One: Addled Essence

Mention the term *adolescent* and various images may come to mind: the self-conscious misfit, spending “miserable hours examining his nose before the mirror, despairing over its size” (Hollingsworth 1947 18); the juvenile delinquent who deliberately sets out to shock, “not merely by way of emphasis, but with unseemly and blasphemous vigour” (Manning 1958 56); the “poetic notion of the young, languishing over Keats and Shelley, trailing diaphanous scarves..., pining and sighing for pure love, and daydreaming darkly of suicide pacts” (Ritchie and Ritchie 1984 11); the fashion-conscious teenager, living “in a movie, pulp novel and rock’n’roll saturated world” (Yska 1993 177). These descriptions are perhaps best summed up in the words of New Zealand children’s author, David Hill, in 1998: “Roughly the age at which human beings shouldn’t exist, actually” (tape-recorded interview with author). No other period of human development is considered at once so complex and so contradictory, yet such predominantly negative definitions say as much, if not more, about the adult commentators as about the group they are seeking to categorise.

Although adolescence is grounded in physiological changes that commence at puberty, over time it has acquired an increasing number of culturally constructed connotations with ever-changing demarcations. While commentators such as psychologists, sociologists, behaviouralists, and educationalists endeavour to explain “what adolescence is,” poststructuralists identify a difference between “what is real” and the construction of reality. Marjory Hourihan, for example, in *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children’s Literature*, draws upon Roland Barthes’ use of the term “myth” to describe the way in which “certain stories and images function to shape our perception of reality” (12). She elaborates:

For Barthes, myths are omnipresent signs which impose upon us the belief that something simply “goes without saying;” they create a perception of the “falsely obvious” (Barthes [1957] 1973 11) [that] makes contingent events and behaviour seem inevitable, part of the nature of things. (12)

Extrapolating from this, social discourse about adolescents and adolescent behaviour creates the myth of “the teenager,” which appears to acquire an existence all of its own.

The myth of adolescence forms the focus of this thesis, in relation to its representation of characters aged between fourteen and twenty in New Zealand children’s fiction written for readers aged between twelve and eighteen. The characters’ age range is based on the observation that younger characters, twelve and thirteen-year-olds, tend to be regarded as immune from the vagaries associated with adolescence, often functioning within the texts as appropriate spokespeople to convey the adult point-of-view. Fourteen-years-old, on the other hand, seems to signify characters’ impatience to leave childish things behind, while twenty represents the upper limit for works intended for a school-aged audience. Having sketched the parameters of adolescence, however, immediately the terminology becomes problematic: adolescents are not children, yet the term “children’s literature” will be used throughout this study, even though, as the twentieth century continued, commentators came to refer to these works more commonly as “Young Adult” or “YA” literature. Nevertheless, “children’s” fiction recognises the premise that many of these novels, far from portraying characters in the process of becoming adult, focus instead on the ways in which they differ from adults. To borrow a term coined by Roberta Seelinger Trites in *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (2000), this reveals an “adultist” imperative, in that children’s fiction is produced almost exclusively by adult authors, which invites conjecture about the hegemonic context in which such works are created.

### **Adolesco, adolescere, adultus.**

The word “adolescence” derives from the present participle of the Latin verb, *adolescere*, meaning ‘to grow up:’ the perfect participle of which is *adultus*. Literally, then, adolescence is a state of “becoming,” of which adulthood is the culmination. However, while etymologically the relationship between the two states may seem straightforward, the connotations surrounding adolescence as a social construction are far more complex. One of the reasons for this is that nearly all of the literature for and about adolescents is written by adults. In a

post-modern age where other alterities have been given a voice through movements like Black Power, Women's Liberation, and Queer Politics, children and adolescents remain one of the last minorities. In support of this contention, Perry Nodelman, in "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature," draws parallels between authors' attitudes towards children and the Eurocentric view explored in Edward Said's 1978 cultural study, *Orientalism*. "We need children to be childlike," Nodelman maintains, "so that we [adults] can understand what maturity is — the opposite of being childlike" (32), a statement this thesis applies to adolescents as well. Adolescents tend not to regard themselves as "adolescents": rather the term reflects the hegemonic control by adults over the process of becoming, at a time of human development when the roles of both child and adult are increasingly in a state of flux.

The term "hegemony" was first used by Antonio Gramsci in relation to the class struggle, to mean "a set of ideas by means of which dominant groups strive to secure the consent of subordinate groups to their leadership" (Stillo 6). Hegemonic relations can be seen within any social context where individuals organise themselves according to their own "rules and procedures, ...roles and positions, ... behaviours...and hierarchies" (Danaher, Schirato, and Webb 33), a definition that not only applies to class and gender distinctions, but also has direct bearing on the relationship between adult and adolescent. Adults have dominance in the early years of a child's life based on their physical and cognitive superiority, but, once the child attains physical maturation, this automatic power base no longer necessarily applies. Moreover, Michel Foucault's redefinition of Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" to remove any sense of hierarchy (*History of Sexuality* 93) has further implications for interpreting the shifting power dynamic between adult and adolescent. According to Foucault, no one group holds inalienable authority over the other, with all individuals having the potential to act: "power is everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (93). This power, however, does not simply exist. It is the product of social interaction, one party's dominance made possible only by the existence of those who uphold or withstand it. Within this context, Foucault coined the term power/knowledge in recognition of the interrelatedness of power and

knowledge: “there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (*Discipline and Punish* 27). Such a view empowers both parties, recognising resistance as a positive product, yet — despite the acceptance of such fluidity of power in relation to sites such as politics and gender studies — adult society has been less willing to regard adolescents in this light.

This repressive adult attitude is revealed by the words of Patricia Spacks, author of *The Adolescent Idea, Myths of Youth and the Adult Imagination* (1981):

The young flaunt their beauty, energy and freedom; the middle-aged assert their experience, wisdom, and parental dominance. The young press forward, the old press them back. Conflict prevails. (5)

Spacks’ comment seems to suggest this dialectic is a given, and certainly much of the discourse on adolescence has accepted the power struggle between these two groups, with twentieth-century “taken-for-granted truths” (Besley 2) such as “the generation gap” and “the adolescent problem” maintaining the hegemonic tensions governing the behaviour of both parties. As Nadia Wheatley, an Australian children’s author, observes:

...just as a class does not exist in isolation, an age group does not exist in isolation, and those who express concern at the friction or confusion that occurs at the boundaries between adolescence and middle age, or adolescence and childhood, are missing the whole point: the friction is the way the groups define themselves. (4)

How these groups define themselves could well form the subject of this thesis, except that in children’s fiction only one group is doing the defining: adults. While Anna Lawrence-Pietroni, writing about Margaret Mahy’s novels, draws attention to the impossibility of regarding the members of any group as homogenous (34), nevertheless adolescents have come to be regarded, by and large, as all that adults are not. The representation of adolescence within children’s literature seems to challenge Foucault’s definition of the fluidity of the power dynamic within society, in that authors exercise complete control over their characters, both adult and adolescent. Such control serves a dual purpose:

presenting readers with a constructed version of themselves, and — at the same time — enabling adults indirectly to explore what it is to be *not* adolescent.

Donna Weinstein, in her 1994 essay “Expendable Youth: the Rise and Fall of Youth Culture,” adopts the term “floating signifier” (73) to acknowledge the shifting nature of adolescence as a social construct throughout the twentieth century, with associations that have a tendency to be negative or disparaging, indicating a need for adult intervention in adolescents’ lives. This thesis contends that “adult” functions as an equally floating signifier, with the representation of adolescence, by inference, invoking an idealised view of adulthood. The artificial boundaries between the two states are made explicit by Phillis Garrard, in *Hilda, Fifteen* (1944) when her eponymous protagonist, after influencing her headmaster not to take up a job offer in Australia, makes the following observation:

Had a person like herself more power than she had ever expected?  
Were grown-ups just grown-up kids after all? Or was she an  
ungrown-up grown-up? (32)

Readers are expected to respond to these rhetorical questions in the negative, with the narrator going on to stress that adolescence is when one experiences “muddling, new kinds of thoughts”<sup>1</sup> (33). Garrard’s diametric opposites, however, warrant further attention. That adults might be simply “grown-up kids” is a possibility the majority of novels for children seek to disavow, while the juxtaposition of a physical state (“grown-up”) with the socially constructed (“ungrown-up”) makes the limbo of adolescence overt. *Not* behaving like an adult, this awkward state contrasts with the certitude associated with what Hilda seems to suggest is a prescribed path to adulthood: “There was all her life to find that out. But probably the sooner you knew, the better you could manage yourself” (194). Garrard makes no further mention of “ungrown-up grown-ups;” nevertheless, the issue lingers, informing the very focus of this study as a whole.

The shifting adult-adolescent relationship is made possible, in Foucauldian terms, because all human interaction is constructed through discourse, in which “power and knowledge join.” Adolescence, then, in common

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<sup>1</sup> The intimation that adults may share these muddled thoughts remains unexplored, but foreshadows the tenor of later novels.

with other hegemonic constructs such as gender, ethnicity, and class, consists of “a multiplicity of discursive elements” (*History* 100), depending on who is speaking. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and *Power/Knowledge* (1980), Foucault drew attention to the fact that we judge others according to our own “normalising” worldview. From an adult perspective, adolescents cannot but appear immature, naïve, reckless and unwise, leading to a representation that ultimately operates to disempower both characters and implied readers. The thesis aims to explore the various ways in which adult authors create a discourse of “adolescentness” as a way of warning readers of New Zealand children’s fiction against the dangers of inexperience. Beginning with a survey of the ways in which society has endeavoured to define adolescence, followed by an overview of its literary representation as a genre in its own right, this chapter will outline the methodology whereby the thesis seeks to examine some of the ways in which twentieth-century New Zealand YA authors have sought to portray adolescence, and, in so doing, have created a myth of what it is to be adult, as well.

### **“Storm and stress”**

Many twentieth-century studies on adolescence cite such seemingly contemporary observations as:

Children now love luxury. They have bad manners and contempt for authority. They show disrespect for their elders and love to chatter in places of exercise (qtd. in Gray 1),

and:

The young are in character prone to desire and ready to carry any desire they may have formed into action. Of bodily desires it is the sexual to which they are most disposed to give way, and in regard to sexual desire they exercise no self-restraint. They are changeable, too, and fickle in their desires, which are as transitory as they are vehement ... they are passionate, irascible, and apt to be carried away by their impulses. They are the slaves, too, of their passion, as their ambition prevents them ever brooking a slight and renders them indignant at the mere idea of enduring an injury (qtd. in Kiell 18),

before revealing their respective authors to be Socrates and Aristotle. Shakespeare is another whose words are often quoted:

“I would that there were no age between sixteen and three-and-twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest, for there is nothing in the between but getting of wenches with child, wronging the ancients, stealing [and] fighting.” (*A Winter’s Tale* III, iii)

Such observations consider “youth” (generally regarded as being from 14 to 25 years) a short-lived state, with the medieval chivalric tradition of the twenty-first birthday, “when a knight was old enough and strong enough to stagger about in a full suit of armour and carry a lance” (Sanders 93), one way of recognising successful passage to adulthood. “Adolescence,” on the other hand, is regarded as a modern concept. Social historian Philippe Ariès, in his survey *Centuries of Childhood*, maintains that, until the twentieth century, “people had no idea of what we call adolescence, and [that] idea was a long time taking shape” (29). Spacks expresses a similar view: “If adolescence as an observable stage of life has a long history, adolescence as a distinct idea has a short one” (7-8). Tellingly, neither seems able to define exactly what adolescence is, nevertheless, Ariès and Spacks highlight the distinctions being made within this study, that “adolescence” has now come to mean much more than “youth,” that brief interlude before the attainment of adult responsibilities, such as marriage or entry into the workforce, signalled its endpoint.

During the nineteenth century, Western society underwent a number of social, political and economic changes that contributed to the concept of adolescence as a distinct period in its own right. Increasing technological sophistication demanded more skills, advances in health care increased life expectancy, and growing affluence, associated with the rise of the middle-class, removed the need for children to go out to work. According to Kimberley Reynolds, in *Girls Only? Gender and Popular Children’s Fiction in Britain 1880-1910*, “the concept of adolescence itself was new to the nineteenth century — a product of prosperity, leisure, prolonged education and the bourgeois household” (52-3). Society needed to create a new category to accommodate this new demographic, its citizens physically no longer children, but not yet

accepted as adults. This readjustment of intergenerational roles continued into the twentieth century, which increasingly witnessed the breakdown of formerly fixed institutions such as marriage and gender roles. Deborah Anderson and Christopher Hayes, in *Gender, Identity, and Self-Esteem: A New Look at Adult Development*, see “adolescence,” in the modern sense, as a symptom of the “discontinuity” (269) between generations that has occurred in the aftermath of social changes, which strike at the very heart of what it is to be “adult”.

Generally recognised as a “culturally and socially defined period of life which has its base in biological changes” (Appleby 40), adolescence came to be regarded as a major social phenomenon in the twentieth century. Initially the preserve of behavioural psychologists, the discourse of adolescence has provoked input from such diverse commentators as educationalists, librarians, social historians, politicians, civic authorities, and parents ever since. In 1904, G. Stanley Hall called adolescence a period of “storm and stress” (Vol I xv), in 1930, Leta Stetter Hollingsworth called it “the awkward age” (13), and in 1975 Sueann Ambron extended the boundaries by calling it “a time of testing: of pushing against one’s capabilities and the limitations as posed by adults” (qtd. in Manaster 4). In 1984 Jane and James Ritchie published *The Dangerous Age: Surviving Adolescence in New Zealand*, a handbook for parents that described the period as “a tumultuous, confusing, and dangerous business” fraught with “potential perils” (9), an attitude confirmed by Michael Marris’s 1996 description of a “turbulent, tempestuous, troubled time” (3) for teenagers and their parents. As a twentieth-century invention, such definitions of adolescence have enabled adults, by contrast, to shore up a sense of their own self-assurance.

One of the main reasons Western society has problematised adolescence rests with its most obvious marker, the onset of sexual maturity. As a result of improvements in “socio-economic status, expressed through nutrition and other influences on growth” (Smart and Smart 495), puberty is now occurring earlier and earlier. The average age at menarche, for example, has declined markedly in the past 150 years, dropping from 16 - 17 years old in 1860 to 12-13 in 1960 (Smart and Smart 496). Current figures indicate this decline is advancing even further — the average age of the onset of menstruation occurred between 11 and 12 in 1997, with latest studies showing girls entering puberty as early as seven

and eight (Thompson; Haupt).<sup>1</sup> Such physical changes complicate the definition even further, as Ritchie and Ritchie note:

It somehow seems ironic that with better diet and nutrition, the age of puberty should drop just at a time when that early breeding potential was being made unnecessary by longer life-expectancy. Earlier puberty means earlier and longer exposure to the hazards of sex, as well as more opportunity to enjoy its delights. (11)

Their observation touches on the heart of the matter. Western society has tended to have an ambivalent attitude towards sexuality in general, as shown by Barthel's observation, "In contrast to the taboos of other societies, in ours the promise is that absolutely no societal notice will be given to the menstruating woman" (157-8), with advertisements for sanitary products, for example, all emphasising "invisibility" as their most desirable feature. On the other hand, puberty draws attention to youth's sexual potential in a manner that adults would rather not acknowledge.

As Foucault notes, however, awareness of its existence underlies such institutions as medicine, education, ethics, politics, and the media, despite apparent evidence that sex is "hardly spoken of at all" (*History* 27). The particular taboos associated between youth and sex were highlighted by Sigmund Freud's psychosexual theories (Muus 18), in which he established a parallel between Sophocles' tragic hero, Oedipus, and adolescents' nascent sexual awareness. The "Oedipal complex" is generally interpreted as attraction to the parent of the opposite sex, coupled with desire to kill the same sex parent, an interpretation, in the context of the adult/child power dynamic, that reveals just as much about adult unease as about the expression of adolescent sexuality. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1981), Foucault differentiates between "sex," and the associated discourse of "sexuality" (33-35), a crucial distinction that he bases upon a power dynamic grounded in knowledge and the repression of knowledge. In the same way as Freud highlighted "the (forbidden) pleasure of

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<sup>1</sup>Triggered by the attainment of sufficient body weight to maintain a pregnancy, the onset of puberty may now occur before children are "ready emotionally or socially." The advice from a spokesperson for the New Zealand Family Planning Association, in such instances, to "treat your child as an eight or 10 year old, not as a teenager" (Thompson 1999 28) clearly reinforces the socially-governed distinction between puberty and adolescence.

sexuality” (Trites 87), the Foucauldian “regime of power-knowledge-pleasure” (*History* 100) describes how adults derive pleasure from acknowledging their own sexuality, and power from denying adolescents that same pleasure.

In contrast, traditional societies often welcome puberty with formal rites of passage, equating the onset of sexual maturity with the beginnings of adulthood. Ann Sieg, in her 1971 article, “Why Adolescence Occurs,” cites Margaret Mead’s research amongst the Arapesh people of New Guinea, where

[at] 13, after a brief period of training, boys are initiated in puberty rites, and are married to little girls of 6 to 7 years of age. At the time of marriage, the boys assume sole responsibility of growing food for their young wives until the wives are old enough to leave the parental protection and live with their husbands permanently. Long visits of the girl to her husband’s house take place frequently, but not until the menarche does she take up permanent residence with him. At 13, in other words, the boy has simultaneously reached puberty, and attained symbolic adult status through the real responsibility of marriage and providing for his wife. (Sieg 347)

This example highlights the constructed nature of adolescence within societies. As Australian literary critic John Stephens maintains in *Language and Ideology in Children’s Fiction* (1992), “all developmental paths are ideologically constructed, involving conformity to societal norms” (3-4). In a Western society long governed by sexual taboos, placing a growing emphasis on the unsettled nature of adolescence seems to minimise the significance of puberty as a sign of maturity. This not only suggests a reluctance to acknowledge a competing cohort, thereby endeavouring to retain sexual activity as an adult preserve, it also recognises the insistence that sexuality must be channelled, as in Sieg’s example, in accordance with appropriate (adult) rules of marriage.

As Ken Donelson and Aileen Nilsen state in *Literature for Young Adults Today* (1980), “Puberty is a universal experience, but adolescence is not” (2), an observation further recognising the definition of adolescence as a social construct. Even though they are “adult” in a physiological sense, Western society continues to perceive adolescents as being in limbo. This definition became formalised at the beginning of the twentieth century with the identification of parallels between the “psychological characteristics of

adolescence” and the eighteenth-century precursor to Romanticism, the German literary movement, *Sturm und Drang*, with its “idealism, commitment to a goal, revolution against the old, expression of personal feelings, passion, and suffering” (Muus 16-17).

This belief arose from the theories of G. Stanley Hall, commonly called the “father of adolescence.” His views, based on Darwinism, considered that human development mirrored the evolutionary development of the human race, “from savagery to barbarism [and finally] to civilisation,” with adolescence the crucial period during which an individual would either mature into a civilised adult or remain “stunted” (Lesko 1) in a state of savagery. Hall’s seminal two-volume work, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* (1904), defined adolescence accordingly as

...an oscillation between contradictory tendencies. Energy, exaltation, and supernatural activity are followed by indifference, lethargy, and loathing. Exuberant gaiety, laughter, and euphoria make place for dysphoria, depressive gloom, and melancholy. (qtd. in Muus 17)

The “romantic” notion of the adolescent as an unstable mix of every human emotion has influenced attitudes ever since. The term “storm and stress” appropriated by Hall in 1904 is now used in relation to adolescence far more often than to the original literary movement, although Ariès goes so far as to cite Wagner’s Siegfried as the first “typical” modern adolescent, whose “combination of (provisional) purity, physical strength, naturism, spontaneity and joie de vivre ...was to make the adolescent the hero of our twentieth century, the century of adolescence” (30). However, this view is one of the few positive appraisals of youthful idealism, with the majority of commentators adopting the more literal meaning of “storm and stress” to denote adolescence as a time of crisis when viewed from the safe haven of adulthood.

In apparent confirmation of the inchoate nature of adolescence, twentieth-century behaviouralists established a hierarchy of “tasks” that must be achieved before attaining adult status. Jean Piaget (1950) associated adolescence with the attainment of his most advanced level of intellectual development

(Smart and Smart 533), with an implicit expectation that such thinking will concur with that of the adolescent's elders. Lawrence Kohlberg (1964) developed a complex taxonomy of moral development (*Developmental Psychology Today* 312), while James Marcia (1966) and Erik Erikson (1968) considered the main task of adolescence was to establish "a sense of identity" (*Developmental Psychology Today* 40). Marcia divided this process into four separate stages: identity diffusion (lack of commitment), foreclosure (commitment without questioning), moratorium (challenging beliefs), and achievement, "the desired status" (Irwin 9), once again determined according to adult criteria. During the 1970s, Lev Vygotsky and Urie Bronfenbrenner further contextualised these developmental stages, yet in each case, such theories represent adult definitions of adolescence. Robert Havighurst (1971) combined all these "linear sets of stages" (Besley 2) into a series of "Life Tasks" to be fulfilled in order to attain adult status:

1. Achieving new and more mature relationships with age-mates of both sexes;
  2. Achieving a masculine or feminine social role;
  3. Accepting one's physique and using the body effectively;
  4. Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults;
  5. Preparing for marriage and family life;
  6. Preparing for an economic career;
  7. Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behaviour — developing an ideology;
  8. Desiring and achieving socially responsible [behaviour].
- (Manaster 14)

Such tasks have come to be accepted as Western society's equivalent of traditional rites of passage. However, their successful completion is by no means assured, contingent on a number of ever-changing variables, many of which are outside an adolescent's sphere of influence. Rather than empowering adolescents, these tasks — the product of the discourse of adolescence — arguably merely serve to prolong the storm and stress.

Similarly, the complexity of these tasks may jeopardise adults' own sense of achievement. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the domestic realm remained largely unchanged from the nineteenth century, with the

authority of the *pater familias* uncontested. By the middle of the century, however, the social upheaval occasioned by two World Wars, the economic hardship of the 1930s' Depression and the rise in middle-class prosperity during the 1950s had had a significant influence, particularly in terms of redefining women's roles. From the 1960s onwards, many of the values previously taken for granted were eroded, and the formerly indisputable signifiers of adulthood, marriage and employment, were no longer necessarily a given. While youth subcultures flourished, a sure sense of what it was to be adult became far less certain. Indeed, by the 1990s, theorists in the growing field of adult development acknowledged "crystallization of an identity that will apply to adult life is undoubtedly ... impossible ... by the end of adolescence" (Anderson and Hayes 96). Such an admission — vouchsafed to an adult audience — questions the adolescent/adult divide that the discourse about adolescence continues to perpetuate.

The sense of opposition between generations can perhaps in part be attributed to the reluctance of adults to hand over their power to youth. This results in tension, with society ignoring the obvious signs of physical maturity, while affording adolescents limited franchise through a range of "legal demarcations" (Manaster 5). Legally and financially, young people are deemed to be mature at any age from twelve to eighteen,<sup>1</sup> "depending on whether they want to travel in planes or buses, go to the movies, leave home, marry, drink, vote or drive" (Gray 2), yet this very lack of precision ensures that none of these milestones in itself constitutes being an adult at all. As Ritchie and Ritchie observe:

Adults often view the adolescent years as problem years, but maybe this is because, although we are forever telling our young to grow up and act responsibly, we won't give them any real responsibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Gray's original text gave the legal and financial boundaries as between "twelve and twenty." Since the publication of her book in 1988, the legal voting and drinking ages in New Zealand have been lowered to eighteen (with even more recent debate about raising the drinking age to twenty again). Moreover, as this thesis entered its final stages, a government proposal to allow eighteen and nineteen-year-olds to marry without their parents' consent was decried as "an attack on parental rights" by the National Party's spokeswoman on families (Watkins A1), providing even further evidence of the arbitrary nature of adolescence as a social construction.

Maybe their rebelliousness is through sheer frustration at not having any power. (90)

Rather than concede this point, society has tended to foster the notion of “the generation gap,” holding adolescents responsible for the tension. Although this sense of diametrically opposed forces was challenged by studies in the 1970s and 80s that found little empirical evidence of disharmony, with the majority of teenagers sharing their parents’ values (Cross; Elkind 1988), nevertheless the myth that adolescence signified “not being adult” prevailed.

Adolescence became a major social issue in the mid twentieth century. Although Michel Foucault regards history as a discontinuous “series of fictions” (Green 1-2), humans have always sought to identify a causal relationship between significant occurrences and the social conditions at the time. Each age had its own youth culture, such as “the Flapper Era or the Jazz Age” (Lisman 15) in the 1920s, but the 1950s heralded in the age of the “teenager.” Closely associated with America and the birth of rock’n’roll (Brake; Coleman; King; Yska), its recent genesis is implicit in Margaret Mahy’s observation about her own youth:

[Born in 1936,] I just missed out on the real invention of adolescence though I was able to observe it in my younger sisters. Of course, teenagers were acknowledged when I was a teenager myself ... but they did not have the autonomy and power they developed a few years later. (1998)

Mahy’s statement about adolescence’s “real invention” acknowledges the growing illusion of a unique demographic, consciously shaped by “the marketplace and the media” into a powerful social force, known as “youth culture” (Ritchie and Ritchie 132). As already mentioned, Barthes’ writings on semiotics reinforce the notion that society in general, and adolescence in particular, are cultural and ideological constructions (*Mythologies* 11). He refers to the “totems” that support such cultural “mythologies” (58), which Appleby takes even further, suggesting that adolescence itself was “invented, in the United States, for social-economic reasons” (40).<sup>1</sup> Certainly, the media-

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<sup>1</sup> The term “teenager” was coined by an American advertising agency in 1947 to denote a potential new marketing demographic (Yska 57).

generated image of teenagers wearing Levi jeans and drinking Coca Cola became an internationally recognised icon, the social construction of youth reinforced by both mainstream and counter-culture representations. By the end of the twentieth century, youth culture dominated the fashion, music and film industries, with the (adult) arbiters of style fostering the myth that adolescents seek “to strengthen [their] own sense of identity by being a member of a group,” the composition and criteria for membership of which are constantly evolving. Theorists may observe, “as adults catch on, the signs change” (*Developmental Psychology Today* 569), but this begs the question of who is really in control.

### **Adolescence in Literature**

Social construction of adolescence as a discourse has direct bearing on its representation in children’s fiction. The notion of control is fundamental, in that literature plays an important role in acculturation. Children’s literature has always tended to be didactic in intent, as John Stephens recognises in *Language and Ideology in Children’s Fiction*:

Writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values, which, it is assumed, are shared by author and audience... Since a culture’s future is, to put it crudely, invested in its children, children’s writers often take upon themselves the task of trying to mould audience attitudes into ‘desirable’ forms, which can mean either an attempt to perpetuate certain values or to resist socially dominant values which particular writers oppose. (3)

What is significant is that these works are written by adults: therefore the representation of adolescence is mediated by adult assumptions of “desirable” forms. Even if authors do not consciously concede this intention, they cannot deny its effect: “literature has long been seen ... as a means to illuminate the nature and meaning of one’s existence” (Russell 58), an observation that can apply both to writer and reader.

The history of children’s literature written in English mirrors adult attitudes towards adolescence as a twentieth-century phenomenon. Books in the

first half of the century portrayed teen-aged *children* (Arbuthnot and Sutherland; Darton; Gilderdale; Meigs et al.), but a conscious body of “adolescent fiction” only came about in response to the publication in 1951 of J.D Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (Donelson and Nilsen; Lisman; Townsend 1983). Although not written for children, Salinger’s portrayal of a troubled teenage protagonist “struggling to come to terms with the society” in which he must live (Hourihan 213) had a significant impact on society’s attitude towards adolescents. In the United States, this led to a new body of literature that was validated with the title “New Realism,” its “official arrival” (Root 19) dated to the awarding in 1964 of the American Library Association’s Newbery Medal to Emily Neville’s *It’s Like This, Cat* (1963).

According to Katie Leach in her thesis on New Zealand young adult fiction, the rise of adolescent literature was “indicative of a radical rethinking about what constitutes adulthood” (193). At the very time when adolescents first began to emerge as an independent social force, adult authors took it upon themselves to inscribe their own version of adolescence as a period of conflict between troubled teenagers and their parents (and/or authority figures in general). By depicting “personal problems and social issues heretofore considered taboo for fictional treatment” (Root 19), American authors of these so-called “problem novels,” such as Paul Zindel, Judy Blume and Robert Cormier (Donelson and Nilsen; Egoff; Poe, Samuels and Carter; Townsend), could address contemporary issues of concern to adults, such as drugs, sex, and the harmful influence of the peer group. Ostensibly about adolescents, this genre can also be seen to represent adult concerns in a rapidly changing social order, with New Realism heralded as one of a series of liberation movements: “black liberation, women’s liberation and, now, children’s liberation” (Root 19). However, although one of the first books, S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders* (1967), was written when the author was only seventeen herself, books that ““tell it like it is”” (Root 22) ironically also served an adultist imperative, by perpetuating the myth of adolescence as a time of crisis.

Adolescent novels in America rapidly came to be seen, not as literature at all, but as useful discursive tools for teaching and psycho-analysis (Calhoun; Harding and Snyder; Pardeck; Taubenheim; Yeazell and Cole), based on the

rationale that “appropriate reading material can assist in expanding students’ coping skills, decision making processes and critical thinking capacities” (Gentile and McMillan qtd. in Harrison 5). The aim of bibliotherapy is explicit. Not only should readers identify with the character in the selected fiction, they are also expected to copy approved behaviours, progressing from feeling “‘He’s like me’ or ‘I’m like him’ to ‘Gee, I feel the same as he does’ to ‘I can do it just like he did’ or ‘I can do it too’” (Spache 24, qtd. in Calhoun 939). This transference of learning from the vicarious experiences offered in literature has been almost universally accepted by literary commentators and educationalists. In Nodelman’s words: “we [adult authors] show children what we ‘know’ about childhood in hopes that they will take our word for it and become like the fictional children we have invented” (32). Harding and Snyder are among the few who question “whether adolescents profit more from discussion of fictionalised dilemmas or those which occur in their own lives” (321), although Adler and Clark (1997) concede that bibliotherapy can only be effective if its values are reinforced by other influences in the reader’s life. Nevertheless, the literary representation of adolescence, ostensibly in order to “make the transition from childhood to adulthood less difficult” (Harrison 14), also operates to reinforce the adult hegemony.

The constructed nature of the discourse, directly attributable to the increasing visibility of adolescents as a social demographic, can be seen in the debate over its designation, mainly steered by librarians’ need to shelve the growing number of novels within this corpus. Magazines can be for “teenagers,” but books are variously termed “adolescent” (Carlsen; Donelson and Nilsen; Fuller), or “young adult” or “YA” literature (Nelms and Horton; Poe et al.), even though, as John Rowe Townsend observed, he has “never heard anyone called a young adult in ordinary conversation away from the library” (291). This definition has since been divided into “junior” and “senior” YA fiction, in an attempt to accommodate the ever-changing construct of adolescence itself. Tracing the development of the terminology used by Penguin since the 1980s, which ranged from “something for older children” in 1981, to “created for the teenage market” in 1985, to “young adult” in 1990 (Wheatley 7), Australian

children's author Nadia Wheatley interprets the term "young adults" as signifying an end point in itself, its citizens no longer adolescents or teenagers:

...limb-dwellers stuck in between the two "real" ages of childhood and adulthood — but ... a variety of adult ... people whom we [i.e. adults] respect, and people whom we regard as responsible enough to run their own lives. At the same time, their dependent status is revealed in the prefix young. (10)

The tension associated with defining the genre reflects society's ambivalent attitudes in general, as shown, for example, by the reaction in 2001 when Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass* became the first *children's* book<sup>1</sup> to win Britain's Whitbread Award. Critics are now divided over whether Pullman's work is for children at all.

That so many commentators have attempted to define adolescence and, in so doing, to reduce audience and subject matter to a common denominator, is indicative of the changing needs placed upon adolescence by adult society, as expressed by another Australian children's author, Brian Caswell:

We expect [teenagers] to behave with adult responsibility when faced with the dilemmas of a worldwide drug culture, institutionalised corruption, the threat of AIDS, the prospect of a future without the certainty of full employment, a growing trend towards economic, political and religious fundamentalism and the threat of an environmental apocalypse; and yet so often we insist on treating them like kids. Because, in many ways, at times, they still are; and even when they're not, it is a great way of maintaining a semblance of power and control over them. (274)

Caswell is one of the few to acknowledge that adulthood is not the "perfect" state implied by its etymology, a conclusion shared by speakers at a LIANZA (Library Association of New Zealand) symposium in 2003:

The bottom line is that most YA fiction is written to help teenagers understand both the joys and problems of the world they live in, whether by using humour, fantasy, suspense, horror, adventure or realism. Some of these stories inevitably include elements of

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<sup>1</sup> J.K.Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* caused a furore in 1996 when it came second in the same award, with critics at the time loudly decrying the thought that a children's book could win an adult award, despite its appeal to both children and adults.

"doom and gloom" while describing the problems. But surely the doom and gloom belongs not to the novels themselves, but to the difficult world portrayed in them – a world created by adults.

(Beckingsale, Coppel and Orman)

Such observations recognise a need to deflect attention from the “unsolved problems of adult life” (Ritchie and Ritchie 10) by focusing on the adolescent problem instead.

Literature is a vehicle well suited to such an exploration, because it constructs a vicarious experience for its readers, through which an author can influence his or her audience. Wolfgang Iser in *The Implied Reader* (1974) and *The Act of Reading* (1978) explored the relationship between author and reader, distinguishing two types of audience, the actual, and the “implied” reader. The actual reader, the one who physically picks up the book, brings his or her individual experience, values and beliefs to the reading of the text. On the other hand, the implied reader exists only within the text, constituting the “perfect” audience: “situated in such a position that he can assemble the meaning toward which the perspectives of the text have guided him” (Iser 1978 38). Stephens extends Iser’s theories, identifying a discursive practice used to situate the reader that he terms “focalization” (1992 68), whereby “the reader’s selfhood is effaced and the reader internalizes the perceptions and attitudes of the focalizer.” In this way, according to Stephens, the “focalizer,” or “main character from whose perspective events are presented” (68), plays an important ideological role.

By examining the focalising techniques employed by authors, this thesis seeks to highlight this narratorial influence on readers’ response. Focalisation is driven by the narrative voice, and the majority of texts employ omniscient third person narration, characteristically privileging a child’s (but not necessarily the adolescent’s) perspective. Few are as explicit as in Esther Glen’s *Six Little New Zealanders*, where twelve-year-old Ngaire sees “things with [adults’] eyes” (178), but this point-of-view in effect underpins all the works in this study, a discursive control made possible because the novels speak adult values with a child’s voice. By often imbuing them with a self-awareness sophisticated beyond their years, authors use such narrators as a non-threatening advocate of

conformist behaviours. Adult views can be voiced directly within the text, but this occurs most often through the use of dialogue, rather than narratorial point-of-view. Focalisation is at its most persuasive (because least obvious) in novels that employ first person narrative, which, as Inglis stated, particularly enables a work to “form its readers” (4). This view is supported by Hourihan’s observation that first person narration is not only “the most powerful means by which the reader’s perceptions and sympathies are manipulated,” but also “invites the reader’s [unquestioning] acceptance of the narrator’s values and judgements” (38). Within this study, however, the use of first person narration is shown to be relatively rare, requiring the adolescent to have already internalised adult values, something most texts doubt.

As Peter Hollindale points out, even if most books written for children and adolescents purport to avoid overt didacticism, they implicitly reveal through the focaliser the “writer’s own values,” as well as hinting at a wider context: “a large part of any book is written not by its author but by the values of the world its author lives in” (1988 19). Perry Nodelman (1992), Professor of English at the University of Winnipeg, goes so far as to suggest that adult authors colonise their readers:

...by and large, we encourage in children those values and behaviours that make children easier for us to handle: more passive, more docile, more obedient — and thus, more in need of our guidance and more willing to accept the need for it. (30)

In this, he builds on Stephens’ recognition of the ideological imperative behind the “impulse [of all children’s literature] to intervene in the lives of children” (8). Although these commentators refer specifically to children, this thesis contends that their observations can also be applied to adolescents. Drawing on the notion that children’s literature is a construct fashioned by adults in order to acculturate its audience, the “reality” of the adolescent problem can be examined in relation to the adults who have created it thus, paying particular attention to the way narrative strategies reflect the power dynamics of the discourse.

The methodology of this study will entail a close examination of the focalisation, whereby readers are invited to view the world of the novel through the narrator’s (or a narratorially-privileged child character’s) eyes. This is either

achieved by using a younger commentator like Glen's Ngairi, or a fellow adolescent whose views are introduced by such overt phrases as "she had to admit it" (de Roo 10), or "she could see" (Boock 1997 128). At other times, first person narration represents an even more immediate influence, often providing a self-conscious appraisal of the follies of adolescent behaviour, as in "I didn't want to lie, but for the sake of being popular, I would" (Vasil 27). Dialogue offers a further opportunity for focalisation, enabling adult voices, in particular, to be heard directly, as when an aunt exhorts her teenaged niece to "Think about" her mother's point-of-view (Taylor 1992 97). Rarely does the author's point-of-view reveal itself explicitly, but this study will demonstrate how focalisation serves the same function, shaping readers' perceptions of adolescence in accordance with an adult perspective.

### **New Zealand Young Adult Fiction**

As Leach observes in her Masterate thesis, New Zealand literature for adolescents is a new genre that has occasioned little critical commentary to date (15). Tessa Duder, for example, contributing to Australian critic Agnes Nieuwenhuizen's anthology, *The Written Word: Youth and Literature* (1994), notes that, while over 100 works of New Zealand adolescent fiction were published between 1984 and 1994, they have only latterly become the subject of critical study, with the majority of commentaries on New Zealand's best-known author for adolescents, Margaret Mahy. In 1987 Claudia Marquis wrote a seminal article in *Landfall* on Mahy's fantasy work, *The Haunting*, and in 1991 she published a further article on YA fiction, including Mahy's *The Tricksters*, Heather Marshall's *Gemma, Brooke & Madeleine*, and Tania Roxborough's *If I Could Tell You* (1997), in which she questioned the "grown up expectations" (332), which critical study imposed on children's literature. Marquis echoed the views of British commentator, Jacqueline Rose, expressed in *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984), identifying "an audience consuming a product that is not actually produced by one of its own kind; and a corollary — a product produced by a group that can never be immediately present among those who consume it" (Marquis 333). In 1990, Robyn Sheahan explored the mix of real and supernatural in *The Changeover* in *Papers*:

*Explorations into Children's Literature*, the journal of the Australian Children's Literature Association for Research. In 1992, writing in the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Josephine Rayburn placed *The Changeover* within the feminist tradition, regarding the novel as a weaving together of "Maori animism, pre-Hellenic moon mythology, Christianity, Jungian psychology, and modern science" (27). As well as all this, she acknowledges the significance of the story as a rite of passage that "establishes a formula which explains the female psyche and coming of age" (37). In 1996, in the same journal, Anna Lawrence-Pietroni explored the uncertain nature of adolescence in relation to the shifting definitions of self in *The Changeover* and *The Tricksters*. In 1999, Amy Jamgochian examined Paula Boock's *Dare Truth or Promise* as a lesbian "romance," in the *Women's Studies Journal*.

Recognising children's literature, and adolescent fiction in particular, as a subject of degree study has been similarly belated. Jennifer Kestra completed a masterate thesis at Auckland University in 1988 on the role of adolescent girls in literature. Kestra focused mainly on British nineteenth- and twentieth-century school stories, but the final chapter looks at the works of Mahy and Duder. She took a feminist approach, initially accepting the "new realism" of such works with comments such as, "perhaps in writing in retrospect Duder [in *Alex*] has been able to present a more truthful picture of schoolgirl life in the late 1950s than books written at the time" (93). She concludes that her chosen novels deliberately supported the conservative status quo of "an era which was still reluctant to accept females as intelligent people with ambitions to assert their independence from males, to prove that they are not an inherently weaker sex, to avoid the trap of domestic life" (98). Diane Hebley presented New Zealand's first doctoral thesis on children's literature at Waikato University in 1992, which was subsequently published in 1998 as *The Power of Place: Landscape in New Zealand Children's Fiction*. In 1999, Amy Jamgochian completed an Auckland Masterate on "Fictions of Lesbian Adolescence." In the same year, Katie Leach examined the role of the family in New Zealand YA fiction for her Masterate at Otago, maintaining that its portrayal between 1914 and 1996 has shifted from idealised nostalgia to realism, an appraisal she attributes to the "increasingly complex relationships" (195) between parents and children.

This study aims to contribute to the field by examining the representation of adolescence in twentieth-century New Zealand Young Adult fiction, which, in the event, encompasses works written between 1912 and 1999. Such a broad scope means, inevitably, that some works have been omitted. Nevertheless, the selection (from an initial list of more than sixty novels compiled in consultation with Lynne Jackett, curator of the Dorothy Neale White Collection in the National Library) endeavours to be representative. The forty-odd primary texts, revealing an unexpected number of common elements, have been chosen on the basis of their explicit reference to the “life tasks” commonly associated with adolescence, as experienced by characters between the ages of fourteen and twenty. For this reason, purely adventure stories, historical works and fantasies have generally been excluded. Granted, such works often empower their characters in a way that appears to run counter to this thesis. However, by situating their plots outside the domestic realm, such works, arguably, do not represent the state of adolescence at all. As Hebley’s *Power of Place* reveals, New Zealand adventure stories emphasise engagement with the landscape rather than the “introspection and character growth” (Gilderdale 160) typically associated with an examination of adolescent development<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, novels set in the past such as William Satchell’s *The Greenstone Door* (1914) tend to focus on plot rather than character, or, as with Maurice Gee’s *The Fire Raiser* (1992) and *The Fat Man* (1995), to portray characters younger than fourteen.

On the other hand, fantasies may well contain complex teenaged characters, endowed with super-human qualities. By definition, however, a fantasy’s depiction of adolescent agency exists in a world that does not purport to be real. One of New Zealand’s best-known fantasy works is Sherryl Jordan’s *Rocco* (1990), in which the eponymous main character awakes to find himself mysteriously displaced, no longer in his bedroom with “clothes strewn on the floor, the homework spread unfinished across his desk” (4), but in a wild setting of wolves, plague, and desolation. Within this context, he proves to be a truly heroic leader, ultimately saving the world from nuclear war. However, the novel’s primary setting — two generations into Rocco’s future — is a primitive,

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<sup>1</sup> Characters in Joan de Hamel’s *X Marks the Spot* (1973), for example, remain childlike in behaviour, despite Ross being old enough to fly a helicopter. (Their ages are never given.)

post-holocaust, agrarian society, in which adolescence has no place: a girl can be betrothed at fifteen (37), and a “young man” of seventeen is already a father (193). Attaining “adult” status within this, and other fantasies such as Caroline Macdonald’s *The Lake at the End of the World* (1988) and Ken Catran’s *Dream-bite* (1995), may operate as sublimation for the actual powerlessness of adolescents in the “real” world that this study seeks to explore.

The representation of “adolescence,” then, is most often associated with works of domestic realism, whose focus on intergenerational relationships enables authors to foreground adult concerns as well. The study deals with texts topically rather than historically, although contemporary secondary sources drawn from psychology, sociology, official inquiries and popular literature provide relevant cultural context. It will show that little has changed in roughly one hundred years of New Zealand YA fiction. Texts may vary their approach to the question of intergenerational power, but the themes such as rebellion versus authority and/or foolishness versus wisdom remain constant over time. Many of the works have been honoured by the AIM and New Zealand Post Children’s Book awards, and include novels by authors such as Esther Glen, Isabel Maud Peacocke, Edith Howes, Phillis Garrard, Joyce West, Tessa Duder, Margaret Mahy, David Hill, Kate de Goldi, William Taylor, Paula Boock, and Jane Westaway, among others.

With reference to Foucault’s power/knowledge dynamic, the thesis seeks to explore the adult-centred imperative governing the representation of the main themes associated with adolescence: rites of passage; teenage rebellion; the generation gap; and sexual awakening. Using this framework, Chapter Two, “When I grow up...,” examines how such works portray adolescents’ preparation for adulthood in the light of the developmental tasks established by behaviouralists. This focus, which tends to occur in novels written in the first half of the century, reveals a consistent attitude towards the requirements for each gender, employment for young men and the acquisition of domestic skills for girls, as well as towards courtship rituals. Texts most often present dutiful role models who conform to the path laid down for them by adults. However, few rites of passage actually take place, effectively delaying the transition to adulthood beyond the parameters of the text.

Chapter Three, “Storm & Stress,” examines the depiction of adolescents who presume to act independently of adult guidance. Rather than encouraging the development of autonomy recommended by behaviouralists, works tend to promote the desirability of conformity, with independent adolescent behaviour often regarded as synonymous with juvenile delinquency. Such depictions of rebellion serve, by inference, to reinforce the status quo in that each work has a “happy ending”: good prevails, and recalcitrant characters are punished, while the merely misguided, having realised the error of their ways, are welcomed back into the fold.

Although the thesis contends that *all* the texts demonstrate the hegemonic relationship between adolescents and adults, Chapter Four, “The Generation Gap,” focuses on those works that deal with it explicitly by highlighting the parental point-of-view. While some works depict two-parent families, the high prevalence of solo parent and/or blended families reflects authors’ awareness of a shifting power balance between generations towards the end of the century. This chapter will explore the portrayal of role-reversals (adolescents who take on adult roles, and adults who revert to adolescence), as well as the treatment of physical and sexual abuse. Often requiring adolescents to forgive adult failings, such depictions seem to say more about adults’ desire to be validated than about adolescence itself.

Arguably the first signifier of readiness for adulthood, adolescent sexuality remains the greatest taboo. Chapter Five, “The Birds & the Bees,” will examine how works seek to reinforce sexuality as an exclusively “adult” preserve, by contrasting the portrayal of committed relationships with the invariably negative consequences of casual sex in both hetero- and homosexual relationships.

Chapter Six, “Ungrown-up Grown-ups,” will conclude that twentieth-century New Zealand children’s and Young Adult fiction represents adolescence less as “the state of becoming...” than as “not being an adult,” inviting a concomitant interpretation of adulthood as “not being adolescent.” This is most often demonstrated by a tendency to portray adolescent characters as uncertain and misguided, denying them the autonomy behaviouralists generally associate with adolescence. Each case overwhelmingly asserts the importance of adults in

adolescents' lives. Such interactions range from repressive imposition of hegemonic power, to the more frequent "benevolently helpful colonising attitude" (Nodelman 34) that seeks to protect readers from the apparent dangers of adolescence, affirming an inherently conformist sense of adulthood in the process.

## Chapter Two: “When I grow up...”

Western society has historically regarded the markers of the transition from childhood to adulthood to be entry into the workforce (for young men) and marriage (for girls). These markers support the concept of behavioural “life tasks” given expression in the nineteenth-century literary genre known as the *Bildungsroman*. Literally a “coming-of-age story,” according to Jerome Buckley, the first *Bildungsroman* was Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795), with well-known English examples including Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield* (1850), and *Great Expectations* (1860-61). Hourihan defines the *Bildungsroman* as

...primarily a progress through time as [the hero] moves from the uncertainties and powerlessness of childhood, through the difficulties of adolescence and the hostilities of the external world, to arrive finally at some form of successful adulthood. (48)

From this successful vantage point the protagonist reflects on his formative years, a perspective that illustrates such works are “intended for adult readers” (Trites 11) rather than for adolescents themselves.

*Bildungsromane* experienced critical reaction in the late twentieth century, initially on the feminist grounds that they tend to portray male characters actively determining their futures, while women’s life choices are proscribed by their gender (Pratt qtd. in Trites 12), but also because “coming of age” became increasingly less easy to define. This led to the rise of *Entwicklungsromane*, “novels of development” written from an adolescent’s perspective, which emphasise triumph over present tribulations rather than an overall sense of completion. Where *Bildungsromane* enable adolescents to “overcome the condition of adolescence by becoming adults” (Trites 19), *Entwicklungsromane* stress acceptance of one’s place within a socially-constructed power dynamic.

New Zealand children’s novels tend to fall into the category of *Entwicklungsromane*, because — although behavioural theories advocate adolescence as a time of growing autonomy in preparation for taking on adult roles — the majority of works stress characters’ lack of readiness instead. In this way, the genre contributes to the discursive construction of adolescence by

deferring the transition to adulthood, whilst problematising adolescence itself. This means, in effect, that rites of passage do not eventuate: rarely do adults within the texts endorse adolescent characters' independence, thereby preserving the exclusivity of the adult order. By exploring the rites of passage typically associated with adolescence in the first half of the century— employment for young men and marriage for girls — together with the narratorial voice that shapes readers' perceptions of adolescence according to an adult perspective, this chapter will reveal that adolescents' ambitions for the future are often portrayed as wanting. Moreover, the fact that characters' futures are rarely mentioned in novels set after the 1960s indicates the concomitant lessening over time of the sense that adolescence need have an endpoint at all.

### **“Someday he meant to do something...splendid”**

Traditionally, the signifier of adulthood for males has always been entry into the workforce, although the raising of the school leaving age in New Zealand from fourteen in 1901, to 15 in 1943, and again to 16 in 1996 indicates the increasing prolongation of childhood already noted by Reynolds. Significantly, none of the New Zealand *Entwicklungsromane* portrays characters successfully making the transition into the workforce. On the other hand, several focus on their failure to do so, together with the associated need for parental intervention in determining the adolescent's future. One such work is Esther Glen's 1929 novel, *Robin of Maoriland*. Using thirteen-year-old<sup>1</sup> Robin as focaliser, the third person narrative voice describes how her oldest brother, Coon, leaves school at the age of fifteen, “since Father and [the principal] decided that Coon was wasting both Father's money and the master's time” (113), establishing the primacy of adult authority from the first.

No longer being at school, the adolescent's status may appear to alter:

The family realized that Coon was really growing up. His voice, which for some time had been an indeterminate quality, developed

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<sup>1</sup> The reason why this thesis defines 'adolescence' as beginning at fourteen. Twelve and thirteen-year-old characters are regarded as *children* within the texts, a lack of status that enables them to operate as narrator or focaliser, unquestioningly conveying adult views on adolescence.

a manly gruffness and his horizon broadened to an appreciation of socks and ties. (114)

However, despite evidence of his physical maturation, the limits of his “broadened” horizon suggest no one really considers Coon grown-up, as someone with a say in his future. His life-long ambition to emulate the Antarctic hero Captain Oates — “Someday he meant to do something self-sacrificing and splendid” (113) — is taken no more seriously by the narrative voice than his other far-fetched childhood schemes (silk-farming, orchardry, stamp-collecting), accounts of which pepper the early pages of the novel:

Since, save for a desire to explore the polar regions, he possessed no more definite idea of a career than the average boy of his age, Father placed him in a solicitor’s office. (114)

The patronising narratorial perspective is revealed not only by the apparent rejection of adolescent idealism in general, but also by the hegemonic implications of the phrase, “Father placed him.” Coon has neither identity nor input into the decision-making process.

Indeed, as the focalisation goes on to suggest, even with adult direction, an adolescent may founder. In the event — offered as evidence of his immaturity— Coon’s employment history takes only the one page to relate. His enthusiasm for law clerking wanes after a month, “his opinion concurring exactly with that of the head of the firm...that he was not cut out for a lawyer”:

An accommodating friend of Father’s made room for him next. The prospects were exceptional, but the work altogether beyond the capabilities of a lad fresh from school ...

A shipping firm was Father’s next venture, and Coon really seemed to settle down. (114)

This seems promising, were it not for the narratorial observation that “Coon had plenty of time on his hands” (114). Idleness is the opposite of industry, a clear marker of immaturity, and the narrator reports that Coon “suffered a bad relapse to the enthusiasm of earlier days, and embarked upon an enterprise more grubby and evil-smelling than any in which he had previously been engaged” (117). “The Eastmere Eel Canning Company” takes up a considerable amount of his time, and, inevitably, “the crash came” (118), after his boss repeatedly discovers

him absent. Even though Coon professes bravado when talking to his younger sister — “I gave old Murray the sack today” (119) — Robin’s anxiety draws attention to his actual lack of power: “the thought of what Father would say was acutely alarming” (120). Coon’s entrée into the adult-determined world of work is jeopardised by his adolescentness.

This seems to suggest employment *per se* is a lesser signifier of maturity than doing what one is told (which leads to a similar inference about what it might mean to be adult). The narrative voice holds out little hope for Coon’s future, until a friend of his parents, who just happens to be putting together an Antarctic expedition, invites the boy to accompany him.<sup>1</sup> Here, finally, is an activity of Coon’s own choosing, yet his parents’ initial reactions are telling: “To Mother, Coon was just a little boy again to be sheltered and protected” (123). Having failed to demonstrate his maturity by settling down to a job, Coon must perforce still be a child. The father responds differently: “the lad is doing no good for himself...He is at an impressionable age, and perhaps a taste of hardship will make him value his life at home more” (123). Both reactions imply adult authority over the adolescent. Where a trip to the South Pole could have formed the basis of a rollicking yarn for younger readers, here the expedition serves to highlight the foolishness of an adolescent thinking he can determine his own career. In order to raise money for his trip, “for a week — a fortnight — three months — Coon worked as surely never mortal youth laboured before” (125), but the irony operates against him, and, over time, “Coon’s efforts unconsciously slackened, though he himself was pleasantly unaware of the fact” (125). The narrative voice notices, however, and makes a point of drawing Coon’s fecklessness to readers’ attention once more.

Nonetheless, the trip serves a purpose in terms of achieving adolescent capitulation to adults’ wishes: ““Coon is learning slowly. By the time he returns from his trip he may have quite a modicum of common sense,” finished Father, with a smile” (131). “Common sense” here implies an adherence to society’s norms, those behaviours held “in common”: young men must do as they are told, rather than following their own desires. His mother (the parent with no say

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<sup>1</sup> As well, of course, as formally “writing to Father” (123) for permission.

in her son's future) is the only one prepared to acknowledge Coon's actions might represent a step towards autonomy (some time in the indefinite future):

The first of her fledglings was stretching his wings for flight. He would fly back, she knew, but he would learn the strength of his wings and soon he would wander. (132)

In contrast to a *Bildungsroman*, however, the text emphasises only his immaturity at this stage. From the South Pole, Coon writes home,

in the would-be jovial manner of one thrilled by every moment of his adventures, but here and there was a note that only Mother detected... 'After all, he's very young to go so far.' (159)

Here the adult voice is heard directly, but its tenor strikes a jarring note. No adolescent likes to be reminded how young he or she is, yet — as Coon's contemporaries — that is exactly what implied readers are being told.

Furthermore, in order to reinforce adolescent immaturity, the narrative voice informs readers of aspects other characters do not learn:

'I rather like a storm myself,' added Coon, omitting to mention the fact that his first experience of an Antarctic gale had set his nerves quivering and his heart throbbing. (160-160)

His inexperience causes him to get lost in a blizzard, and, despite his safe return, society (represented by his family) heralds his homecoming with the words, "It was the same old Coon." Although the same sentence concedes that he is "older, more manly in his ways" (211), the text continues to describe him as a "tall, boyish figure" and a "big lad" (210), while the statement, "There was more steadfastness about him now" (211), is tempered by the inference that he possessed none before.

Throughout *Robin of Maoriland*, Glen reinforces the fact that adults control adolescents' life choices. Coon's Antarctic adventure has been an interlude, affording him the necessary time to grow a little wiser. Nevertheless, his future remains unclear, until another adult agent, this time an eccentric maiden aunt, intervenes, offering to pay Coon's university fees and provide him with an allowance until he "qualified as a metallurgist" (211). Although never having heard of the profession (the story gives no explanation why Aunt Sophronia should choose it), Coon "threw himself heart and soul into his new

life and his new work. ‘It’s no end of a profession,’ he told Robin, ‘and interesting, too. I might do a bit of prospecting on my holidays’” (212). Once again, his career has been chosen for him, with the significant difference that *this* time (as the book near its end) the narrative voice implies he will settle. Approval can be inferred from the silence of the other adult characters. The only reminder about Coon’s tendency towards overenthusiasm comes from an older sister, which seems to confirm that the *dea ex machina* provides the perfect resolution to the problem of aimless adolescence.

The Antarctic expedition (symbolising adolescent idealism) out of his system, Coon is now doing what adults wish, as shown by the active voice: “[throwing] himself” rather than being thrown by others, although adult status is by no means achieved yet. The text describes his older sister as making “an *unconscious* tribute to Coon’s growing importance in the family” (italics added), but in the same sentence, he is described as sitting boyishly “on the edge of the dressing table, swinging his legs” (242), a portrayal that graphically reveals his transitional status. Any rite of passage is delayed within an *Entwicklungsroman*, in which the youth in question remains in a state of “becoming,” rather than completing the transition towards maturity.

If one adolescent fails to complete his rite of passage through nothing more than youthful ineptitude, the failure of one who actively resists adult direction is presented in another of Glen’s novels, *Six Little New Zealanders* (1916). The treatment of rebellion in New Zealand children’s literature will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three, but this example belongs here as a further example of adult control over rites of passage. Like Coon, Rob is the eldest son, and, after unspecified trouble at school, his father has also refused to allow him to return. Faced with the unwelcome prospect of an idle youth, adult society, according to Zornado, must “help the child redirect [his] energies, [which] meant to properly repress them” (28). This can be seen in the following passage:

The uncles were willing to take him for a year; father said he would have to go to Kamahi and learn sheep farming, whether he liked it or whether he didn’t. Rob didn’t like it one bit. You see, he wanted to be a lawyer, and you can’t learn lawyering in the country when

you've got to spend all your time looking after sheep and cattle and growing crops. (*Six Little New Zealanders* 6)

At “sixteen — seventeen nearly,” Rob is old enough to matriculate, and has a strong sense of vocation. Nevertheless, the text offers no reason why Rob cannot go “lawyering,” other than the intimation that the stint on the farm is penance for his misdemeanours at school. Whatever the rationale, Rob has no say in his future.

Unlike Coon, Rob refuses to comply with the decisions made for him by his elders, and, “tired of farming” (173), runs away with a friend. Rather than acknowledging this as an assertion of their independence, the narrative voice trivialises it as a reckless adventure:

Boys in books ran away because they were unjustly suspected and because their hearts were breaking, but Rob hadn't even a cruel uncle or a harsh parent. There really wasn't any excuse for him.  
(172)

Such a categorical denial prevents implied readers from considering the situation from Rob's perspective, a denial made even more forceful because the narrator and focaliser, twelve-year-old Ngaire, is a child herself. Despite feelings of loyalty towards her big brother, she finds herself “seeing things with the uncles' eyes” (178), a device that unequivocally requires readers to do the same. Rob as good as disappears from the story for one hundred pages, and — although later readers learn of “the journey Uncle John had made to the Chathams, of the hopeless trips Uncle Dan had taken to various parts of the Dominion” (261) looking for him — the story never mentions their absence at the time. Moreover, the family seem confident Rob will soon “see the error of his ways” (180). This is an even stronger indication of adult superiority than Coon's father's expectation of common sense. Having been led astray by his friend Alan, someone described as needing “discipline” (180), the adolescent is completely in the wrong.

The adult point-of-view is made clear in the uncles' opinion that “[knocking] around the world” will do the rebellious youths “a world of good” (180), although “good” is relative, defined here in adult terms as the chastened boys' realisation that they must defer to authority, something their triumphant

return would undermine. This stance is confirmed when Alan returns alone fifty pages later, and, despite evidence of considerable resourcefulness, the narrator records his contrition as he avows to “try again and work hard” (222). Cast as the villain of the pair, he is now “quieter and more thoughtful...trying to pick up the threads where he had thrown them down six months ago” (222). The comparatives are presented as positives: all bravado knocked out of him, the focalisation — which makes the appraisal all the more persuasive for the implied reader through its use of ostensibly a child’s voice — emphasises that, rather than making them men, the boys’ attempt at self-assertion has simply reinforced how much they need to conform to adult authority.

This is reiterated when Rob finally returns, fevered and emaciated after his “idea of a trip across to Australia” (223) fails to come to fruition (confirming adult expectations once again). Ngaire comes upon him sheltering in an abandoned cottage, ashamed to face his family:

‘I can’t do that...I only — got so tired and pegged out messing around — I’ve been two trips round the coast in a cargo boat as cabin boy. Then I took to swagging it down in Otago and worked towards Kamahi. I never meant to stay. I wouldn’t come sneaking back after being such an ungrateful animal.’ (261-262)

Rob’s physical debilitation, coupled with his contrition, reinforce the interpretation of his escapade as punishment, a time in the wilderness, despite a catalogue of experiences,

...the “way back” railway camp in which he had worked, ...the trip he had taken round the coast in the timber scow, ... the swagging days during which he had passed through Otago and South Canterbury (269),

any one of which, in a *Bildungsroman*, would have been deemed sufficient to “make a man of him.” The narrator passes over his evident life skills<sup>1</sup> in favour of “repentance, and sorrow and the resolving of better things” (270). The only value the text sees in allowing adolescents (briefly) to choose their own path is that it makes them finally accept their dutiful place in society: deferring to their elders. As with *Robin of Maoriland*’s Coon, adult authority comes in the form

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<sup>1</sup> This might also have formed the basis for an adventure story for younger children.

of aunts and uncles, rather than parents, a recurrent motif within the corpus perhaps intended to avoid depicting direct challenges to authority. Unlike Zornado's definition that equates parenting with repression (28), Glen's adults are not portrayed as overtly imposing any power, so confident is the implicit ideological superiority of the narratorial voice.

The prodigal's return is recorded indirectly, overtaken by other events: a narratorial omission significant in itself, suggesting it was only to be expected. Having admitted his wrongdoing, Rob can now receive a second chance:

‘I’m not going to be a farmer after all, Skinny,’ [Rob] said. ‘Uncle John is sending me back to school, and then on to the University. So I can be a lawyer or anything else I want....’ (270-1)

The text gives no explanation for the adults' change of heart, although it can be inferred that, by running away, Rob has unwittingly subjected himself to a much more gruelling test of his ability to work than had he stayed on the farm. In a Foucauldian sense, this could be read as a hegemonic interplay, the power of youthful rebellion bringing about change, except that the text uses this occasion solely to pay tribute to the adult agent:

‘Uncle John’s just ripping — you don’t know what a good sort he is, kid,’ [Rob said.]

But I did. I had discovered it long ago. (271)

Writing at a time when adults felt secure in their locus of control, Glen uses the first person narrator, coupled with adolescent rebellion and obedience, to affirm their superiority. Rob's wishes count for nothing: at the beginning of the story he left school at his elders' behest; now he returns, the transition to the adult state of "lawyering" both permitted and deferred solely due to adult agency. The final description makes the message clear: "Rob is not quite so sure of himself [but] is rapidly ...reinstating himself in the good graces of the uncles" (276). Adolescence, within New Zealand children's literature at least, is not a time for self-assertion; rather it is when characters must learn to defer to adult authority.

Directly challenging a parent's wishes can bring about change, but only on adult terms. Joyce West, in her 1963 novel, *Cape Lost*, the second in a trilogy that also includes *Drover's Road* (1953) and *The Golden Country* (1965),

portrays another adolescent, an English farm cadet, who faces parental opposition to his career plans:

‘I always knew I wanted to be a farmer,’ Simon said... ‘But my father wanted me to go into the business with him, and I lost interest and just fooled around my last year at college; so he took me away and gave me a job; he said that would settle my silly ideas.’ (*Cape Lost* 144)

In this case, Simon takes matters into his own hands, and his non-compliance succeeds in bringing about a change in his father’s attitude:

‘I stuck [the office job] for a while, [then] I ... applied for an assisted passage to New Zealand as a farm worker.  
 ‘... [My father] was furious at first, but when he found I really meant it he was very decent about the whole thing. ... He says, in a few years’ time, if I’ve done well and still want a place of my own, he’ll finance me into a property.’ (144-5)

In no way, however, can this be construed as condoning an adolescent’s “silly ideas.” The father’s change of heart results less from Simon’s obduracy than from the evidence of legitimate hard work and resourcefulness. Moreover, Simon’s observation that his father ““was very decent about it”” acknowledges the adult prerogative to have reacted otherwise. Although this account provides evidence that an adolescent’s wishes may be heard, his future still depends entirely upon his father’s patronage.

While West depicts an adult willing to concede a diligent adolescent’s career choice, a less sanguine fate awaits one who fails to receive his father’s approval, as shown by Tessa Duder’s *Alex* (1987). Duder set the *Alex* quartet<sup>1</sup> in the late 1950s and 60s, yet she wrote the novels at a time when a series of liberation movements, stemming from the United States, advocated sexual, gender and racial equality. Duder is one of the few authors within this study to challenge adults’ right to dictate their children’s futures, by portraying Alex’s first love, seventeen-year-old Andy, as a sensitive young man, who dreams of

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<sup>1</sup> *Alex* (1987), *Alex in Winter* (1989), *Alessandra: Alex in Rome* (1991), and *Songs for Alex* (1992).

joining the British Navy. It is an eminently acceptable ambition in its own right, but his father harbours the assumption that his son will fulfil his own failed ambitions: scaling “the ultimate twin pinnacles of New Zealand manhood, as a doctor *and* an All Black” (*Alex* 54). These aspirations suggest the father’s own adolescent idealism, yet, having presumably forfeited his dream to satisfy *his* parents’ wishes (although Duder does not reveal his occupation), the fact that he now seeks to impose them upon his son signifies the hegemonic imbalance between the generations.

Glen’s novels took it for granted that a young man would obey his elders, and, to this end, adults were presented as upright citizens. Andy’s father, on the other hand, is revealed by his actions to be racist, chauvinist, “bad-tempered [and] bossy” (*Alex* 54), and Andy and Alex talk of the “Great New Zealand Clobbering Machine” (Hebley 1998 66) that cuts one “down to size” (*Alex* 108) if one does not conform. Here the first person narrator directly denounces unreasonable adult authority. In the event, Andy neither submits to his father’s wishes nor fulfils his own ambitions, because he meets an untimely death, the victim of a hit-and-run accident. ““Terrified to go home”” and confront his father about his future, he lingered at school for as long as possible after his final exams: “*That’s* why he was pedalling home at midnight and copped it” (*Alex in Winter* 133). Readers share Alex’s shock, as well as the implicit casting of blame, conveyed by the italics. Moreover, the description of Andy’s bedroom, full of “models of ships and pictures of ships, warships and sailing ships,” together with the rhetorical question, “Hadn’t his parents realized?” (*Alex* 131), heightens the sense of tragedy. Despite readers’ knowledge to the contrary, Mr and Mrs Richmond’s opinion of their son as someone who “lacked ambition” (147) prevails to the end. In this way, Duder — writing from the vantage point of some thirty years’ hence — presents Andy’s death as a rare indictment of adult hegemony. The parents’ refusal to let an adolescent chart his own future is ultimately responsible for destroying their power base altogether, leaving readers to imagine what might have been.

### “A nice little job”

Entry into the work force may be a rite of passage for males, but New Zealand children’s literature tends to present it as something adolescent characters are unable to achieve: yet. The fact that “adult authors are creating these repressive relationships” (Trites 54) between adult and adolescent characters suggests an underlying attitude towards adulthood as well, not only implying a steadfastness beyond adolescent means, but also the fact that entry into adulthood can only be bought at the price of conformity to adults’ wishes. The same attitude applies to the depiction of daughters’ career choices, although here employment is not considered a rite of passage so much as a pastime before marriage.

Esther Glen’s *Robin of Maoriland* (1929) stresses this by contrasting serious adult industry with unrealistic adolescent idealism. Clem, Coon’s seventeen-year-old sister, has recently left school:

... and was at present at home assisting Mother with the work, since help in New Zealand is hard to obtain, and Father would not hear of her starting yet on the journalistic career upon which she had set her heart. (*Robin of Maoriland* 20)

Clem’s role within the household is an economic one, reflecting an attitude towards the nations’ children that would not alter until the Labour Government introduced social and educational reforms in the mid-1930s (Williams 2003). At the same time, the force of her father’s veto has less effect than witnessed in relation to Glen’s adolescent males. For a girl, a career is not as important as the social prelude to courtship:

Clem had suddenly blossomed into a very popular young lady, much in demand at social affairs, and was beginning to look down on home doings. Of course, under the circumstances, it was not to be expected that she would have much time for purely domestic concerns as father, mother, sisters and brothers. Clem, arrayed in the smartest little sports suits, played tennis and golf, and assisted at garden parties; Mother spent long mornings in the house darning the stockings and socks that filled the family stocking bag to overflowing. The stocking bag bored Clem. (164-5)

According to Mike Brake, author of *The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures*, “a girl’s leisure is her work. It is leisure activities that are the

setting for the start of her career, for the attraction of a man suitable for marriage” (74).<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the final lines of Glen’s description seem to differ. Granted, by 1926, the New Zealand domestic scene had undergone a radical transformation, thanks to the advent of labour-saving devices: “irons, vacuum cleaners, water heaters, toasters, cookers, radiators, sewing and washing machines, kettles and even refrigerators” (Watson 1984 243). Moreover, the “modern girl” had become a popular image, with advertisers (as distinct from parents) regarding adolescents as the face of the future, as shown by the 1929 American campaign for Modess sanitary napkins, entitled “Modernizing Mother”:

Old-fashioned ways cannot withstand the merry onslaught of the modern girl. Her enthusiasm is so sane and contagious, she is so everlastingly right in refusing the drudgeries and repressions of her mother’s girlhood that the whole world is approving her gay philosophy which demands the best and nothing but the best.

(*Pictorial Review* 1929)

According to this, by the end of the 1920s the modern girl could do whatever she wanted. The media, however, create a set of myths for their own purpose. In a novel for children, the deliberate contrast with the mother’s industry operates to censure adolescent frivolity. Boredom, the text implies, is a childish trait, in marked contrast to the diligence of the adult. Moreover, the very mention of the stocking bag suggests Clem’s carefree interlude is limited. Soon the time will come when she must acquire the domestic skills necessary for her role as wife and mother.

The narrative voice makes this explicit when the mother becomes ill, and Clem steps into an unfamiliar role:

Clem was darning the family socks now, and even if she did cobble them in a way that broke Mother’s heart, still love guided the needle, and Mother appreciated the effort. (212)

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<sup>1</sup> This freedom as part of the process of courtship is also shown by Isabel Maud Peacocke in 1919, as “white-clad girls and young men in flannels leapt and ran nimbly on the tennis courts” (*The Misdoings of Micky and Mac* 75).

The critique of Clem's needlework makes the adult point-of-view overt, although implied readers are expected to recognise the significance of her newfound willingness to shoulder responsibility:

The wind played with the little curls about her serious young face, but it touched no responsive strain of gaiety. In every life there are vantage points from which we can view the distance we have come, and see the road which lies before.

Behind Clem lay the sunny fields of childhood, before the long, long years of womanhood. (213)

In contrast to the previously "girlish" description, here Clem stands on the brink of adulthood, a status she will attain, within the social milieu in which Glen was writing, only when she marries. In the meantime (although the tenor of the narrative voice seems to forget its audience in mourning the loss of youth), having dutifully taken up the darning she previously eschewed, Clem can now be rewarded with the interlude of the journalistic "career" denied her at the beginning of the novel. Accordingly, readers learn that the (hitherto unmentioned) editor of a local newspaper has accepted some of her stories and that "the year after next I may start on his paper" (213-4). "May" has lost its force in modern colloquial usage, but implicit in its meaning is the granting of permission. From an adult's point of view, however, nothing has been conceded. The original reference made clear that her father "would not hear of her starting *yet* on the journalistic career upon which she had set her heart" (20) [italics added], and this condition has not altered: the "year after next" is still a long way off.<sup>1</sup>

Even while presaging her entry into the workforce, the narrative voice takes the opportunity to reinforce the immaturity of Clem's ambition:

Clem dreamt a dream of a busy newspaper office, and of a very young reporter, golden-haired, charming, who wrote leaders, supervised the cables, turned out an occasional witty article and generally kept things moving in the newspaper world. (214)

From Clem's perspective, the epithet "very young" signifies confidence in her natural aptitude for the job, but the patronising

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<sup>1</sup> By which time the younger sister, Robin, will be ready to take Clem's place within the domestic round.

tone of the narratorial voice invites readers to re-interpret it as naivety. Clem will do as she is told in the workforce as she has done at home, her “career” nothing more than a pastime until her parents deem her ready to marry.

In contrast to males, for whom “occupation remains the cornerstone of ... identity” (Leser qtd. in Hourihan 70), at the time Glen was writing, “society ... put little value on women in the workforce” (Ebbett 13): marriage was women’s work. Like Rob and Coon, the adolescent Clem has proven herself worthy of eventual adult status by her willingness to undertake unpaid domestic work, but — once again — the transition is deferred. In this way, Glen’s *Entwicklungsroman* socialises its implied readers alongside its characters, with the hegemonic boundaries between adolescent and adult revealing a strongly middle-class ethos.

Glen’s 1920s’ audience may well have accepted the prescribed path laid down for Clem, but the many social histories (*herstories*) of the changing role of New Zealand women published in the 1970s and 80s highlight the (lack of) career options open to women (Park 1991; Coney) in the first half of the century. Tessa Duder based her writing for children on her own experience, as outlined in a 1998 tape-recorded interview with the author of this study:

I was very aware as a teenager that the options for me were pretty limited. ... I was expected to have a nice little job until I was twenty-three or so — the average age of marriage — and then I would do the decent thing and get married and after that my family would be my life.

And even though I went into journalism at age seventeen, which was a little bit unusual (most of my friends went to university; they went to business college to be secretaries; they went nursing or teaching)... I seemed to think — I *bought* — the 1950s’ expectations pretty lock, stock and barrel.

With these words, Duder makes clear the authorial desire to influence her audience’s behaviour, with *Alex* (1987) operating to reinforce 1980s’ feminism by reminding girls what it was once like.

In this way, the adult/adolescent power dynamic becomes subservient to the political agenda, with empowering adolescent girls equated to empowering

womankind in general. Duder addresses the issue directly by inviting readers to recognise the irony of the unmarried Vocational Guidance Counsellor's words to Alex and her classmates, "Do you want to strive towards degrees, diplomas, achievements, to be a *career girl*? Or the greater and more realistic satisfaction of motherhood and family?" (*Alex* 25). Inherent in the italics of the original is the notion that "women only worked in the public arena until marriage" (McMath 46),<sup>1</sup> with marriage, not work, signifying the coming of age for young women. The weighting of "the greater and more realistic satisfaction" appears to invite young women to choose the latter path, but this is a choice both Duder and Alex challenge. As Hebley notes, the novel's time-shift "allows for criticism to be levelled from the point-of-view of the present at social attitudes that existed in the past and still exist today" (1998 63). As well as her immediate goal, to represent New Zealand at the 1960 Rome Olympics, Alex is depicted as wanting both career (in Law) *and* motherhood:

Why not me? To do something worthwhile with my life, earn more money and have less worries than Dad does? Why not? A husband, children, a nice house somewhere, maybe I could have those as well. (26)

For Alex, representative of the "modern" generation, a woman need no longer make a choice between career and marriage, as her mother and grandmother had to do. The inference that career is the more "worthwhile," as well as the identification with her father, reveals the feminist imperative at play.

As a further reinforcement, the *Alex* quartet employs aspects of the *Bildungsroman*, moving beyond Alex's adolescence through the unusual device of appending, inside the back cover of the final volume, an apparent "extract" from *Who's Who*, possibly the most recognised chronicle of adult success:

ARCHER, Alexandra Beatrice, O.B.E, L.L.B. (Hons), B.Litt (Oxford). Pioneer New Zealand television presenter and producer; b Oct 28, 1944, Auckland; d. of James Archer and Helena Young; m. Tomas Alexander (q.v.) 1966; two d, one s; Epsom Girls' Grammar School, Auckland University College (pres. NZ

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<sup>1</sup> This also reveals society's attitudes towards men, in that "Once you got married you didn't work. If your husband couldn't keep you, you wouldn't have married him, would you?" (qtd. in Park 116).

Students' Assn, 1963-65), Somerville College, Oxford University (member, Oxford Union); New Zealand champion, swimming, 100m, 200m freestyle 1960, Swimmer of the Year 1961; bronze medal, w 100m freestyle, Olympic Games, Rome 1960. Free-lance swimming commentator, radio and television, NZBS, 1961-65; production assistant BBC TV 1969-1974; producer, London-based until 1979, New Zealand-based, 1990-. Documentary film maker, esp. of sporting, social, cultural issues; international award-winning documentaries on the 1972 Olympics at Munich, women at the Olympics, New Zealand rugby politics and the Olympic movement. Director/producer, 1986-, of the Bow and Arrow Company, producing documentary video programmes on social, political, and cultural topics for use in schools; from 1990 television drama, film development. International columnist and media commentator, visiting lecturer on broadcast communications and mass media, contributor to academic journals, media studies conferences. Member NZ Hillary Commission, 1985-88, Trustee, National Library of New Zealand, 1987-, Member NZ Film Commission, 1989-1992. Recreational interests: riding, music, reading, theatre.... (*Songs for Alex*)

The novel itself ended with Alex leaving secondary school, yet the formidable litany of her ultimate achievements (although “lawyering” is inexplicably absent) operates to reinforce the 1980s’ catch-cry that “girls can do anything.” A complete reversal of Glen’s portrayal of the adolescent who must wait to be allowed to undergo the rite of passage, nevertheless, Alex’s characterisation reveals an equally hegemonic imperative at work. Children’s literature is a site for acculturation, enlisting implied readers to the prevalent adult ideologies, in this case the feminist ideal current at the time of writing.

Although empowering the adolescent *in absentia*, the *Alex* quartet continues to reinforce adult authority within the text. Alex’s ambition to become a lawyer, so firmly articulated, is made possible because her parents approve (*Alex* 109, 118). On the other hand, “If your Mum or Dad said No, well that was it! ... You just had to do what you were told” (qtd in Park 111). As an illustration, Alex’s friend Julia wants to become a doctor “more than anything in

the world” (*Alex* 26), but her father refuses on the grounds that he cannot “afford to put two sons through university *and* a daughter through medical school” (27). Even though Alex, the focalising first person narrator, decries this patriarchal attitude, “She’ll end up nursing, you’ll see. Girls are expendable in the end” (108), a challenge that invites implied readers to side with the aspiring daughter, the characters within the text appear powerless to contest it. That requires an opportunistic narrative twist, in which a visiting cousin is caught, literally, with his pants down: “he tried to kiss [Julia] and had actually started undoing his fly, but he didn’t choose his moment very well...” (119). Julia is able to turn the incident to her advantage, using her father’s concern that none in the family find out to extract his agreement to her medical studies.

Written from a 1980s’ perspective, the text regards this as a feminist victory, empowering Julia to shape her own future. However, although affirming Foucault’s notion that hegemonic interplay can bring about change, this victory is circumscribed by the context of the novel’s 1950s’ setting in which the father’s authority holds sway. In his desire to cover up the incident, Julia’s father has, in effect, privileged his own reputation above his daughter’s, but Julia sees only her good fortune at the turn of events. Even when the father reclaims dominance by requiring her to obtain “three hundred for School C, *and* a scholarship...” before he will allow her to study medicine, Alex’s objection of “That’s steep” is overridden by Julia’s unquestioning acceptance of his terms: “But it gives me something to aim at” (119). Julia may appear to challenge the patriarchy when she presents her father “with a piece of paper with all this written down and asked him to sign it, in front of Mum so that he couldn’t protest” (120), yet her stand is contingent upon adult approval.<sup>1</sup>

One way of empowering children in fiction written for younger readers is to remove parents from the story, thereby enabling characters to undertake a wide range of adventures. This technique, Gilderdale notes, is employed with great frequency:

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<sup>1</sup> Reinforced by Alex’s observation, “Julia...is so grimly determined to get her three hundred marks she working like it’s going out of fashion” (120), and by the father’s reaction when Julia achieves a total of 372: “He’s started telling all and sundry: ‘My clever daughter, brilliant at science, you know, is going to do medicine’” (149).

It is a truth universally acknowledged that parents in adventure stories must be speedily removed from the scene. Indeed, their unwritten exploits would furnish material for adult novels as they are killed, divorced, delayed in transit or summoned to the bedside of dying relatives. (153)

Novels that depict adolescents employ the same technique, but to a very different end: to control their characters, rather than liberate. According to Trites, “even if parent figures are absent from an adolescent novel, their physical absence often creates a psychological presence that is remarked upon as a sort of repression felt strongly by the adolescent character” (56). In Joyce West’s *Drover’s Road* trilogy,<sup>1</sup> for example, the main character, Gay (aged twelve in the first novel and twenty by the third), has lived with her uncle on a sheep station since the divorce of her parents several years previously. Her mother now lives in England, and her father is searching for emeralds in South America in the first volume, and farming in Australia in the second. Parental authority, however, still holds sway. Half way through *Drover’s Road*, Gay’s father returns (to convalesce from malaria), and, despite reassuring her that he has no intention of interfering in her life, expresses clear plans for her future: “I did think, perhaps, when you left school, Gay, that you might be willing to come and run my house for me. It would be fine for me to have an almost grown-up daughter” (185). Phrasing his offer as a suggestion (the father’s abdication of care precluding any show of authority as such) implies that the decision is Gay’s to make. Nevertheless, the re-establishment of the hegemonic relationship gives the father’s request added force: the “daughter” cannot but agree.

Readers are reminded of filial duty again, when the headmistress, representing an alternative adult authority, takes it for granted Gay will go to university:

‘You may not need to work at the moment, but all girls need to be equipped for the future. Life is uncertain. Not all girls marry. Some marriages unfortunately do come to grief. I would like to see you qualified for a good job, Gabrielle.’ (*Cape Lost* 129)

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<sup>1</sup> *Drover’s Road* (1953), *Cape Lost* (1963), *The Golden Summer* (1965).

These attitudes appear in marked contrast to those of Duder's Guidance Counsellor (even though *Alex* was set in 1960, and *Cape Lost* in 1963), but in each case the account serves the hegemonic purpose. Duder creates a stereotypically conservative teacher in order to highlight her characters' liberation; West presents the opposite to highlight Gay's apparent willingness to remain submissive:

‘Oh, I'm going back to a job,’ I said proudly. ‘I'm going to keep house for my father.... I'm expecting to be very busy.’ (129-30)

Here the text pits the authority of absentee father against that of headmistress, yet only one can prevail. A precedent can already be seen in the account of Gay's cousins:

[Eve] was at the Auckland University, ...Hugh ...was in Dunedin, at the university there — he had always known that he wanted to be a doctor. Merry ... had decided that he wanted to study animal research and go to Ruakura. (60)

It appears West intends implied readers to question Gay's domestic eagerness: “I had read everything I could find on interior decorating. I had read cookery books too, and books about food values” (132). Reading books does not signify proficiency. However, the adolescent cannot be shown to disobey her father, therefore West resolves the impasse by introducing his (hitherto unmentioned) fiancée (132), whose existence releases Gay from her filial obligation, allowing her to undertake tertiary studies (Agricultural Science at Massey College) after all (143). Although empowering the adolescent to determine her own future, this resolution once more affirms adult influence over adolescent decisions. Without her father's sanction, Gay could not have followed the course of action laid down by the headmistress.

Going to university is not a rite of passage either, merely serving to prolong childhood even further, as already shown in Glen's and Duder's novels. The emphasis on higher education as a more significant prerequisite for adult status than either gainful employment or domestic proficiency may also be attributable to the prevalent middle-class ethos governing the corpus as a whole. In each case, however, the depiction of adolescents within the texts (from

foolish lads to assertive young women) consistently reinforces deference to adult authority in their choice of future career.

### **“Womanly qualities”**

As already indicated, the one rite of passage guaranteed to afford girls entrée into adulthood in Western society was marriage. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it would be expected that a daughter would still be living at home until such time as her parents permitted courtship, with the associated transition — from child to young woman-in-waiting — occurring when her mother determined it was timely. Sandra Coney, in her illustrated social history of New Zealand women, *Standing in the Sunshine*, observes:

The graduation from girlhood to woman-hood was symbolically marked by the rite of passage of putting up the hair. This, and the simultaneous lengthening of skirts, was a very public way of saying the girl was now of marriageable age. To the Edwardians, the legs and hair were potent sex symbols, which must be concealed. Only a woman’s intimates — her family and later her husband — would ever see her hair free and her legs bare. (Coney 151)<sup>1</sup>

According to Helen Wilson (1869-1957), “It was an epoch-making moment, prepared for, stitched for, looked forward to—the day a girl put up her hair, let down her skirts and ‘came out’” (Coney 151). This transition was often abrupt, its sexual significance implicit, as Coney’s observation alongside a pair of photographs from the turn of the century shows:

Alice Mason illustrates the change in appearance brought about by putting up the hair. The photo on the left was taken in September 1899, a mere four days before the one on the right. In that time Alice has developed a bosom. (Coney 152)

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<sup>1</sup> This focus on external appearance allowed for exploitation. For example, in the 1920s, “fears that movies might pose an undesirable influence led a Dunedin theatre to place an advertisement, prohibiting girls under 16 from entering the theatre: ‘The result, of course, was that the theatre was simply rushed with school girls, with their hair up, and nobody could say they were under sixteen years of age’” (*New Zealand Parliamentary Debates* 188 (1920): 741 qtd. in Shuker et al. 61).

The significance of this change in appearance in terms of social status (devoid of reference to sexual readiness) is depicted in Esther Glen's *Six Little New Zealanders* (1917) and its sequel *Uncles Three at Kamahi* (1926). First, readers meet eighteen-year-old Kathie, the eldest of the six, who has "just put up her hair" (*Six Little New Zealanders* 3), which, together with the concomitant lengthening of her skirts, automatically sets her apart from the younger characters in the novel. That this change occurs as a result of adult agency is also made explicit in the text, "Kathie took a long time to grow up even with mother helping with the hems of her skirts" (251), as well as reiterating that it takes more than a change in appearance to become an adult.

Glen develops the topic further in relation to the characterisation of Kathie's younger sister. Elated to be invited to a local dance, fourteen-year-old Jan is subsequently mortified to discover she is the only guest "with her hair over her shoulders and childishly short skirts" (*Six Little New Zealanders* 203). Her description by an erstwhile dancing partner as "a red-headed kid with long white legs who waltzes like a kangaroo" (209) substantiates the adult view that she is still gauche, whereas Kathie, whose engagement forms the subplot of both novels, is described as dancing effortlessly, "with superior air" (*Uncles Three at Kamahi* 119). At eighteen, adulthood is still in the future, but within one's sights; for a fourteen-year-old, on the other hand, the gulf seems immeasurable. Constantly depicted as "harum-scarum" (*Uncles Three at Kamahi* 130), and gangly, clumsy, exuberant, and untidy (*Six Little New Zealanders* 3, 14, 16; *Uncles Three* 14, 23), Jan typifies the inchoate nature of adolescence: "One of these days she will grow up unexpectedly — and may that day be far off" (*Uncles Three* 160). This observation not only stresses the distant nature of the transition, it also seems to imply the process is within the adolescent's control, as does Jan herself:

She was not going to grow up yet awhile; she might even postpone the process till she was eighteen or nineteen or twenty, and that was years off. (161-2)

However, the focalisation, from the perspective of the twelve-year-old narrator, draws attention to the inherent irony of this procrastination as evidence of Jan's lack of maturity. The decision, as readers know, is not hers to make.

Few texts allude to the male equivalent in terms of outward appearance. Nevertheless, without this outward signifier, one remains unequivocally a child, as revealed in C.R. Allen's *A Poor Scholar* (1936):

The Roman boy is said to have assumed the *toga virilis* at the age of fourteen. The equivalent in Ponto's day and country was the first pair of long trousers: but accidents of build sometimes postponed this assumption. (165)

*Toga virilis* translates as "a man's robe." However, as the omniscient narrator fails to qualify his final statement, we never actually learn whether Ponto acquires his first pair of long trousers then or not. Certainly, the significance of clothing seems less marked for males, as suggested by Dorothy Butler's autobiography, *There Once Was a Time* (1999), in which she describes her older brother's first job in 1939:

At fourteen, Ross was still a boy. No one had so far identified the teenage stage, and he simply went on wearing his school clothes (minus the giveaway cap) to work. (129)

Butler's brother's clothing can be attributed to the family's straitened finances subsequent to the Depression. In *Through the Looking Glass: Recollections of Childhood from 20 Prominent New Zealanders* (Gifkins), however, former Prime Minister Sir John Marshall (1912-1988) recalled a similar lack of urgency in donning long trousers during his youth, due to the temperate climate in Whangarei. Although unmentioned by any of these commentators, nevertheless the implicit assumption remains that adults determined when the male and female equivalents of the *toga virilis* were adopted.

Changing one's clothing is insufficient in itself, however, particularly for girls for whom adulthood in the early decades of the century tended to be equated to marriage, and being mistress of a household. As a way of foreshadowing this role, both *Six Little New Zealanders* and *Uncles Three at Kamahi* portray Kathie's major concern, having just become engaged, as a lack of culinary expertise: "Kathie's cakes lose heart so quickly and seldom rise, her scones burn and her jellies won't jell" (*Six Little New Zealanders* 8), a critique repeated on page 271. Society, in this case — as often — exemplified by the patriarchy, is unequivocal: "Uncle John said all girls should learn housekeeping

and cooking” (186-7). Here bachelor uncles take on the hegemonic role in the parents’ absence, the mother having returned “Home” to England for medical treatment (Gilderdale 6). Uncle John’s stipulation not only has a domestic purpose, it also has a national significance, as shown by the words of a leading contemporary feminist, Rosetta Baume (1871-1934):

The Womanhood of the future must be as capable as we can make it. The mother of to-morrow is the State’s greatest asset...the rebuilding of the nation, during the industrial period which must follow this great war...will largely devolve upon the schoolgirl of to-day, the potential mother, the maker of the home that is to be...it is our primary duty to fit them for the “business of life.” What is the real life’s work of the majority of girls? I reply unhesitatingly, ‘Home-making.’ (qtd. in Coney 202)

Although the children’s mother is absent for the duration of events (undergoing year long medical treatment in England in *Six Little New Zealanders*, and visiting Sydney in *Uncles Three at Kamahi*), the text offers no reason why Kathie has been so woefully unprepared, other than to serve as comic warning to impressionable readers of her unreadiness for matrimony. Her avowal to “devote [herself] to fancy-work,” for example, is mocked by her family at every stage: “though we all jeered at her she produced a strip of knitting which...was going to resolve itself into a shawl — some day” (*Six Little New Zealanders* 111). Both novels emphasise her tortuous efforts to acquire the necessary culinary repertoire, until, finally, towards the end of the second book,

Kathie had passed in poultry and soups; she had obtained first-class honours in pastry, and second-class in scones; she had graduated in bread, and scraped through in jams. There remained only the ordeal of cakes.... (*Uncles Three at Kamahi* 217ff)

The focalising narrative voice is that of a younger sister, yet the hyperbolic academic language seems to echo adult reaction, belittling her achievements even as it approves. Unlike real education — reserved in Glen’s canon for male children — cookery is simply what women do.

Finally, after considerable effort (218), Kathie produces a ““jolly good cake”” (220), but the novel undermines her achievement with the possibility that she has mistaken a tin of poison for the baking powder. Even when reassured by the housekeeper that this is not the case, Uncle John calls for an end to the cooking lessons, saying that “Kathie’s experiments were too risky” and that “the best way to stop them was to marry her off” (227). Her father’s consent is sought and given; the wedding takes place within the week, and “Kathie was really ‘Mrs Uncle Dan’” (234). This abrupt outcome emphasises adult rather than adolescent agency, as Gilderdale’s observation makes clear: “Kathy [sic] is told by her father that she is too young to marry and should wait until she can cook. He knew, of course, that she was the world’s worst cook” (86). The test has been less of domestic prowess (made superfluous in any case by the housekeeper’s presence) than of readiness for marriage, at a time determined by adults.

The acquisition of domestic skills could also function as a means of contrasting the generations, and finding the adolescent wanting. In Phillis Garrard’s “Hilda” series,<sup>1</sup> perhaps in reaction to the youth lost fighting in two World Wars, adolescence is portrayed as an interlude to savour. Yet future responsibilities are foreshadowed nonetheless: “ere a few more short years had rolled over one’s sunny head one would be a woman” (*Hilda, Fifteen* 76). This seems to suggest the rites of passage will be automatic; certainly Hilda and her friends appear in no hurry to satisfy the domestic criteria laid down by society, their dictum: “We’ll just be ourselves” (76). As evidence of their apparent carefree youth, they are portrayed laughing at Mrs Beeton’s advice on “the duties of the mistress of a household,” having to make “a round of the kitchen and other offices” before planning the day’s menu: “Almond icing, cherry tart, gooseberry fool, Devonshire junket, cheese straws...” (79). Nevertheless, while the catalogue of unfamiliar dishes appears to substantiate the girls’ dismissive attitude, Garrard counters this with the housekeeper’s rebuttal: ““Bread, meat, plain vegetables and puddings — useful things like that are what young girls

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<sup>1</sup> *Hilda at School: A New Zealand Story* (1929), *The Doings of Hilda* (1932), *Hilda’s Adventures* (1938), and *Hilda, Fifteen* (1944). Betty Gilderdale’s Kotare Books republished a collection of stories from *The Doings of Hilda* and *Hilda’s Adventures* as *Tales Out of School* in 1984.

should learn,' said she, wielding her rolling pin with a practised hand" (79). Here the message is made overt, words like "useful" and "practised" presented in contrast to the adolescents' paucity of skills. Even though the novel allows fifteen-year-olds their nonchalance — with the novel's title suggesting their age is their most defining characteristic at this stage — an adult has the final word, outlining the future that awaits them.

Only one character demonstrates culinary prowess, Clem, the "Kathie-equivalent" in Glen's *Robin of Maoriland*, who is depicted "enveloped in a pink pinafore, ...making sponge cakes and pies, boiling ham, and cooking dinner between whites" (70). As already revealed, however, her passage must wait until she can also darn. Significantly, no works written after 1944 portray the need for adolescents to acquire domestic skills as a prerequisite for adulthood at all. Shorter, author of *The Making of the Modern Family*, attributes this to the increasing complexity of adult life, as well as a "fundamental shift in the willingness of adolescents to learn from their parents" (276), part of the breakdown of the "chain of generations" (8) that occurred throughout the twentieth century. This alteration in the power dynamic, together with the changing roles of women in the aftermath of World War Two had consequences in terms of society's definitions of both adulthood and adolescence, leading to a further elision of boundaries of these "floating signifiers."

### **"In love with being in love"**

Within children's literature, however, adults still maintain control, as revealed by the depiction of marriage, and its associated rituals of courtship. Indeed, the works of Isobel Maud Peacocke have been described by Betty Gilderdale as "romances ... [which] would have been more likely to have been read by romantic young ladies than by children" (*A Sea Change: 145 Years of New Zealand Junior Fiction* 73). Rather than serving as *Bildungsromane*, however, Peacocke's works gently mock adolescents' presumption that they should be contemplating such an "adult" act at all. This is shown in *Dicky, Knight-Errant* (Peacocke 1916), where, as well as performing assorted good deeds for King and country, such as bringing about the capture of a German spy (280ff), nine-year-old "Boy Scout Richard John Stanley" (11) acts as go-between for a series

of courting couples. Peacocke's portrayal reveals them as adolescent by definition, not only because they are unmarried, but — in the prevalent jargon of the time — because they “do not know their own minds.” This appraisal invites the inference that adults do, reinforcing the hegemonic focus of this study. Adolescents may display quite definite opinions, but, unless they accord with those of their elders, they do not count.

No adult characters are party to the first relationship, but the omniscient narratorial voice, ostensibly witnessing events through Dicky's eyes, passes judgement on the behaviour of the juveniles, whom readers meet in the middle of a heated debate:

‘It's no use, Sylvia,’ [Harry] was saying, ‘I know what I'm talking about. Bob Lascelles is no kind of fellow that nice girls make a friend of — you must surely allow me to know best — a man!’

‘I haven't made a friend of him, I tell you,’ she cried angrily, ‘and if I have I shall make what friends I choose. You haven't the right to order my friends for me.’

Much had gone before to the same tune, and now, trying to be pacific, he made his great mistake.

‘Of course, dear. I know you are quite inexperienced where men are concerned.’

What pretty girl likes to be told she has no knowledge or experience of men? It is when we are much older than Sylvia's twenty that we like to pose as guileless and innocent.

‘Inexperienced!’ she sneered. ‘And you—you're nothing but a boy yourself, Harry!’

And what man among us, engaged to be married, likes his fiancée to call him ‘nothing but a boy’? (19)

The point-of-view makes it clear this novel is not intended for an audience of eight-year-old boys. Peacocke addresses her implied readers directly, the inference being that “we” are *her* contemporaries, not Sylvia's.

In fact, despite Harry referring to her as “a girl,” Sylvia is twenty years old, and — in order to be engaged — must have “come out.” Described by Tessa Duder as “that female rite of passage from girlhood to availability for marriage” (in Gifkins 37), middle-class young women were presented as debutantes,

thereby announcing their “entry into adult Society” (Forrest 36) on adults’ terms. Even though a 1934 article in the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* mocked coming out as an old-fashioned notion, an “exhibition for the purpose of obtaining husbands” (36), the ritual remained in force in New Zealand well into the 1960s, with School Balls remaining its modern equivalent today. Sylvia, then, has been introduced into respectable society, yet Harry accuses her of consorting with an undesirable. Here the narrative voice reveals its adultist character, offering counsel to impressionable readers at the same time as making it appear as if they do not need such advice. The fact, however, that her narrator speaks to an “adult” audience in the first instance implies that adolescents are foolish to believe themselves sophisticated, with “coming out” merely another stage that defers the transition towards adulthood rather than advancing it.

A further hegemony comes into play, in that — as “a man” — Harry affirms his right to tell “the girl” how to behave. For young women, marriage as a rite of passage depends not only on parental approval, but also on that of the male. Sylvia retaliates by calling Harry “nothing but a boy,” but the narrative tone undercuts her words by the stressing the intemperance of her mood (crying angrily and sneering). Her immaturity is further reinforced by the hyperbolic description of her reaction, in inverse proportion to the significance of the tiff,

...[behaving] as the ladies of melodrama in *Bow Bells* or the *Family Herald* might have done, for ‘drawing up her slim figure to its full height (i.e. five feet four inches and a fraction), with a superb gesture of disdain, she cast her ring at her lover’s feet.’ (21)

Through alluding to the behaviour of characters in the popular media of the day, making particular mention of her smallness, and devoting twenty-six of the chapter’s thirty-three pages to Sylvia’s frantic efforts to find the ring again, the narrator suggests she is not as grown-up as she would like to believe. The message is further reinforced by continual references to her as “a maid” and “a girl” (41, 43, 44). The text only refers to Sylvia as “a woman” and “a lady” (35, 38) from “nearly nine [year-old]” (29) Dicky’s point-of-view, when, feeling obligated to lend a hand, he employs the terms as an alienation device to exonerate him from becoming involved. On the other hand, Harry is a “young man” who smokes a pipe (40) for whom the term “boy” is an insult. His later

admission to Dicky that “I was nine myself about a couple of days ago” (42) — in other words, when he quarrelled with Sylvia — reinforces the foolhardiness associated with youth.

In Peacocke’s next vignette, Jim has rashly enlisted in order to prove his manliness to Marjory, yet the focalisation from Dicky’s point-of-view describes the soldiers marching down Queen Street as “a rank of young cadets, standing stiff and soldier-like, with round boyish faces, looking gravely important” (149) and again later as “boys” and “lads” (151). Even while attempting to fulfil a man’s role (they are soldier-like, not soldiers), youth is their most striking quality (an attribute clearly more obvious to the adult author behind the narratorial voice than to the characters themselves). Once again, Dicky is instrumental in a reconciliation, and a few weeks later is guest of honour at one of “a crop of so-called ‘war-nuptials’...to which parents had been hastily summoned by telegraph, and who, under the exigencies of the hour, and the circumstances, could raise no real objection” (154). In wartime, adolescents may apparently go straight from being children to adults (a revision of their status geared to meet society’s requirements in the same way as the stay-at-home daughter suited its economic needs previously). Parents appear to have little say, but the qualifier, “no *real* objection,” asserts their power to do so, should they so choose. Moreover, in the circumstances, such sanction recognises that the groom may not survive into adulthood, rather than endorsing the youthful couple’s maturity *per se*.

That a couple require their parents’ blessing in order to make a successful transition to adulthood reflects the power relations traditionally associated with courtship and marriage. The suitor must ask a father for his daughter’s hand; the father “gives the bride away,” both rituals imbued with a notion of the transfer of property. Joyce West endorses this tradition, at the same time highlighting the unrealistic expectations of the adolescent in *Cape Lost* (1963), the second in the *Drover’s Road* series. The narrator Gay’s older cousin Eve, at eighteen, is depicted as already having given the subject a great deal of thought. She has every intention of marrying a rich man, with

‘Two houses ...one in Auckland so that I can keep up with things  
— plays, music and so on — and a big, modern country house,

probably with a sea view. ... And two cars...Of course he won't be an *old* rich man—he'll be a *young* rich man....' (*Cape Lost* 103)

Such intransigent views invite an ironic narrative twist, which occurs in the form of a “pig-hunter” Eve meets in the bush (111) who subsequently turns up at Drover’s Road to pay her court. This presumption appears to go against all the rules of social etiquette (and class distinctions), yet the text takes care to reassure readers of his impeccable manners and “nice voice” (108), despite an apparent lack of other credentials:

‘He’s got no money, you know,’ I whispered.

‘Money isn’t everything,’ Eve whispered back surprisingly. (115)

Although Eve’s “surprising” change of heart seems merely to substitute adolescent inconstancy for her former adolescent fantasy, nevertheless the novel condones the courtship, for reasons that become clear later on. Dan proposes after only a week, but the engagement at this stage remains literally *sub rosa*: “Dunsany [the girls’ guardian] could not possibly have known about Eve’s pig-hunter kissing her in the rose arbour; if he had he would have been pulling the house down around our ears” (117). This passage serves only one function: to highlight adult authority *in absentia*. Dunsany’s inferred disapproval arises solely, Gay’s imagery suggests, from the clandestine nature of Eve’s relationship, whereby she has appropriated adult behaviours without permission. Just as adolescents cannot choose their own career path (unless it conforms to parental expectation), nor can girls marry without adult sanction, an ideological reservation Eve echoes, despite her earlier riposte: “I don’t know anything about your people, or where you come from, or what you do, or where you live —” (115).

West initially appears to critique this conservative attitude (while reinforcing it by its very mention) through the cameo rôle of Aunt Gertrude, who seeks to impose her choice of socially acceptable suitor: “...a *very well-known* architect, the nephew of a *very old* schooldays friend of [mine]” (116) (italics in original). Fully prepared to reject him on sight, the girls discover that the nephew, “dressed very nicely in beautifully cut slacks and a cream silk shirt” (118), is, in fact, “Eve’s pig-hunter.” Thus, despite caricaturing Gertrude’s snobbish Victorian sensibilities, the novel upholds them notwithstanding. Dan

proves to be a gentleman after all, satisfying convention by having already approached Eve's guardian:

‘He said so long as I waited until you were through university, I had his permission to make my addresses to you. Isn't that the correct way to put it?’ (119)

In this, West shows that a modern girl may marry whom she chooses, as long as her choice coincides with her elders', a proviso similar to that already seen in relation to young men's careers. Moreover, the rite is still deferred, any thought of marriage two or three years in the future.

In fact, very few protagonists marry, with the majority of texts citing immaturity as the reason to wait. In Esther Glen's *Robin of Maoriland*, for example, the omniscient narrative voice typifies seventeen-year-old Clem as a dreamer, a romantic idealist with a “poetic temperament” (*Robin of Maoriland* 11) who spends a great deal of time worrying about her appearance. Her fickleness having been established, romance comes early in the form of the boy next door:

It was all very astonishing, but highly romantic. Christopher was making love to her — Christopher wanted to marry her — Christopher was proposing to her.... (71-2)

Clem passively accepts her suitor's advances, her status as fiancée solely determined by his actions. However, the fact that no adults have been involved in the negotiations suggests that the marriage will not eventuate. Certainly, nothing in the description indicates Clem's readiness:

She was happy and excited and just a little uncertain...She stood under the old wattle trees, a slim girlish figure, caught in a mesh of silver moonlight. A girl, whose eyes still held something of childish wonder, aglow with the glory of the first romance, very much in love with being in love. (74)

The words “girlish,” “girl,” and childish,” together with the reference to “the first romance” (implying it will not be the last), reinforce an adult-centred appraisal that seems out of place in a work intended for the adolescent characters' contemporaries.

Further criticism of youthful idealism comes from the information that “Clem loved the sea and admired the life of a sailor” (86). Christopher is a

midshipman, and, as such, can be no more than eighteen or nineteen: the only “man” Clem has ever met. The text contrasts Clem’s concept of love with her mother’s description:

‘Love...is the light to lighten all the days to come, to carry you over the rough roads together — for there *will* be rough places, dear.’ Clem’s bright face sobered...

She wondered if she really felt all that for Chris. (81)

Here the text foregrounds the adult voice, directly through the mother’s words and indirectly through Clem’s thoughts, drawing readers’ attention to the fact that, as her father observes to her mother, “Clem doesn’t know her own mind...She’s nothing but a child — why, she’s not eighteen” (80). Implicit in this statement is the sense that adults do know their own minds.<sup>1</sup> Indeed this is what distinguishes them from adolescents, as the father’s array of negatives emphasises Clem’s state of “not being adult” three times over. In this way, the text need not voice the parents’ disapproval, as Clem’s own words reveal that the marriage is unlikely to eventuate: “‘Of course, we’re not going to be married yet — not for years, and years, and years,’ ... feeling that in distance lay safety” (81). This final comment on the part of the narrative voice is most telling, acknowledging the “years, and years” of respite afforded by delay.

The text firmly extinguishes any thought of marriage by shifting the focus onto Christopher’s feelings:

Quite suddenly, Christopher knew that the last thing in the world he wanted was to marry Clem. Just as suddenly as he had fallen in love, Chris tumbled out again. (86)

This vindicates the adult point-of-view: love that dissipates so suddenly is nothing more than adolescent fantasy. Glen exploits the image of “falling in love,” reinforcing its accidental connotations in contrast to the sobriety of adult love described earlier. Such certainty would be contested in the plethora of works written later in the century depicting the breakdown of parents’

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<sup>1</sup> This assumption is made clear by yet another of Peacocke’s lovers’ tales. Tom and Lyssie cannot begin to grow up until they acknowledge their love for each other, something Tom’s father already knows: “Like brother and sister, they were, but as they grew up my boy began to see things in a different light, but she didn’t seem to know her own mind —.” (*Dicky, Knight-Errant* 245)

marriages. At this time, however, the emphasis is on the fallibility of youth, unready for major commitment: “four years ago [Christopher was] a wistful-eyed little lad, with a gnawing pang of homesickness” (39), and “a small boy, a little resentful and misty-eyed ... torn from his home associations to follow the tradition of his family in a land thousands of miles across the sea” (43). For this purpose, fourteen or fifteen is not merely a child, but a “little lad,” with the inference that the intervening years have not made much difference. Although Christopher appears to have satisfied adult criteria by dutifully maintaining the “chain of generations” (Shorter 8), the emphasis on how much he hates life at sea (84) is reinforced by yet another adolescent dream:

‘Some day I’m going to leave the sea, and buy back “Three Peaks.”  
I’ve made up my mind. Meanwhile, I’ll just have to stick it out till  
my time’s up. But it’s something to look forward to.’ (214)

Even though he has “made up his mind” to return to his late father’s farm—which represents a generational chain it is safe to assume the adult narratorial voice endorses —“some day” is still a long way off: he is not an adult yet. Thus, it comes as no surprise to readers when Clem, too, “discovered the last thing in the world she wanted was to marry Christopher” (108), an outcome foreshadowed by the previous account of a cow eating Clem’s “love letter” (102). The identical language of their decisions signals narratorial approval (86, 108). Once again, in hegemonic terms, adolescents can know their *own* minds, provided they correspond with adults’.

Another author who critiques the adolescent who plays at being adult is Phillis Garrard. In *Hilda, Fifteen* (1944), Hilda’s admirer, an English farming cadet, is introduced at a remove: “Well, talking of boys, Arthur Graham has been to supper once or twice, and he’s asked Dad if he can take you and me to the pictures some night. How’s that?” (*Hilda, Fifteen* 86). Although Arthur satisfies the niceties of etiquette, the narrative tone discounts him from the first moment, reinforcing adult opinion with adolescent endorsement: “[Dad] thinks Arthur is a nice kid. Fancy calling nineteen a kid. But Arthur does act like a schoolboy most of the time” (86). That fifteen-year-old Hilda (characterised throughout the series as having adult-approved good sense) regards “acting like

a schoolboy” as a negative operates to affirm the hegemonic order: nineteen *is* a kid.

This is further reinforced by the bathetic catalogue of Hilda’s preparations for the “date,” which completely dispels any notion that the adolescent is mature enough for the occasion:

On Saturday morning she baked and iced cakes; made shortbread; tried her hand at cheese straws (a total failure—more cheese than straw); ... giggled for half an hour with Mary on the phone; changed her mind three times regarding the frock to wear that evening; wondered if her hair needed washing; suddenly dashed to the bathroom and washed it, leaving the place a smother of steam, soapsuds, sponges, damp towels, and splashed water; hunted for ten minutes for a certain brooch, found it but with its fastening broken, and then made the horrible discovery that her nose looked shiny.

(101)

The description is completely unlike the “real” Hilda. Its emphasis on superficial busyness parodies an apparent “metamorphosis — the fashioning of the girl into the woman, of the pre-romantic child into sexual female adolescent” (Gilbert and Taylor 87) — based solely on external appearance. Such artifice encodes the hegemonic message: no matter how sophisticated an adolescent looks, she is still a child. This is made clear in two different ways. The text does not describe the date itself (thereby lessening its significance). Moreover, its reported account stresses Hilda’s naïveté. An “outing with [a] young gentleman ... sounded so beautifully grown-up, Hilda had to preen herself” (104), but this *hubris* is immediately quashed by the description of the housekeeper sending her to bed.

### **Gentlemen admirers**

Repeated denial of successfully completed rites of passage, or even the thought of them, reinforces the hegemony within the texts. Only with adult approval — and through adult agency — can this transition come about, a situation graphically represented by the portrayal of adult suitors in novels by Esther Glen and Joyce West. Sociologists note that most marriages in the twentieth century are endogamous, between partners of similar class, occupational and educational

background, and age (Shorter 1975), an equality typically associated with love matches as opposed to arranged marriages. On the other hand, exogamy (marrying outside one's immediate sphere) "points to instrumental considerations" (154). For example, hypergamy, marrying above one's station, traditionally enables women's upward mobility across class or caste boundaries. Intergenerational unions — in this case, the betrothal of young girls to older men — effect a similar transition, in that the girl moves directly from child to fiancée.

In Glen's *Six Little New Zealanders* and *Uncles Three at Kamahi*, hypergamy enables fifteen-year-old Jan to acquire the quasi-adult status otherwise denied her. Her admirer, Mr Corfan, is her parents' contemporary, so definitely an adult that neither Jan nor her sister Ngaire, the child-narrator, ever calls him by his Christian name. Nevertheless, within the social context of the time, his attention to someone half his age is not considered inappropriate. Indeed, it may well be the making of her. Another of Glen's Antarctic explorers, Corfan sets off on an expedition in the final pages of the novel:

'How old will you be when I come back, Jan?' he asked, smiling at her.

'Twenty,' answered Jan, recklessly adding years.

'Eighteen,' I corrected.

'Eighteen. Eighteen is a great age,' said Mr Corfan, a little sadly I thought.

'Almost a woman. Why, Jan, I shall be nearly double that then.'

(*Uncles Three at Kamahi* 235)

Corfan's words remind readers that "almost a woman" is not the same as being an adult, a point reiterated by the child narrator's attention to detail. At thirteen (i.e. not yet adolescent), Ngaire acts as spokesperson for the adult point-of-view, accusing her older sister of recklessness. Nevertheless, *with* her parents' permission, Jan now enters the period of waiting — three years in this case — at the end of which she will be old enough for her adult suitor to court her in earnest. Corfan's nostalgic reflection on his own teen years seems out of place in a novel for children, an intrusion that recalls the longing "to recapture memories of a lost past," which Kiell (13) associates with adult novels, an

ambivalence that will increasingly colour the representation of adolescence in these works.

Another who employs an adult suitor as the means of preparing her heroine for adulthood is Joyce West, in her *Drover's Road* series. Gay is depicted as having a number of admirers, but, as they are her contemporaries, she never takes them seriously. West exploits the elements of romance fiction when one rescues Gay from a cliff face, but the conditional mood undercuts the passage's sincerity:

In a book I would have turned to Dunsany [her guardian] and said in a low thrilling voice, like a proper heroine: 'Simon saved my life at the risk of his own. He is a hero!' and Dunsany would have put his arm around Simon's shoulders and said, with a catch in his voice: 'My boy, how can I ever repay you?' (*Cape Lost* 74-75)

Readers are expected to make the distinction between 'would have' and the reality of the text. The idealised nature of this scenario is revealed by the fact that Dunsany still calls Simon, "My boy," reinforcing that neither Gay nor Simon is mature enough for a serious relationship.

Such readiness only occurs only when adults say so, an approval made explicit in *Cape Lost*, by their crafting of Gay's appearance. In this case, actions speak louder than words:

My frock for the breaking-up dance was a lovely surprise; Susan [her guardian's wife] and Aunt Belle [the housekeeper] had made it. It was not the fluffy sort of affair that most of the girls were wearing; it was elegant. (*Cape Lost* 130)

Unlike the 'fluffy' girls, Gay can rightfully appraise her appearance, which has been created, and sanctioned, by adults. Moreover, now that she *is* ready for courtship, the dress's colour (white) symbolises her status as novice. Adult approval is further corroborated by the arrival of a "mysterious package" from an unknown admirer:

Inside was a single orchid, bronzy-green, to be worn as a shoulder spray... It was perfect on the shoulder of my frock. I was grown-up. I had my first orchid. (130)

In contrast to similar descriptions by Glen and Peacocke, the language here employs no qualifiers: Gay neither "imagines" nor "thinks," nor is the epithet

“grown-up” modified by a simile, as was her “heroine” status. Her transition is made possible because, although he remains anonymous, implied readers know who has sent the gift. A neighbouring farmer, considerably older than Gay, Clive was mentioned once before in *Drover’s Road* where, even while Gay was still at primary school, he was described as treating her “like a real grown-up lady” (125). Moreover, unlike Eve’s pig-hunter, as her guardian’s contemporary, Gay’s suitor does not need permission.<sup>1</sup>

Gay’s reaction to the gift also signifies the power of external agencies. Reading her appearance as if it were a text, she experiences what Roland Barthes in *Le Plaisir du Texte* termed “*jouissance* or ‘joy,’ a shock of revelation which involves a loss of the established sense of self” (qtd. in Hourihan 46). Gay can now begin to re-evaluate who she is in the light of this new knowledge, in accordance with the role adult society has mapped out for her. Implied readers are possibly also invited to consider “the parasitic bundle of connotations” (Leak 12) associated with the orchid. While signifying her suitor’s regard, the etymology of its name (from the Greek *orchis*: testicle) affirms his sexual maturity. More importantly, it visibly symbolises the adult intervention required before the passive adolescent can move towards her new status as a “grown-up.”

### **“The parents are making the best of it”**

Such portrayals not only reinforce adult power in determining when and if adolescents make the transition into adulthood, they convey a sense that adolescent characters are simply not responsible enough to merit entrée. Only rarely do authors portray adolescents challenging the apparent natural order, such instances serving, by and large, as cautionary tales of how not to behave. One such example, the third lovers’ tale in Peacocke’s *Dicky, Knight Errant*, openly addresses the power relations between parent and child. On the surface, both Hartley and Peggy appear to be adults, the one a twenty-two-year-old returned serviceman, the other a nineteen-year-old who has already left home, and works as a typist. However, Hartley’s mother does not approve of their relationship and the eight-year-old focaliser’s atypically-mature appraisal of

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<sup>1</sup> The absent parents are unmentioned in the final volume.

Hartley as “a youth, scarcely more than a slim boy” (212), reinforces the adultist view that, while still living at home, he is subordinate to his mother’s authority. This is further reinforced by Hartley’s own words, when, unaware of the complex social barriers<sup>1</sup> at work, Dicky cuts to the heart of the matter:

‘Why don’t you ... get her to come here?’ pursued Dicky.

‘You don’t understand, youngster ——’ began Hartley, and then resolutely: ‘To tell you the truth, I funk it. I believe I’d go through Achi Baba again rather than face the mater if I brought Peggy here.’ (220)

Hartley may be a veteran of the Dardenelles campaign, but within the family hierarchy he has no power at all. Implied readers are expected to empathise with the enormity of the problem, even though the text offers a solution: “‘Well,’ said Dicky, sensibly, ‘you’d better go and marry Peggy, and then you could buy a house for yourselves to live in’” (220). The use of “sensibly” here appears to convey narratorial approval, yet readers cannot ignore the fact that the advice is delivered by an eight-year-old.

As already shown, marriage has the power to transform adolescents into adults, and three days later the two “were made man and wife” (227) — but the use of the passive voice and the choice of verb are telling. Without parental approval, this union sounds contrived, the product of a ritual rather than a genuine union. That society has accorded the couple only token acceptance is evidenced by the rather dubious account of the wedding, held at “a certain church out in the suburbs” with only “the cabman and a loiterer in the churchyard [signing] the register as witnesses” (226, 227). Hartley has married clandestinely, in the company of those with questionable adult status.

Of all the love matches in Peacocke’s novel, this has the least satisfactory dénouement. Hartley seeks to introduce his mother to his bride, but is involved in a car accident on the way to fetch her, which means the formalities do not take place. Peggy is summoned to Hartley’s bedside by Dicky, but the mother orders her to leave, forcing the confrontation the wedding

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<sup>1</sup> Implicit in the fact that Peggy is working for a living, rather than whiling away her “salad days” in leisure pursuits, offset against Hartley’s use of such English public school terminology as “mater.”

was intended to obviate. Peggy makes a stand — “if I go, my husband goes with me” (236) — but Hartley says not a word. The novel’s ambivalence is made clear in its account of the mother’s reaction:

Mrs Davenant, looking suddenly like an old and broken woman, covered her face with her hands. She had been so ambitious for her only son, and this little nobody with the pretty face had ruined all her schemes for him.

Then she looked up, and her voice was quite gentle as she said: ‘No! no! Stay, child! Hartley’s wife shall always be welcome here!’ (236-7)

Here the narrative voice reveals an inconsistent bias: the first sentence invites sympathy with the parent, while her snobbish appraisal of Peggy and the word “schemes” appear to reaffirm her role as villain. Nonetheless, in choosing to accept the working-class Peggy, not in her own right, but as her son’s wife, she affirms the power of marriage. Through this, Hartley may have won independent status, but this portrayal suggests that by challenging parental hegemony he has compromised himself. Whereas, in a novel for adult readers, true love might prevail, an adolescent audience is more vulnerable: hence the strong intimation that this is *not* the way to make a successful transition to adulthood.

The most dramatic challenge to adult power, occasioning its most extreme sanction, occurs in Duder’s *Alex in Winter* and *Songs for Alex*, where Alex’s pregnant cousin, eighteen-year-old Ginnie, is hurriedly married off in order to preserve her parents’ reputation. They have already rejected eminently suitable beaux on the grounds of their immaturity, but here, in a graphic imposition of power, the text depicts adults willing to condone an undesirable liaison if it serves a greater imperative. Mervyn has no redeeming qualities other than being Ginnie’s ballroom dancing partner, yet the shotgun wedding is arranged within two weeks. Duder leaves it up to readers to note the irony of the name, “Virginia,” which reinforces the bride’s naïveté as well as drawing attention to her fallen state, having misappropriated a prerogative reserved for adults: sex. Adult voices take precedence, from the gossip of old ladies, “Ginnie had always been a bit of a problem.... Only threatening to disown her made her see sense” (*Alex in Winter* 105), to the resignation of Alex’s grandmother: “her

parents are making the best of it” (95). Such pronouncements objectify the adolescent: neither she nor the “equally terrified” groom (103) has a voice at all.

All this evidence appears to privilege the adult point-of-view, but the thirty-year difference between the novels’ time of writing and setting enables Duder once again to offer a rare critique of the adult/adolescent power dynamic. Modern readers can be expected to recognise the hypocrisy of Ginnie’s parents vainly pretending this is a normal wedding, further highlighted by Alex’s drunken toast to “the baby” (106). Ginnie’s powerlessness in the face of her parents’ humiliation contrasts with Alex’s academic and sporting potential, and her family’s supportiveness. At a time when the majority of schoolgirls were contemplating “training college, nursing, secretarial college, home science, and then travel” (*Alex* 26), Duder distinguishes Alex’s plans to become a lawyer explicitly with her father’s response: “The power to change things, eh?” (*Alex in Winter* 112). As previously argued, however, this reaction is unusual for the 1950s in which the novel is set, its liberalism intended to reinforce the prevalent views of the 1980s, which attached diminishing importance to marriage as girls’ prime life choice.

Nor, under these non-conformist circumstances, does marriage transform Ginnie into an adult: parental control remains in force thereafter, as well. Even though her husband beats her (*Songs for Alex* 26-27), Ginnie dare not leave, because “Dad wouldn’t have me in the house” (63). The death of her premature baby finally frees Ginnie, but only because the hegemonic grounds for marriage now longer apply. Presumably, if Duder had not chosen this scenario, Ginnie would have remained in limbo indefinitely. Although expecting 1980s implied readers to condemn this 1950s example of adult dominance, the episode also serves as a cautionary tale of what happens to adolescents who defy their parents’ values in the first place.

Adolescents are, by definition, on the verge of adulthood. However, contrary to behavioural theories that regard adolescence as a time when one should begin to chart one’s own course, New Zealand children’s novels tend to depict characters who do not “know their own minds,” implying that adults do. *Bildungsromane* reflect on characters’ progress from an adult point of view; in contrast, the majority of these works can be classed as *Entwicklungsromane*:

novels of development rather than fulfilment. Rites of passage are introduced, yet rarely achieved, with authority figures stressing the need for adolescents to acquire further skills, and/or conform to adults' rulings. By emphasising adolescents' lack of readiness (often in contrast to their own aspirations), the discourse creates a concomitant sense of adulthood as a state with exacting standards, further reinforced by the number of adolescents who undertake tertiary education in preparation. It is worth noting that all the novels discussed in this chapter were written (or set) before 1965. In these later decades, when adult roles within society were undergoing significant changes, adolescence tends to be portrayed as a state in its own right, with no indication when or even if adult status will occur.



### Chapter Three: Storm & Stress:

The depiction of adolescence discussed in the previous chapter reinforces adult identity by emphasising adolescents' immaturity, together with the associated need for them to satisfy adult expectations. Any evidence of characters endeavouring to act independently is countered by a combination of adult voices within the text and an overall narratorial point-of-view that suggests "right" behaviour for readers to emulate. On the other hand, a didactic imperative may also be served by portraying undesirable behaviour to be avoided, an approach that enables authors to address the issue of adolescents as social beings in their own right. Indeed, the term "adolescence" was adopted by G. Stanley Hall at the beginning of the twentieth century expressly to "name [the] 'problem' created by young people" (xii), a construction of adolescence that has persisted ever since, believed even by teenagers (Friedenberg 1975), in much the same way the notion of "the terrible twos" is associated with toddlers.

The growing perception of the "adolescent problem" allowed adults within society to affirm themselves as problem-free in opposition, as shown by the following comment from Alison Gray, author of *Teenangels, Being a New Zealand Teenager* (1988):

Our society has allowed a mystique to develop around teenagers. The word itself separates out a particular age group but also conjures up visions of a certain kind of behaviour — self-centred, rebellious and disturbing, at worst anti-social and at best immature. (181)

This myth categorises adolescents as a homogeneous group of rebels, with Gray implicitly condemning the hegemony that denies young people any real role in society. According to American sociologists James Côté and Anton Allaher, during the twentieth century adolescents "have gone from being central to agricultural economies to being marginal in industrial economies; ... from being economic assets to...economic liabilities" (17). This growing lack of purpose, together with prolonged education, increased leisure and discretionary spending power, led to a generalised sense, fostered by the media, that adolescents are a threatening "Other" (Besley 4). Foucault's influence led later social commentators such as Dick Hebdige (1979) and Mike Brake (1980) from the

Birmingham School of Cultural Studies to challenge this fallacy. Nevertheless the myth of the “adolescent problem” remains in force, recalling Said’s words about western discourses of the east: “The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, different; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal’” (40). Just as Nodelman draws a parallel with adults’ attitudes towards children —

Similarly, we adults can see ourselves as rational, virtuous, mature, and normal, exactly because we have children to compare ourselves to. We need children to be childlike so that we can understand what maturity is — the opposite of being childlike (32)

— so Said’s statement can be further reinterpreted to suggest that adults need adolescents to rebel in order to affirm their own sense of righteousness.

Adolescents’ apparent disruptiveness within society evokes Michel Foucault’s concept that “power is everywhere” (*History* 93), by which he means the potential to act (rather than a sense of one group having dominance over another). He maintains that “there are no relations of power without resistances” (*Power/Knowledge* 142). This may be, but between adult and child “the power runs one way only” (Ritchie and Ritchie 93), with parents having ascendancy over the infant due to their physical and rational superiority. In Foucault’s words, “the one who is constituted as the subject [of power] —who is ‘subjected’ — is he who obeys” (*History* 85). As the child develops, challenges to parental authority form part of the dynamic process of role revision. In this way, seen within the context of power relations, any challenge questions authority, but also affirms its existence at the same time.

According to Trites, the depiction of rebellion against repressive authority figures in American YA fiction often proves “redemptive,” enabling adolescent protagonists to “engage their own power” (54), and leading to a reassessment of hegemonic roles. This aspect, however, tends to be lacking in New Zealand texts. According to Ritchie and Ritchie, “the New Zealand authority pattern says you may do what you like, as long as you do what I say” (92), indicating an ideology that seeks to preserve the status quo (a term whose definition as “that which already exists” automatically enshrines conformity), at the same time as protecting its citizens from harm. This supports the contention

that New Zealand works fit within children's (rather than YA) literature, in accordance with Nodelman's observation:

...if adults have a secret desire to act [irresponsibly], and if that dangerous desire is engendered by the childish actions of children, then we must protect ourselves and our world by making children less childish. Our domination of children is for our own good as well as theirs. (31)

Although the majority of depictions of irresponsible behaviour in New Zealand children's fiction occur in the absence of authority figures, the narratorial voice maintains control, with delinquent adolescents generally reduced to the status of penitent children by the end of the novel.

A discourse that does not accept that adolescents "know their own minds" in terms of major life choices such as marriage and career continues to operate in relation to other behaviours. However, where the examples discussed in the previous chapter reinforced the importance of obedience in the presence of adult authority, the following examples demonstrate what happens when adolescents seek to establish their own rules. A clear hierarchy of responses to deviant behaviour seems to exist within the texts, which — in the absence of adult characters — relies on limited third person- or omniscient narratorial voices to convey disapproval. The majority of accounts concern minor transgressions (such as non-conformist fashion), depicting them in a disparaging light in order to undermine the intended rebellion. Acts of more overt delinquency such as smoking, often instigated as a result of peer pressure (a force diametrically opposed to adult influence), are presented as a test of character, which the adolescent must overcome in order to realise his or her "true self," in other words, conforming to adult mores. Potentially harmful behaviours observed towards the end of the century such as alcohol and drug abuse receive a somewhat different treatment, as authors seek to protect readers by overstating their negative consequences. Actual criminal behaviour tends to be reported outside the text, functioning as a cautionary tale of what happens when adolescents get out of control, necessitating adult intervention. Representations of adolescent rebellion, therefore, far from challenging the

existing social order, operate to endorse conformity to its rules — at the same time affirming adulthood as a normative state of right behaviour.

### “Tipped a bit to one side”

An early example that illustrates adolescents as a distinct group from adults occurs in Isabel Maud Peacocke’s 1919 novel, *The Misdoings of Mickey and Mac*, where the butcher’s boy appears

...not in his blue denims and striped apron, but in all the glory of after hours, his hard bowler hat tipped a bit to one side, showing his lank forehead curl, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, a mottled bamboo cane in his hand as he swung jauntily along. (38)

Here we see a young man — correction: “boy” — savouring the freedom of his youth, yet the focalising narrative voice is at pains to stress that every aspect of his appearance, unlike his work uniform, is “off-centre”: his hat, his unruly curl, his cigarette (a clear misappropriation of adult sophistication), and his cane, presenting him as a working-class mockery of the gentleman of the time. Only a minor character in the eight-year-old eponymous twins’ escapades, nevertheless, the butcher’s boy deserves much more attention in the context of this study.

For the first time in any New Zealand children’s novel read by the writer, we witness an adolescent in other than a formal, adult-regulated, context. His appearance may mock convention, but it also demonstrates his individuality. Such hubris cannot be allowed to go unchecked, however, and “great was his fall” (38), a victim of the twins’ tripwire. Peacocke’s depiction presents the first, superficial challenge to hegemonic relations, as a single adolescent seeks to appropriate adult status in terms of outward appearance, without having the real qualifications for admission. Two alternative interpretations arise. On the one hand, this treatment reinforces the definition of adolescent as one who has yet to conform (compared to the adult who does); on the other, it recognises the potential threat such non-conformity poses to the status quo.

Endeavouring to make a statement through fashion (and failing, the narratorial tone implies) is one thing, but the twentieth century has also fostered the myth that adolescents are wayward by definition. Ruth Park alludes to this in her autobiography, referring to her cousins in the 1930s:

They had almost reached the psychological no-man's land of male adolescence. They had awakened one morning to find they didn't fit their bodies any more, and everything that had been good and interesting now was not. Some of them existed permanently in a speechless state of sulk; others were unable to cope with everyday life except by spitting, barking, blurting and fighting. The world was incomprehensible to them and their view of it incomprehensible to everyone else. (*A Fence around the Cuckoo* 129)

According to Park's description, the malleable child suddenly metamorphoses overnight into a creature with no particular cares or responsibilities, but few opportunities, either — existing outside society, literally a “misfit.”

Randolph, another character in *The Misdoings of Micky and Mac*, typifies this creature, described as “a sulky and anaemic youth” (132) from the very first. Although he plays only a minor role, the omniscient narrator goes to some length to establish his character:

In the family Randolph's gloom was tolerated, even accepted as natural, because of what they all vaguely specified as his “disappointment,” the disappointment being that Randolph had mapped out for himself a great musical career, which, owing to the state of his health, and his funds — possibly for other reasons as well — had proved impossible.

So nothing was left for his genius to expend itself upon but the piano — playing for his sister's dancing-classes, and this he performed with an air of cynical suffering. (166)

The unsympathetic treatment of his “career” lays the blame firmly with Randolph himself, the “other reasons as well” suggesting a lack of talent and/or application. However, it is his *ennui*, his generally disgruntled attitude towards life, which places him among the ranks of teenage rebels without a cause. This observation is reinforced with every description of his actions: Randolph asked “disdainfully,” he “muttered...and struck the long-suffering instrument with both hands so that it jangled and jingled discordantly,” and “agreed with cordial bitterness” (167). Later he “played the measure with a scowl of hate at the

piano” (169) and, when not playing, “the cynical youth was sitting ... smoking a cigarette” (171).

The reference to “youth,” rather than “boy” singles Randolph out as a representative of his peers rather than a disaffected individual. When a crisis occurs (Micky and Mac gatecrash the dancing school tea party, locking the parents out), Randolph is initially described as “too inert to go and see what the ‘deuce the row was’” (181). When “reluctantly” he eventually climbs through the window, he “gloatingly” threatens to torture the youngsters until they begin throwing food at him, whereupon “wiping ... his face with a somewhat dingy handkerchief” and — without unlocking the door — “with sarcastic calmness, [he] went home” (181). In this characterisation, a pejorative description accompanies the adolescent’s every deed, the unacceptability of his behaviour confirmed through the disapproving adult gaze: “‘This is intolerable! Intolerable!’ cried [one of the mothers] in the tone of one crying aloud for redress of great wrongs” (181-2). Despite her histrionic reaction (readers share the twins’ delight at causing such furore), nothing about Randolph’s portrayal offers much possibility of redemption. Although such characterisations act solely as temporary foils for the novel’s juvenile leads, the narrative tenor implies that, in comparison with grown-ups, these representatives of adolescence are found wanting.

Within this context, indolence appears to be a particularly disturbing trait, a reference perhaps to the old saying about the devil finding work for idle hands. In C.R. Allen’s *A Poor Scholar* (1936), such lack of purpose leads to even greater deviancy. Ponto’s older brother Herby, described as “inherently deviant” (113) and “a tall, slouching lout” (194), has “gone off the rails” (100), led astray after their father’s death by an unsavoury friend “of Semitic cast of face, ... considerably older than Herby, almost a man, but stunted physically, mentally and spiritually” (56). Herby and his nameless companion, whom the narrative voice condemns to life-long adolescence, confirm society’s worst suspicions. Herby is not only idle, but actively delinquent:

So it came about that Herby developed into something of a pariah about the district. Mrs Lawrence was prosecuted once or twice for failing to send her son to school. Here, as often, the law operated

obliquely. Mrs Lawrence had certainly sent Herbert to school. His non-arrival was entirely a matter of his own volition. (91)

Just as Randolph's history was told from an adult perspective, so the account here allows no insight into Herby's point-of-view. Comic as the irony is here, the reader's sympathy is nevertheless directed to Mrs Lawrence. The final observation confirms adult opinion: a blameless parent cannot be held responsible for the behaviour of one whose "volition" is clearly flawed. Significantly, although texts can depict sloth and cynicism, criminal behaviour is reported indirectly. Readers learn he has been "indicted for theft" (91) and "committed to Industrial School" (92) until he reforms (107). The most deviant of characters, Herby's sole purpose in the novel appears to be to inspire Ponto (and impressionable readers) to right behaviour. Herby, Randolph, and the butcher's boy represent minor episodes within their respective stories. Even so, isolated within the context of this study, they illustrate the view that, unlike the adolescents discussed in the previous chapter, these three act independently of adult direction — and are found deficient. Such depictions reveal how authors adapt the definition of adolescence to suit their purpose, reinforcing it as inherently deviant, unless taken under adult control.

If obedient adolescents serve a didactic purpose, affirming conformity to adult values, so do characters who waste their days in indolence, and/or defer to the wrong type of authority. In Allen's *A Poor Scholar*, one of the few *Bildungsromane* in New Zealand children's literature, the protagonist Ponto rises to become a Rhodes Scholar, thereby fulfilling both Allen's social agenda privileging the "self-made man" and the adult-imposed work ethic for adolescent males. On the other hand, his friend Harold is blessed with good looks and money, but his privilege is contrasted unfavourably with Ponto's diligence. The first reference describes Harold "like a strayed god from that Olympus beyond the poplar trees" (*A Poor Scholar* 95-6). Other descriptors include "phlegmatic" (113), "indolent" (113, 120, 187), "undiscriminating" (116), "lazy" (118, 169), "complacent" (123), "a fallen Olympian" (183), and "a pleasant lethargic fellow who lacked the ability to get on" (233-4). While a loyal childhood friend when seen from the perspective of the adult Ponto retelling his life, Harold represents a flawed ideal, to whom Ponto — "a live

wire” (81), “eager” (116), “strenuous” (138), “lithe” (137), and “alert” (208) — is defined in opposition. Allen characterises this as “the difference between doing and being[:] Ponto had been doing so much, accomplishing so much. Harold had just drifted with the tide” (168-9). Here, the narrative voice stresses the distinction between active and passive, a young (working-class) adolescent actively striving towards his future, while the representative of the upper classes is metaphorically “washed up.”

To this end, Allen presents his adolescent characters (and implied readers) with a series of role models, the choice of which apparently determines one’s future direction. Harold’s role model is his uncle, Gerard Burnaby, a character completely outside society: “He was a ‘remittance man’ from England, who took pupils in Latin and English, and appeared ... to be ‘living something down’” (125). That Burnaby is “a remittance man” exemplifies a further layer of adult hegemony in action, the disgraced son banished to the opposite side of the globe:

...pitchforked out by his embarrassed relatives ... [he] had given his word to stay in New Zealand until a certain matrimonial entanglement had been set aright.

Whether he would keep his word remained to be seen. (148)

His arrival in the colonies is in marked contrast to that of his brother-in-law, Harold’s father, an unquestionably upright citizen, “who had come out from the Old Country with his wife and babies to a well-nursed business which he had been representing in England” (148). Mr Marsh, however, described as “a short-sighted, preoccupied man with a very winning diffidence” (147) plays little part in his son’s upbringing, possibly as a narrative device to allow for the didactic message couched in the characterisation of his wife’s brother.

Burnaby is unmarried,<sup>1</sup> unemployed, and irresponsible. He is also the youngest of his family (149), condemned to a state of perpetual adolescence in that he has failed to complete any of the “life tasks.” Nevertheless, as Ponto’s tutor, he is yet “another agency in the drama of Ponto’s progress” (164) towards successful adulthood, his potentially undesirable influence balanced by that of

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<sup>1</sup> The question of his sexuality will be discussed in Chapter 5.

the local Presbyterian minister, who “was, perhaps, one of the chiefest factors” influencing Ponto’s “career” (103). On the other hand, Harold displays no such discrimination in terms of role models, arousing even his uncle’s fears:

Gerard’s knowledge of the ways in which Harold might go wrong was encyclopædic, and he did not want Harold to go wrong. He would be prepared to exert himself to prevent his nephew from becoming the kind of person he knew himself to be. (150)

As a failed adult in his own right, Gerard’s exertions on his nephew’s behalf cannot help but fail. When Ponto, on his Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford, knocks on the door of Harold’s rooms in Cambridge, the text reads, “It might have been Gerard Burnaby who called [‘Come in’]” (269). It is not Burnaby’s effete manner that offends (in that it can inspire a determined youth to succeed), but Harold’s misreading of his uncle’s example. This is made overt in the final chapter when the adult Ponto (now Sir Frederick) reminisces with his wife, and readers learn that Harold has been killed in the Great War, leaving “no mark behind him” (281). Harold’s sister, equally idolised by Ponto in his youth, is also described as having achieved nothing: “Pauline, it appeared, had got nowhere. There was no outward ratification of that early promise” (285). In contrast to Ponto’s success (although his characterisation also functions as a metaphor for New Zealand’s desire to win independence from outmoded colonial traditions), Harold and Pauline represent adolescence gone wrong.

### **“Just a silly boy”**

In most cases, novels portray deviant adolescent behaviour only indirectly, reporting its consequences from a safe distance. The rare occasions on which disobedience is explicitly presented operate as “cautionary tales,” from which, as Nicholas Tucker observes in *The Child and the Book: A Psychological and Literary Exploration* (1990), implied readers are expected to “learn something about themselves by following through the mistaken notions and misconceived fantasies of ... fictional characters” (151). The bad behaviour in question tends to be minor, but — as a means of affirming conformity to adult rules — texts overstate its implications. One such example, Isabel Maud Peacocke’s *The Cruise of the Crazy Jane* (1932), begins as a rollicking sea adventure about a

group of children who join forces with a “strange big boy” (25). However, it quickly develops into a morality tale, depicting the comeuppance of an adolescent who attempts to initiate his own course of action (running away from boarding school), going against the wishes of his guardian in the process.

The story is told from the perspective of Vicky, at thirteen still regarded as a child, whose implied obedience provides a convenient vehicle for the authorial voice. Neither the stranger’s identity nor his age (sixteen) is revealed until well into the book (62, 142), yet the narrative voice arouses suspicion from the first: “Why should he make friends with [us]? ... I think it’s sinister.” Even though the next line undercuts these first impressions, “I don’t know what sinister means” (26), the portrayal of the only adolescent character in the novel is ambivalent from the first, as he himself acknowledges: “Here am I a perfect stranger and yet you’ve come off with me, the lot of you. As it happens, it’s quite all right, but in some cases it might not have been” (35). While this mystery suits the escapist tenor of the holiday adventure, and the children initially nickname the newcomer “the Earl” in honour of his role as leader (28), the text continually alerts readers to his undesirability, a misgiving confirmed when his true identity is revealed:

His name is John Erdly and his mother died when he was very young and his father just about a year ago leaving everything to John.... But by a great mistake — according to him — he made John’s cousin, Mr Alan Erdly, his guardian until he comes of age, and this Alan Erdly ... is a tyrant and an interferer, but Bidy [the Irish servant] says that he is really very fond of John, but John ‘though a gran’ bhoy wid a heart of gold’ is ‘neither to have nor to hold if you give him his head’ and so ‘Misther Alan has to keep a rein on him.’ (63).

Adolescent and adult voices juxtapose in this extract, as Vicky, the child narrator, recounts John’s and Bidy’s contradictory versions of Alan Erdly’s relationship with his ward. Here focalisation operates to privilege the adult point-of-view, with Vicky clearly accepting Bidy’s account in preference to John’s. It is no coincidence that the adult has the final word: in less than half a page, John has been reduced from romantic hero to runaway schoolboy, at the

same time as the adult imperative to “keep a rein on” his behaviour is firmly established.

For the first time a New Zealand children’s novel directly depicts an adolescent who deliberately rebels against adult authority.<sup>1</sup> He will not be allowed to get away with it, however, for “there is nothing worse in the [Judeo-Christian] history of the universe than the child’s disobedience of the father” (Zornado 6), an assertion that can be extended here to the father-substitute. From the moment adult characters enter the story, their authority prevails, as shown by the child-narrator’s change of allegiance from her previous admiration for “the Earl”:

I could see now that his cousin Alan wouldn’t have a very easy time of it if Master John had made up his mind to ‘have his head.’

(65)

The issues associated with adolescents acting independently — making up their “own minds” — have already been discussed: views contrary to those of adults will not be tolerated. Vicky’s language clearly establishes sides. She refers to “cousin Alan” by his first name even though she is a child (and has never met him), and to her former hero by the pejorative title, “Master John.” The other children also now revise their opinions, in accordance with an adult perspective: “John Erdly was a cheat.... He said he’d come out of prison as if he had been a real man, and he is really just a silly boy who has run away from school” (107). The conditional mood “as if he had been,” contrasted with what “he is really,” makes the distinction clear. Where his leadership skills onboard the yacht — in a *Bildungsroman*— would evince John’s adult potential, here the text puts him firmly in his place.

The delinquent is now portrayed as totally submissive, the adult characters interpreting self-reliance and determination as stubbornness, unhappiness at school as defiance. This concurs with Calvinist theories of child-rearing, where,

...rather than reading a child’s behavior as a way of reading and supporting her emotional needs, the adult instead reads the child’s

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<sup>1</sup> Rob, in *Six Little New Zealanders*, also ran away, but that narrative reported his exploits only after his penitent return. Moreover, adults indirectly monitored his actions at all times.

behavior as “misbehavior,” as a sign of the child’s wilfulness.

(Zornado 8)

Accordingly, John’s guardian supports the headmaster’s refusal to take him back, making no attempt to understand why John has run away in the first place:

‘Why should you be bothered with a young ass who hasn’t got sense to want to be educated. I wouldn’t myself only I promised his father to look after him until he came of age — and that can’t be too soon for me.’ (133)

Reporting the adult’s words directly gives them added force, as well as signifying the child-narrator’s tacit agreement with the critique of “young asses” who will not conform to adult rules.

The only hope, Erdly’s words suggest, is to contain such antisocial behaviour for as long as possible, with adult forces re-establishing their authority:

‘If you prefer to grow up an uneducated ignoramus, John, that’s your own look-out, but as you get no money until you are twenty-one, in the meantime you’ll have to work for your living, my boy.’ (133).

In contrast to Esther Glen’s characterisations discussed in Chapter One, this ultimatum does not provide the adolescent with the opportunity to prove himself. Calling him “my boy” has already sealed his fate. John will do as he is told:

‘I doubt if anyone else could be got to take you, but in your own printing works I might be able to make a place for you, but you’ll have to work.’ (133)

The vocabulary stresses that adults have the choice whether to “take” or “make a place” for him. On the other hand, the delinquent must do as he is told, regardless of the inappropriate manner in which he reacts: “‘In — er— what capacity?’ John asked, haughtily-sounding.” Having overstepped the mark, such *hubris* must be punished, as shown by his guardian’s response:

‘...in the same capacity as any other uneducated, inexperienced, hobble-de-hoy ... — a roust-about...until you make good — and it’s no use you coming to me and whining.’ (133)

The insinuation of whining suggests a moral judgement, implying that adolescence is a time of profitless indolence, further indicated by the following exchange:

John sprang up and his face was white and his hands shaking.

‘What! In my father’s — in my own — works!’ he said. ‘Never!’

‘In my works, John, remember!’ said his cousin quietly, ‘until you are old enough and educated enough to join with me.’

There was silence for a minute or two and then John said sulkily:

‘I suppose I’ll have to have a bit more schooling [then].’

Here the contrast between intemperate adolescent and measured adult is at its most obvious, and the child narrator goes on to confirm the downfall of one condemned as an “idle nuisance” (133):

I was sorry for John then because in spite of the way he had tricked us and his spoiltness there was something about him we couldn’t help liking and now he ... hung his head low down like a little boy in disgrace. After a minute he said in a low voice: ‘I see I’ve been a fool, Cousin Alan, ‘I — I — apologise to you and,’ he gulped, ‘to [the headmaster], ‘and if — you’ll — if you’ll — make some arrangement about another school for me I promise you I’ll — I’ll — try!’ (133-134)

This description contrasts markedly with the eloquent “Earl” who captained the children’s sea adventure. Implied readers are invited to feel sorry for him, but at the same time must recognise that he is the master of his own fate.

This is shown by the accusation of “spoiltness.”<sup>1</sup> Usually associated with parental overindulgence, Zornado considers spoiling signifies adult failure to meet the child’s emotional needs, resulting in the “child’s insatiable desire for things” (187). Here, however, the word takes on another connotation: John has “spoilt” himself. The adults in his life accept no responsibility for his behaviour, nor has any other adolescent been required to abase himself quite so completely — his only crime running away from school. All John’s potential strengths (his enthusiasm, leadership, imagination, and “romance”) count for nothing, as he literally bows to society’s wishes, “like a little boy in disgrace,” a resolution the

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<sup>1</sup> A term worthy of comment in its own right, with its connotations of irrevocable damage.

text interprets as a happy ending: “‘Good!’ said Mr Alan Erdly quietly. ‘I think that can be arranged then’” (134).

John’s next appearance, “all spick and span and nicely dressed” (136), signifies his capitulation to adult authority before he disappears from the story altogether, apart from reported apologies to the children’s parents. Readers learn that he has been enrolled at the same school as the other boys, passing “all his exams without any trouble” (144). The most obvious meaning of these words is that he passed all his exams “with ease”. However, the expression could also imply that he no longer *causes* trouble. Peacocke’s emphasis on the virtues of conformity possibly reflects her experience as a teacher at Dilworth School in Auckland, established in 1894 to ensure the orphaned sons of middle and upper-middle class families “in straitened circumstances ... become good and useful members of society.” John, however, would not be eligible: Dilworth is a school “for making good boys better — it is not a school for problematic boys” (Dilworth). In the event, lending itself to Trites’ observation that children’s literature is “an Ideological State Apparatus, an institution that participates in the social construction of the adolescent as someone who must be repressed for the greater good” (83), Peacocke’s harsh depiction of a cowed adolescent says more about adult insecurities in the face of youth’s potential than about juvenile delinquency itself.

### **“To think for yourself”**

On the other hand, children’s works can also validate apparent disobedience if it affirms evidence of adult moral teachings. Phillis Garrard’s first *Hilda* novel was published in 1932, the same year as *The Cruise of the Crazy Jane*, but adopts the opposite approach. Gender possibly plays a role in this difference, with McRobbie (1991), in her feminist study of popular magazines, observing that society has always tended to associate deviance only with boys, an attitude that also colours its representation within literature. On this basis, a girl’s behaviour is perceived as less threatening to the adult order, not only perhaps because girls have less social power as adults, but also — as in Garrard’s depiction — because it may not be disobedience at all.

Garrard can apparently award her adolescent character freedom, because Hilda's behaviour does not challenge adult values, as demonstrated by her vision of the future:

She had suddenly realised the life that was ahead of her, to grow up in and to be hers. She had seen it then, like a distant landscape to be travelled; now she was beginning to feel it true. To grow, to get bigger, stronger, to know more, to think for yourself, to act as your own mind told you, not to be afraid, to enjoy the things around you — that was to be given the freedom of 'no mean city.' Ha! It was a thrilling thought. (*Tales Out of School* 118-9)

Just as few texts overtly describe adolescence, this is one of the few to define the utopian state of adulthood. Placed within such a context, Hilda's subsequent display of independent thought in no way implies rebellion, in that she tells her father she wants to grow up to be "straight and fine and sensible, something like you are" (137). Moreover, the text is sufficiently confident of her conformity to have Hilda's father mockingly refer to himself as "a sad example of the Spineless Modern Parent, I fear..." (134), an appraisal disproved by the characterisation of a daughter who operates according to the highest moral code.

The only time Hilda disobeys her father is to search for a missing child, because — although forbidden from venturing out alone after dark — she has a clue to the toddler's whereabouts. Nevertheless, the text takes care to vindicate her actions, simultaneously inviting implied readers to consider her rationale by presenting the housekeeper's opinion:

'Your dad said you couldn't go so you don't have to worry about a thing except obeying him. There's your duty, plain to be seen... I often wish I was child enough to be told my doings. It takes away the responsibility, you see.' (*Hilda, Fifteen* 166)

Lukey's words advocate unthinking obedience, which, unusually, the narrative voice rejects. In direct contrast to the expectations established by Peacocke's *Cruise of the Crazy Jane*, this can be explained in terms of Hilda's higher motive. *Hilda, Fifteen* was published in 1944, and appears to regard youth as vital for the nation's future, as shown by Hilda's teacher:

'Hilda, you just *have* to train yourself and be trained while you're young, because the country will have to depend upon your strength

pretty soon. You're the grown-ups of the future, the citizens, soldiers, parents, workers.' (117)

While rejecting the housekeeper's "childlike" obedience (an implied criticism possibly based on class lines as well), these words nevertheless assume a parallel between "training yourself" and "[being] trained" that places constraints on adolescents' autonomy. The correlation recalls examples discussed in the previous chapter, where the only characters recognised as "knowing their own minds" were those whose life choices met with adult approval: shown here in the prescriptive list of acceptable roles to which the nation's "young" can aspire.

Garrard's treatment of obligation versus disobedience can be explored in relation to the stages of moral development proposed by American behaviouralist Laurence Kohlberg in the 1960s. Contributing to the discourse on human development, Kohlberg's first (pre-conventional) level (based on the desire to avoid punishment) is generally considered to govern the behaviour of children up to the age of ten. The second (conventional) level defines "right behaviour" as that which gains the approval of others: "Following fixed rules, respecting authority, maintaining the established social order for its own sake" (Smart and Smart 612). The "happy ending" of children's fiction overwhelmingly endorses compliance with authority, which suggests this is the level society expects its adolescents to attain. In so doing, it follows that most New Zealand adults (as represented by Lukey) also share this conformist level of morality. On the other hand, the highest (Post-conventional) level of morality, according to Kohlberg, occurs only when a person acts according to his or her own ideals of acceptable behaviour. Smart and Smart express it as "feeling right with oneself" (613), irrespective of the opinion of others.

Such moral autonomy, however, by its very nature, challenges social control, and few adults operate comfortably at this level. Presenting an adolescent challenging adult authority, therefore, cannot be read as an endorsement of disobedience:

Hilda fought and argued with herself as she never remembered doing before. She must — simply must go and look for Davie, hopeless as it seemed. Yet that meant disobeying her father, a thing she rarely did. Not because he might punish her — Dad's

punishments weren't very terrible; but because he trusted her, and she hated to disappoint him. Still ... sometimes you just had to make decisions for yourself, even if you *were* young. (*Hilda, Fifteen* 168)

Kohlberg's levels can be applied here almost directly, as can Foucault's concept of power relations. Hilda's concession that her father's punishments "weren't very terrible" indicates that she has moved beyond the first level, just as the drawn-out decision-making process associated with the breaking of her father's trust indicates consideration, and rejection, of the conventional level.

Such defiance should be a cause for concern, except that her actions, evidence of post-conventional reasoning, operate ultimately to uphold society's moral values, as expressed by the voice of authority, her father:

'Blind obedience is not much good. If you can think sensibly for yourself, I'd rather have it that way. I know you wouldn't disobey me for wilfulness or silliness, Tuppence; and I respect you for what you did to-night.' (173)

While the child's rescue should be sufficient to validate the adolescent's right to independent thought and action, the use of dialogue here functions to reaffirm the father's control over her decision-making. Forgiveness is contingent upon her thinking "sensibly," which is not the same as endorsing autonomy. Moreover, continual reference to her father's likely response at each stage of Hilda's deliberations reinforce the importance of adult influence in this process, culminating in Hilda's reply to his words quoted above: "'You know, I'd much — *much* — rather do as you say than not'" (174). In this way, Garrard portrays what could be regarded as disobedience as ultimate proof of a sound adult order, refuting the very notion of the "modern spineless parent" with adolescent conformity.

### **Juvenile delinquents**

According to Peter Hollindale, "a large part of any book is written not by its author but by the world its author lives in" (1988 19), an observation put to the test during the 1950's "moral panic" when New Zealand's teenagers began behaving in a way apparently deemed unsuitable for depiction in children's

fiction at the time. At a time when the post-war baby boom meant over a third of the population was under the age of twenty (Sanders 23), a challenge to the conformity of previous generations came from the increasing visibility of a distinctive youth culture:

This was the era of Tangye Natural lipstick, full petticoats, *Seventeen* magazine, bodgies and widgies, and courting couples in cars at Mission Bay and Cornwall Park. (Gifkins 34)

Such an account stands in direct contrast to the adult-directed courtship rituals previously depicted by children's authors such as Glen, Peacocke and West. Moreover, New Zealand was now exposed to an influx of largely American media influences. Society initially responded by banning films such as James Dean's *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause* (Shuker, Openshaw and Soler 68).<sup>1</sup> However, despite adult efforts to limit their impact, such movies — together with rock'n'roll music — led to a growing sense of “generational-based tribal identity” (Shuker et al. 96). In the words of Nik Cohn, author of *Pop: From the Beginning*, films such as *Blackboard Jungle* “cemented the fiction of a uniquely teenage way of life” (20), a myth that would shape both adults' and adolescents' sense of self.

Adult reaction to this new demographic's apparent power can be seen in the aftermath of police raids in 1954 that uncovered scenes of “immoral conduct” in the Hutt Valley: “teenagers ... playing truant and dabbling in what were seen to be the exclusively adult pursuits of drinking and sex” (*Rock and Roll* n.p.). Besley, writing in 2002, recognises the role the media play in “formulating both moral panics and ‘folk devils’” (4) as a means of selling its wares, but at the time such tales of depravity appeared to challenge the very heart of adult authority. The New Zealand Government was quick to react, establishing a commission of inquiry. The resultant finding, *The Report on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents* (commonly referred to as The Mazengarb Report after the Commission's chairman), was distributed to every household in the country shortly before the 1954 General Election, contributing,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Wild One* did not, in fact, screen in New Zealand until 1977.

according to Edmond (3), to the National Party's successful re-election on the grounds of restoring law and order.

The Report proved "salacious reading with lurid tales of daytime sex and truancy in the homes of working parents" (Edmond 3), citing evidence of sexual orgies perpetrated in several private homes during the absence of parents, and in several second rate Hutt Valley theatres, where familiarity between youths and girls was rife and commonplace. (Mazengarb 1)

The language is revealing in itself, not only indicating the level of adult affront within its implicit classist critique, but also the fascination aroused by the contemplation of such images. An article commemorating the anniversary of these events included an interview with Redmer Yska, author of *All Shook Up: The Flash Bodgie and the Rise of the New Zealand Teenager in the Fifties*: "While Yska jokes that he shouldn't be 'contemporocentric,' when viewing the scandal with the benefit of 46 years' hindsight, he believes it was 'just ordinary kids having a bit of fun, mostly it was pretty innocent activities'" (Bain 28). Nevertheless, it is exactly this contemporocentric reassessment of the situation as "pretty innocent" that supports Foucault's view about how discourse, in this case attitudes towards adolescence, is coloured by adults' own sense of identity at any one time. In 1954, society's outrage<sup>1</sup> that a handful of adolescents were acting independently provided insight into the psyche of contemporary New Zealand society.

If America was arguably the birthplace of "the teenager," New Zealand appeared much less willing to accept its associated connotations of freedom. "Teenager" became regarded as synonymous with "juvenile delinquent," with the Mazengarb Report seeing unlimited potential for "juvenile immorality" (4) in the tendency for young people to gather at Milk Bars, forming "gangs" away from the sphere of parental influence. Adult fears were exacerbated by the 1954 murder by Christchurch schoolgirls Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme of Parker's mother, and in 1958, Auckland psychologist A.E. Manning published what

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<sup>1</sup> The taboos associated with adolescent sexuality will be examined in Chapter Five of this study, in the light of Foucault's observation that they are a direct product of the power relationship between adults and children.

became regarded as the definitive work on Australian and New Zealand youth at the time, *The Bodgie: A Study in Psychological Abnormality*. As revealed by the subtitle, New Zealand society regarded the emergence of youth culture as a threat to its inherent conservatism. On the other hand, as Foucault observed, it is only through the labelling of abnormality that society affirms its sense of being normal.

Manning's description of the so-called bodgies, whom he termed the "active boils on the body of society" (89), reads like a naturalist's account of an alien life form:

The males ["bodgies"] wore unusual and exaggerated hair-cuts, following the styles made popular by various film stars. All went to extremes in the style of suits worn. The trousers were all much tighter in the legs than is usual. Some favoured extreme shortness of leg, exposing garishly coloured socks. Coats, when worn, were fuller in cut and much longer than is normal by conservative standards, while all favoured brightly coloured shirts, pull-overs or windbreakers, and neckerchiefs.

The girls were rather more standardised in their dress. Hair was worn drawn tightly back and tied in a tail or was worn in a bushy wind-swept style fringing carelessly over the forehead, showing neither the artistry nor the diversity of style manifested by the youths. On the average, the girls were more uniformly drab than the boys with their exotic colours. (9)

Conformist New Zealand youth during the 1950s wore "baggy tweed jackets, cardigans, wide legged grey slacks" (Ebbett 29) just like their fathers, while girls "dressed like an image of [their] mother" (Yska 56). Despite unwittingly revealing a hint of admiration in his account, Manning's choice of words, such as "[going] to extremes," "tighter than is usual," "longer than is normal," and "carelessly," draws attention to the violation of standards already witnessed earlier in Peacocke's description of the butcher's boy. Roland Barthes described fashion as "a 'Language' without 'Speech'" (*The Fashion System* 260). Whatever bodgies (and their female counterparts, widgies) were saying, society was now listening.

Apparently without warning, New Zealand society seemed to consider its meek and mild youth had discarded the garments of their parents and created a style and mores all their own. Manning attempted to put their behaviour in perspective, by asking his adult audience,

In what way are bodgies and widgies different from our fathers and grandfathers, those venturesome forebears who too often wore clothes that offended their fathers, dared to whistle at girls, rode dashing ‘penny-farthing’ bicycles ... and dared to place their arms about girls in a distressingly familiar dance called not ‘rock’n’roll’ but the waltz. (88)

It is worth noting that he did not consider his own generation rebellious, nor could the tameness of his examples persuade a public convinced of its own righteousness. As Yska observed, it was hardly a universal revolt:

In a country where anyone aged under twenty-one belonged to a powerless and repressed minority, dressing up as ‘bodgies’ and ‘widgies’ was perhaps the only way for a few adolescents to exhibit their separateness. (171)

Nevertheless, for the first time, New Zealand youth appeared to be exercising the collective power Foucault attributes to such minorities, challenging an environment that had formerly denied much expression of identity. New Zealand society’s vehement condemnation of these flamboyant costumes supports the observation that “we are all routinely implicated in reading the messages they carry and in tacitly deciphering the social, moral and cultural values that they imply” (Perry 8), values made explicit in *The Psychology of Clothing* (1930):

...certain garments can become symbolic of ... severity of moral standard, and purity of moral purpose — an ethical symbolism that plays a very considerable rôle in the more austere and formal costumes of modern [adult] men. In the thickness of material and solidity of structure of their tailored garments, in the heavy and sober blackness of their shoes, in the virgin whiteness of their collars and of their shirtfronts, men exhibit to the outside world their would-be strength, steadfastness and immunity from frivolous distraction. (Flügel 75)

Any biologist will point out that the male of the species (in the animal world) is usually the more colourful, his finery serving to attract his sexual partner(s). By rejecting “conservative” clothing and its moral associations, adolescents now appeared to present a challenge to adult identity itself, offering an unsettling alternative for a generation of parents who had been brought up to subscribe to a narrow adult ethos based on conformity.

This preamble illustrates the force of New Zealand society’s reaction to the increased visibility of adolescents in the mid 1950s in order to highlight the fact that children’s literature of the same period assiduously avoided depicting adolescent characters entirely, focussing instead on pioneering adventures, accounts of happy youngsters in rural settings or animal tales, as Gilderdale’s bibliography of the time reveals (*A Sea Change* 255-257). On the other hand, one of New Zealand’s best-known adult novels written at the time, *The God Boy* (1957) by Ian Cross, examines the “adolescent problem” in detail. Coming directly in the wake of the Mazengarb Report, Cross’s novel has been called a primer for the study of an adolescent “clearly heading for delinquency” (Holcroft 47). Holcroft went on to criticise “the text-book perfection of the psychological theme” (47), a comment that demonstrates an awareness of the complex power relationships involved. McDonnell takes this further, comparing *The God Boy* with *The Catcher in the Rye*, which he sees as

... passionately felt stories of sensitive adolescents or near-adolescents confused by the adult world ... stories of nervous breakdowns under the resulting pressure. (62)

Such a view recognises that both works hold adults responsible for the fate of their protagonists. Where children’s fiction habitually reinforces adolescent fallibility, based on the underlying assumption that adults know best, *The God Boy* concedes the adolescent problem may well be caused by adults.

*The God Boy* is one of the earliest novels in this study to award the first person narrative voice to its main character, thirteen-year-old Jimmy Sullivan. This is another major difference from works for children, in which the narratorial voice tends to remain more obviously under adult control, either by using third person omniscient narration, or a first person child narrator who observes the foolish behaviour of older adolescent characters “through adult

eyes.” First person narration has the most potential to influence readers, so any such adolescents in New Zealand YA literature tend to be exemplary characters who echo adult views. On the other hand, *The God Boy*’s intended audience was adult already, and therefore unlikely to be corrupted by its first-hand depiction of storm and stress:

You would think I care, and I did for a while, but not now. While it was happening, and for some time after, I cared so much I must have been nearly mad, but I don’t care now. (*The God Boy* 13)

Moreover, in contrast to the third person narrative’s implicit disapproval of errant youths like Peacocke’s Randolph and John Erdly, Cross’s use of first person narration serves to justify Jimmy’s cynicism as evidence of the trauma he has undergone, rather than a lack of purpose.

In this way, Cross questions adolescent responsibility for the “adolescent problem,” at the same time challenging the traditionally stable adults depicted in novels written for children:

Dad drinks, you know, and Mum gets iffy. ... Dad keeps saying she dragged him down, and she says back that he never was up. Dad’s halfway always talking about how he hasn’t got on in the world the way he should of, and it wasn’t his fault, it was hers, and the depression’s. (49)

Parents in children’s books of the period rarely argue or doubt their power, an admission of fallibility the corpus seemed unwilling to acknowledge until the end of the century. In contrast, marital discord permeates *The God Boy*, culminating in the father’s murder by the mother. Jimmy’s unhappiness manifests itself in so-called delinquency and vandalism, while his self-imposed punishments, his pathological “protection tricks”—singing, reciting the rosary and scalding his hands in hot-water (19)—fail to save him from the abuse of the adult authorities in his life. In this way, *The God Boy* acknowledges to an adult audience the problems of both growing up and being an adult, where works for children tend to focus on how adolescents must live up to adult expectations.

By the end of the 1950s, the “adolescent problem” became appropriated into conventional discourse, such as the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*’s regular

feature, “Teenage Pages” (which ran from late 1959 until the mid-1970s). Although ostensibly written for and by teenagers, typical articles projected adult views of adolescent behaviour, such as the following questionnaire, “How do you rate as a daughter?”:

Are the parents of today more difficult to get along with, or does the fault lie with modern teens? Have you ever given the problem any thought? Are you the kind of irresponsible and selfish character the psychologists would label ‘emotionally immature,’ or do you consider yourself beyond reproach?

The “correct” answers are implicit, as are those to the following examples:

1. (a) If your mother shows an interest in your affairs, do you confide in her?
- (b) Or do you accuse her of being noseey?
2. (a) Do you resent helping with the housework?
- (b) Or do you think it’s your duty to lend a hand in that respect?

and

6. (a) When you arrive home late at night have you any qualms about disturbing [your parents’] slumbers?
- (b) Or do you have a little consideration for them?

The final question makes the message even more overt:

10. (a) If you ever have any children of your own, would you be content with a daughter like yourself?
- (b) Or would you be tempted to drown her?

Those readers who score highly (only the one answer in each pair gaining any points at all) are rewarded with the assurance: “you are certainly a very good daughter and will make someone a wonderful wife.” On the other hand, “if you’ve scored under 25 points you had better start mending your ways right now or the chances are you will turn into a thoroughly obnoxious person” (Bonham 68).

That a discursive site for teenagers overtly promotes adult values is also revealed by an essay competition (open to “BOYS TOO”) in the same issue, entitled: “‘If I were the Parent of a Teenager...’” (NZWW 27 July 1959 69). Not surprisingly, the winning essays “most often stressed DISCIPLINE,” a point the

anonymous editor reiterates: “No Teen, it seems, wants to live without it [discipline], however much they might argue to the contrary” (*NZWW* 14 Sept. 1959–70). Letters to the “Teenage Pages” also display a common theme, criticising, for example, the current trend for “clangy music” (Chapman 71), and the tendency for young people to “spend their time lounging around street corners, jukeboxes and pinball machines,” instead of taking up “creative hobbies” (Morris 71). These letters purport to be the voice of youth, yet clearly express adult orthodoxy.

Not until the mid-1960s, when the moral panic of the 1950s had died down, did New Zealand works for children include adolescent characters once more, now making a clear distinction between obedient teenaged *children*, and their opposite: juvenile delinquents. Authors protected implied readers by creating faceless villains, bodgies whose deviant behaviour is reported, together with its punishment, only after the event. In Joan Harland’s *Adventure Acre* (1965), the “good” children, fourteen-year-old Jess and her brothers, Mark (15), Blair (12), and Pete (9), have recently moved to Auckland from the country. This detail suggests that the text considers bodgies to be a malign product of the city, as does its depiction of a neighbouring adult eyeing up the newcomers suspiciously: “‘Don’t want any bodgies around here stealing things again’” (*Adventure Acre* 18). The first portrayal of bodgies occurs when Blair encounters “three boys, all older than himself, [who] came to lounge against the footpath side of the old stone wall” (36). The verb “lounge” suggests the negative qualities of indolence and shiftlessness introduced by Peacocke (1916). Bodgies not only lounge, they smoke and dress outrageously, are sarcastic:

The one who seemed to be the leader flicked cigarette ash off his tinsel-striped jacket and grinned at his mates. ‘Look at little goodie-boy here working hard. Think we ought to give him a hand?’

inherently violent:

‘When we talk to you, kid, you listen, see?’ A lump of clay struck Blair on the shoulder, and he turned to see one of the group with his hand lifted to throw again,

and physically repellent:

‘You’re sure you’re listening this time?’ the thin and pimply-faced one, cigarette drooping from his mouth too, was trying to sound as tough as his chief. (36)

They continue to taunt Blair, literally throwing more dirt before they “sauntered off, hands in their pockets and cigarettes dangling from their lips” (37).

“Sauntering” is the active equivalent of “lounging,” more purposeful than “loitering,” but apparently equally offensive<sup>1</sup> to (adult) observers. Having their hands in their pockets visually signifies the bodgies’ lack of respect, as does their artfully casual smoking technique (influenced, perhaps, by corrupting films like James Dean’s *Rebel Without a Cause*). While smoking in the 1960s lacked the negative associations it acquired by the end of the twentieth century, upright citizens would never have allowed their cigarettes to droop and dangle. Every aspect of the bodgies’ description is an affront to adult society’s mores: the outrageous clothing, indolence, gratuitous violence, and intention to destroy what others have built up.

On-going references to the “bodgie gang” (37, 38) remind readers of their unwelcome existence even when they are not present, and the cause of any random act of destruction is in no doubt, as shown by the following account:

‘I saw how this fire started. ... I glanced across here and saw a boy — oh, about sixteen or seventeen, I suppose — older than any of these — standing at the corner of the hedge and staring up the hill. I’d seen him hanging round two or three times before and I didn’t like the look of him.’

‘Was he thin and weedy?’ Blair asked. ‘With a cigarette dangling out of his mouth? That’d be one of those three who said they’d clear us off the section.’ (49)

Even though bodgies probably existed only in the adult author’s memory by 1965, the characteristics of adolescent as archetypal villain are firmly embedded within the text. They are the antithesis of wholesome, socially responsible children. In order to preserve this prejudice, the implied narrator depersonalises

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<sup>1</sup> Peacocke’s Randolph (in *The Misdoings of Mickey & Mac* 1919) already displayed many of the attributes of the bodgie. Coming from a more privileged class (where, even in straitened circumstances his sister teaches ballet, while he plays the piano), however, he apparently posed little threat to the social order. These three, their descriptions imply, are lower class, unemployed and ill-educated.

the bodgies, never allowing readers to get to know them. Faceless and shadowy, they are referred to only as “Lofty,” “the Chief,” and “the Weedy One.” Similarly, their deviancy (and subsequent arrest) are reported second-hand in headlines, “Disaster Threatens Adventure Playground. Vandal Attack Destroys Hard Work” (153), while the narrative focuses on the cooperation between adults and *good* children to rebuild the playground.

The rationale for protecting implied readers from the bodgies’ point-of-view is reinforced by an episode where the children’s parents go away for a week, and Blair rebels against his older brother’s delegated authority, an example of how easily misguided youth can stray:

‘At least I don’t suppose the bodgies go around bossing one another all the time,’ Blair snapped. ‘I’m sick of you giving orders and criticising everything the rest of us do’ ...

Mark tried for the last word.

‘You ought to go and join up with the bodgies, if you think they’re better than I am!’

‘Perhaps I will!’ Blair flung at him, and stormed out. (98-99)

Although Blair does not carry out his threat (to do so would require the text to portray the bodgies as more than ciphers), this episode serves as a warning against the insidiousness of the bodgies’ very existence.

Joyce West’s portrayal of delinquency in *Cape Lost* follows a similar pattern, keeping the threat firmly out-of-bounds. The protagonist Gay’s orthodoxy has been well-established, and Phillip is a very minor character (the part Maori son of the head shepherd), whom readers never see, although his bad behaviour is reported on several occasions (131, 141, 149). Like C.R. Allen’s Herby, Phillip’s misdeeds escalate unchecked in a single sentence: “He got into bad company and started drinking too much, and then the gang of them pinched that car, and the police picked them up.” The adult observation from Clive, the neighbouring farmer, “He used to be a good kid” (151) seems to imply an automatic correlation between “adolescent” and “bad.” The bodgie gang is integral to Harland’s plot, but West had no need to include Phillip, other than to offset the diligence of her main characters. In both cases, the creation of adolescent villains reinforces the concept of flawed volition, which can be seen

to stand in direct contrast to Hilda's "wilfulness" (independent adolescent action for the "right cause"). Within works written for children (unlike Ian Cross's treatment for adult readers in *The God Boy*), society places the blame for the adolescent problem solely on its youth.

The only other mention of New Zealand's juvenile delinquents demonstrates how an author can manipulate the representation of adolescence according to implied readers' situation. Tessa Duder set the *Alex* quartet in 1959-60, but, at the same time, was consciously creating a feminist role model for her readers in the 1980s and 90s. Within this context, then Alex's rebellion is presented not as delinquency but as self-assertion, although her deviancy remains limited to appearance rather than actual anti-social behaviour. The flamboyant garb of the bodgies and widgies caused waves of moral panic in the 1950s, a visible sign that children were no longer following in their parents' footsteps, which caused adults to doubt the certainty of their own role. By the 1980s, however, the myth of youth culture was sufficiently normalised (the youth of the 1950s now parents themselves) that Duder could safely allude to widgies' clothing.

The following description could have come straight from the pages of *The Bodgie* (Manning 1958), as Alex sets out deliberately to rebel:

I decided to wear jeans, and a skimpy boat-necked blouse, and some earrings I'd borrowed from Julia, and experiment with a bit of frosted turquoise shadow and black liner — protective colouring, I thought, shouting goodbye from the porch so I didn't have Mum saying I couldn't go to a party looking like that. (*Songs For Alex* 57)

Earlier in the series, Alex was already depicted as challenging conventional 1950s' mores when she attended a sixteenth birthday party at which all the other girls were "dressed up to the nines, best satin cotton frocks and matching sandals, white cardigans..., hair set, some with pancake and eyeliner" (*Alex in Winter* 54), wearing "jeans, check shirt, floppy pullover tied around [her] waist, and flat shoes" (53). In the present example — her even more provocative outfit intended to be read as evidence of inner turmoil — the ultimate aim of this rebellion is to uphold the status quo. The clothes are selected for maximum

effect, with the final statement (“so I didn’t have Mum saying I couldn’t go looking like that”) revealing the episode’s true function: to substantiate conformity to parental authority.

Preventing the mother from voicing the prohibition does nothing to lessen its force. By invoking the panoptic gaze, Foucault’s concept of a self-regulatory surveillance system based on Jeremy Bentham’s 1785 design for a model prison (Gore; Grieshaber; Keogh; Trites), the inappropriateness of Alex’s appearance is intensified for implied readers each time she gets away with it through her self-consciousness observations:

I put on my jeans, and tarty high-heels, and the top which was rather tight and my black bra showing, and a wide red belt pulled in tight (*Songs For Alex* 67),

And again:

I’d put on jeans, a T-shirt, a cardigan that clashed, pulled my belt in too tight and made my hair into a beehive with backcombing and hairspray...

Not the sort of clothes girls-from-good-homes wear to the Civic on a Friday night. Proper girls mince up and down Queen Street looking at each other’s best suits and long gloves and matching accessories. In short, slightly in disguise again, a widgie, a mess....

(89)

In terms of the dominant hegemony, adults within the story do not need to remark on her appearance, because Alex has been sufficiently acculturated to voice their disapproval herself; her description of garments that are “tarty” and “too tight” and “clash” ensures readers get the message. This message is enhanced by the use of first person narrative, whereby the adolescent rebel, having internalised the inappropriateness of her appearance, speaks directly to implied readers on the adults’ behalf. As further reinforcement, “right behaviour” is made explicit later in the text when Alex’s fiancé welcomes her back to the fold: “The widgie costume, thank god, was an aberration” (*Songs for Alex* 105). A telling expression, this reiterates the Foucauldian notion of a pre-ordained state of normality against which behaviour is judged, despite the apparently liberal tenor of the novel as a whole. While a modern audience is unmoved by risqué clothing thirty years out of date, Alex’s rebellion (and her

subsequent reform) directly foreground the desirability of conforming to adult rules.

Duder's representation also operates to reinforce contemporary liberalism, as shown by Alex's rejection of the 1980s' American feminist symbol of repression as she recalls her experience at twelve:

I was glad that my Mum, unlike most, did not immediately whisk me off to a shop for my first bra. Lots of mothers could hardly wait to get their daughters all harnessed up [but] Mum waited until I asked, the last girl in the class. I hated the loss of freedom. I went braless around the house, and even my togs, those awful limp cotton things we wore then, became something I enjoyed wearing.

At the pool, in the water, I could be free. (*Alex* 20)

This account, arguably, appears contrived. Not only does an adult voice appear to intrude into the fifteen-year old narrator's allusion to the "cotton things we wore then," Alex appears to be a women's libber some thirty years before her time, compared with Nora Ephron's report of her own experience:

'I want to buy a bra,' I said to my mother one night. 'What for?' she said. My mother was really hateful about bras. ... It was a source of great pride [to her] that she had never even had to wear a brassiere until she had her fourth child. ... It was incomprehensible to me that anyone could ever be proud of anything like that. It was the 1950s, for God's sake. Jane Russell. Cashmere sweaters. Couldn't my mother see that? ("A Few Words about Breasts" 1972 qtd. in Dorenkamp et al. 140)

In contrast, Alex's rejection appears to speak directly to a modern (adult) audience, its feminist imperative overriding the depiction of pubescence.<sup>1</sup> The text also does this on other occasions, for example, when the social conscience of one of Alex's friends is evinced first by his membership of the CND<sup>2</sup> (*Alex* 87-8), and later when he and Alex protest against the exclusion of Maori from an

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<sup>1</sup> The desire to wear a bra as early as possible serves as one of the key signifiers of the floating construction of adolescence, with "kidult" clothing lines, featuring padded bras, now being marketed to nine-year-olds (Tyler B7).

<sup>2</sup> It is questionable whether 1980s' child readers would know what "CND" stood for. Moreover, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (established in 1957 by children's author Elsie Locke) was not even known by that name until a year after the events depicted here (Coney 320).

All Black Tour to South Africa (*Alex in Winter* 68, 73).<sup>1</sup> Thus, 1960s' acts of rebellion (frowned upon at the time) can be validated over twenty years later as affirmation of 1980s' adult liberalism.

### **Uniformity**

Liberalism, however, despite New Zealand's pioneering history of social reform, seems to play a minor role within twentieth-century attitudes towards adolescence. In fact, as previous examples have shown, the insistence on adolescent conformity within children's literature suggests a similar imperative informs the adult condition as well. As Ritchie and Ritchie, in *The Dangerous Age: Surviving Adolescence in New Zealand* (1984), observe:

New Zealand society is over-controlled. This is not only a matter of public comment but it demonstrably true. The extent of public statutes and regulations is vast; the number of small controlling authorities for this and that is enormous.... When something disturbing happens, like a gang confrontation, a substantial part of the population wants to stiffen up the law. (90)

Although New Zealand's political climate has changed markedly since 1984, a degree of conformism still prevails, in that over-regulation of everyday activities continues. In comparison to countries that encourage citizens to take responsibility for their actions by being more vigilant and careful, in other words, more *mature*, in relation to the wearing of seatbelts, for example, New Zealand makes it compulsory. Seen within a Foucauldian context, as already indicated by its overreaction to the behaviour of a handful of teenagers in the mid-1950s, New Zealand society appears to value the power of conformity to rules and regulations over autonomy.

Such an attitude contrasts with the relationship between adult and adolescent characters identified by Trites in American YA literature, where challenging adult authority often plays a significant part in a character's growth. Noticeable in the treatment of so-called adolescent rebellion in New Zealand works, however, is an increasing absence of adult characters. This seems to

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<sup>1</sup> An issue that derived topicality from the fact that these books were written shortly after the anti-apartheid protest surrounding the 1982 Springbok Tour, which caused deep division in New Zealand society.

reflect what Ritchie and Ritchie termed “passive authoritarianism” (91), whereby adults assert control while avoiding confrontation, and can be seen in the tendency for children’s literature to require characters to face the consequences of their deviancy alone, all the while maintaining control of the narrator, who appears to speak with an adolescent voice.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in Ann de Roo’s 1977 novel, *Scrub Fire*, which upholds the message already expressed by the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* Teenage Pages, that teenagers are really “good children” trapped in a sulky persona. Accordingly, fourteen-year-old Michelle must undergo an ordeal in the bush until she is cured of her adolescentness, illustrated by her refusal to baby-sit:

Michelle pouted. That was always the way of it, because she was the eldest and a girl. Andrew was never expected to look after Jason, although there were three years between them and less than two years between Michelle and Andrew. It was unfair and she told [her parents] so, at some length.

Her self-righteous challenge is met with indifference:

Whether she shrieked and stamped and slammed doors or just sat looking rebellious, they all said, ‘But you’ll love it when you get there,’ as if she was the only person who did not know what Michelle Seton liked and disliked. (3)

The role of teenage rebel is now sufficiently internalised within society for adults to disregard her views completely, thwarting her tantrums about the proposed camping holiday in the process. Michelle is the first apparently defiant adolescent readers are allowed to empathise with (the narrative is presented from her point-of-view, rather than being filtered through the eyes of an observer), so de Roo takes care to counter “unacceptable” behaviour with moments of social conscience:

Suddenly, against her will, Michelle found herself imagining [her aunt and uncle’s point-of-view]. This was their escape, their fortnight’s pretence of freedom, and they had chosen to share it with two boys, and, she had to admit it, a sullen, critical teenager. (10)

By stressing her sense of guilt, the focalising phrase “she had to admit it” invokes the Foucauldian panoptic gaze. The adolescent views herself as adults might see her, confirming her status as “sullen, critical teenager,” a submission that will pave the way for her eventual reformation to compliant child once more.

The text exploits the myth of the stereotypical teenage rebel, with de Roo redirecting Foucault’s view of rebellion’s power to bring about change. By the same rationale that advocates parents ignore their toddler’s tantrum, so the teenager must learn the futility of defiance through having no one to rebel against. In the Robinsonade tradition (Hebley *Power of Place* 90), being lost in the bush (requiring Michelle to care for her brothers after all) imposes a harsh punishment. This provides an example of what Trites calls the “paradoxical” nature of YA novels:

Although children’s literature is capable of celebrating “childness” — the characteristics associate with childhood (Hollindale *Signs of Childness in Children’s Books* 1997) —adolescent literature appears to delegitimize adolescents, insisting that “adolescentness,” especially immaturity, is unacceptable (Trites 83).

Michelle only survives this trial, the text suggests, by *not* behaving like a teenager, a process made overt with descriptions that seem to confer adult status and power upon her, such as “queen of the unexplored kingdom” (37ff), and “a tigress defending her threatened cubs” (82). Removed from civilisation, she quickly conforms to society’s rules.

Told in the third person, most of Michelle’s reactions are internalised, shared only with the implied reader. De Roo uses being lost in the bush as a catalyst for a prescriptive account of adolescent development, moving Michelle quickly from her initial “selfishness” to a more dutiful outlook:

She settled down to soothe her hunger pangs with drowsy thoughts ... of Mum and Dad, kind and indulgent as parents were when their children worried them, just as she felt more generous towards Mum and Dad. If only she could see them again, she was sure she would never want to quarrel with them again. (37)

The ordeal in the bush serves as a cautionary tale of what can happen to those who do not “feel generous” towards their parents. Only by accepting her place

as her parents' child will Michelle survive this ordeal, a realisation reinforced when she admits her dependency by mentioning the word "Mum" five times on a single page (100). The children are rescued shortly thereafter, whereupon the reformed adolescent reverts to her rightful place as "just a kid" (105) once more: someone who does as she is told. While *Scrub Fire* is first and foremost an adventure story, it provides a clear message about how an adolescent should behave, according to adult expectations.

One of the most obvious signifiers of obedience to adult authority is the wearing of school uniform, its very name an indication of its role: to enforce conformity by *reductio*, as shown by the following interview with a bodgie in the 1950s: "I was over six feet tall with long thin hairy legs. I had to wear short, tight pants like a little primer kid. In the weekends I would wear decent clothes and be treated like a man" (Manning 73). The speaker does not elaborate on what "decent" clothes means or who treats him thus. Nonetheless, inherent in these codes is the inference that adulthood demands adherence to one set of rules, with school uniform a visible way of compelling conformity. Although Ritchie and Ritchie consider "such rules create the urge to disobey" (96), citing subversion of the uniform as a prime example of adolescent rebellion, its depiction in children's literature renders such challenges powerless.

In Margaret Mahy's *The Changeover* (1984), for example, Laura describes her uniform as "all regulation clothes except for the underpants, because it was a point of honour [that] ...all the girls at school never [wore] school underpants. It was a stricter rule than any the school could invent" (3). A point of honour it may be, but if no one in authority sees, the rebellion loses effect. Moreover, the appended comment seems to draw attention to the irony of non-conformity establishing its own set of rules. Barry Faville, a schoolteacher himself, further reinforces this futility in *Stanley's Aquarium* (1987):

The older we grew the more the restrictions of uniform chafed, and many found a hobby in testing the limits of the regulations. What, after all, was sensible footwear? Define an acceptable windproof jacket if you can. Personally, I found the whole game rather tiresome. I noticed that the whole mob imitated the miscreant so that you ended up with more rebels than conformists. (26)

Having the narrator recount events in retrospect automatically undermines the significance of the gesture. Moreover, the sense that this is merely a game, coupled with the inherent irony of replacing one “uniform” with another, convey an attitude (akin to stressing characters’ youth) designed to disempower. Heather Marshall in *Gemma, Brooke and Madeleine* (1988) makes the same point from a different angle: “An unofficial law among the kids at Boulcott High decreed that Dingbats were in, and to be seen jogging in any other brand was a social mistake” (36). The ludicrous brand name, coupled with the use of Foucault’s panoptic gaze (misappropriating its power of censure in its affirmation of non-conformity), seems to mock adolescents’ efforts at establishing their own rules, reinforcing, by implication, the need for adult-imposed regulations.

On the other hand, where adolescent characters set out to subvert the official dress code deliberately rather than in response to self-imposed fads, the narrative voice makes its inappropriateness overt, as seen in the description of the villain in Paula Boock’s *Home Run* (1995):

Her tunic was hitched up so the bulk of it hung back over the belt, and the skirt was short. Instead of the regulation shoes and socks she wore pantyhose and black slip-ons. She didn’t have a tie ...and wore studs and little dangling crosses in her ears. (9)

Rowena’s appearance is distinguished by the totality of her non-conformity, with every item implying its antithesis. The narrative voice expects readers to infer the correct uniform, further reinforced by a description of the good pupils, “with long, braided hair, ironed tunics and ties [who] were a real target for the cooler set in the class” (10). At this stage of the narrative, readers may share the protagonist Bryony’s rejection of the good girls, but the standard of correct behaviour has been established.<sup>1</sup> The emphasis on appearance serves to demonstrate Bryony’s blind obedience to peer pressure, as she copies Rowena’s look exactly (38) — the “in” style, as pointed out by Faville, ironically just as uniform, but in ways never intended by school authorities. Moreover, the narrative reinforces its inappropriateness by having Bryony leave home before

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<sup>1</sup> Possibly exposing the adult voice in the process: tunic and tie are more likely to have been worn by Boock’s generation in the late 1970s than by schoolgirls in the 1990s.

her parents can see what she is wearing. In this way, rebellion is rendered pointless; there is no autonomy in behaviour predicated on adult reaction.

As already shown by Tessa Duder's characterisation of Alex, the good adolescent's internalisation of adult disapproval reaffirms the hegemonic power relations, which rebellion attempts to challenge. This is made clear by Bryony's reformed appearance at the end of the novel when she puts on the uniform of her new school:

Bryony screwed up her nose at the mirror. She looked like a wimp... She tried lifting one nostril and looking bored and it worked okay, but as soon as it stopped, there she was again — nice, bright, shiny-looking kid. Intelligent, happy — how come her face did that? (90)

This passage reveals recurring themes, such as the surfacing of the adolescent's "true self": no matter how hard Bryony tries to be deviant, she cannot. Moreover, her inherent obedience is shown by the epithet "nice...kid," the challenge to adult authority safely averted.

Good adolescents act in accordance with adult rules; rebellious adolescents act — most often unwisely — on their own. Appearance has already been portrayed as one way in which adolescents seek to distinguish themselves, either as quasi-grown-ups (in the case of Peacocke's butcher's boy), or as a separate species altogether (bodgies and widgies). In the event, few authors pay any attention to characters' clothing, as fashion, by its very nature, is fleeting. Too detailed a description is likely to date a work. Those novels that depict teenage fashion, therefore, appear to do so consciously, as a means of reinforcing its foolishness.

Such references function as a site of control, contrasting adult-directed appearance with fashions chosen by adolescents themselves. Unlike Duder's *Alex* series, the events in Joyce West's novels were contemporaneous with her readership. Alex's widgie costume was unlikely to encourage similar acts of rebellion thirty years later, but West exercises more hegemonic control over her implied readers' reaction. In *Cape Lost* (1963), for example, on New Year's Eve, the narrative stresses the propriety of sixteen-year-old Gay's appearance, which has been crafted by her elders: "I got myself into the old green-and-white

plaid cotton evening frock that Aunt Belle had starched and ironed for me” (147). On the other hand, Cousin Merry’s dance partner, a cipher with no speaking part, is striking for all the wrong reasons:

Yvonne is only about a year older than I, but she had grown very fashionable; her fair hair was bleached like silk and wound up above her head in a sort of beehive effect, and her eyebrows were darkened and arched; she wore a brown sack-like sort of dress with gold jewellery. (154)

A close reading of this passage raises several points. Yvonne, although older than Gay, is portrayed as still not having grown up; rather she has grown “fashionable,” which, within the context, appears to be a strange state, at odds with the conformity associated with adulthood. Her artifice can be inferred from the description, where little appears genuine: her hair is “bleached like silk” and worn in a “sort of beehive effect”; her eyebrows are unnaturally coloured and shaped; her garment is “a sack-like sort of dress.” Yvonne may have followed every fashion trend, but the focalisation suggests impressionable readers should avoid this precedent, a criticism given added weight by Merry’s derision: “looking at [Gay] when Yvonne’s back was turned, and looking at her hair and winking” (154).

As Sandra Coney comments:

[In the 1960s] the desired effect was to look as nearly as possible like a Barbie doll.<sup>1</sup> Hair was dyed, teased, and lacquered into something resembling the nylon tresses of a doll ...

Artificiality extended to every aspect of the toilet. There were false fingernails and eyelashes, whirlpool and uplift bras, plastic, nylon and fake fur clothing, stiletto heels and platform soles. (253)

Despite Coney’s disparagement some thirty years later, one could expect West’s readers at the time to have admired Yvonne’s style, yet the narratorial tone directs them otherwise. Yvonne is not a role model; indeed, she does not even appear a whole person: her parts described in isolation, literally (in the words of Cliff Richard’s 1959 hit record) a *Living Doll*. West’s characterisation appears

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<sup>1</sup> The archetypal symbol of adolescence, invented by Mattel in the 1950s.

openly to criticise the “teenager” of the 1960s, contrasting her with the adult version of how an adolescent should appear: “starched and ironed.”

Another work that describes teenage fashion in detail only to disparage it is Margaret Mahy’s *The Catalogue of the Universe* (1985). Richard is unemployed, still living at home in his early twenties, a dependant who is depicted as misguidedly attempting to assert his independence by dressing as a “hippy.” This is one of the few works to include authority figures, highlighting adult restraint in the face of adolescent excess, as shown by the following contrast between Richard and his conservative younger brother:

Tycho, half-dressed in faded but very tidy blue jeans, watched his brother curiously as he put on a skin-tight scarlet skivvy, and then, over that, an equally tight blue one full of holes gaping like mouths, letting the scarlet throats show from beneath. Richard’s jeans were dirty and frayed around all the edges and were patched with triangles and squares of flowery velvet, bright yellow canvas and pink plastic. Over all this he wore a jerkin that appeared to have been knitted from sky-blue rope. He rejoiced in being unkempt and unironed but, for all that, he took far more care over his appearance than Tycho did. (*The Catalogue of the Universe* 21-2)

Richard’s outfit is beyond fashion, verging on the ludicrous, the (adult) narratorial voice’s attention to detail seemingly conveying bemusement at the lengths to which an adolescent will go to differentiate himself.

Moreover, while Tycho and readers notice, adult characters deliberately exhibit little reaction, as shown by the following exchange:

‘It’s a lovely morning,’ Mrs Potter said cheerfully. ‘How nice you both look.’

‘Since we look the dead opposite of one another,’ Richard began.

‘...in your different ways,’ Mrs Potter finished, giving Richard a triumphant glance. (29-30)

If the adolescent sought to lay down a challenge with his non-conformist appearance, he has been bested by the mother’s lack of reaction. Neither is he depicted as eliciting a response when he wears “an old caftan of [his sister] Africa’s which he had recently taken to sleeping in” (15), nor when “dressed in a Russian blouse, leather trousers patched on the knees, and a slightly moth-eaten

fur bolero he had discovered on the white elephant stall of a church fair.” The only comment comes from Tycho, whose words, “Aren’t you too hot?” (162), seem to echo his parents’ bemused forbearance. Richard’s appearance could be categorised as eccentricity rather than rebellion, were it not for his desire to provoke a reaction at every entrance. By denying the undoubted impact of his appearance, Richard’s parents render him powerless. Within the novel, adults are watching; at the same time, their indifference stresses such rebellion is pointless.

Only with reaction, according to Foucault, does one have power, and even the validity of that power is questioned in children’s literature. Lisa Vasil wrote *Dark Secret* (1989) when she was fifteen. Given her position as the only adolescent author within “the canon,” her work could be expected to offer a teenage point-of-view, but instead, it upholds conformist values, critiquing adolescence in general and 1980s’ adolescent fashion in particular. *Dark Secret* rejects all trappings of youth culture, portraying Connie, the archetypal “good” teenager, as compromising her integrity by seeking to join the “in-group”:

When I was handed the [magazine] pictures to choose which one I wanted to copy, I got the giggles. I loathed them! They were of girls with spiked hair and tons of goo all over their faces. They had eye make-up out to their hair line, so much rouge on they looked as though they had eaten something really hot, and strange coloured lipsticks: purple, green, even blue decorated their lips. I gulped. I was going to look like this? (*Dark Secret* 29)

The narrative voice is that of an outsider, yet the verb “gulp” presages the fact that Connie will swallow her reservations, ending up “like an African native about to do a war dance” (33), i.e. *not* like her true (conformist) self.

Although punk was a genuine feature of youth culture in the 1980s, Vasil could hardly have invented a more extreme illustration of teenagers’ ironic desire to express their individuality by hiding behind a façade of make-up and costume, as the following observation by Ritchie and Ritchie suggests:

The basis of punk is the intention to outrage.... Shaved heads, Mohican crests or pudding basin rounded styles, hair dyed in vivid colours, clothes based on bondage and sexual fetishism, a wardrobe carefully built up from other people’s dustbins, patches and badges

more appropriate to toilet walls, dangling ear decorations and safety pins through earlobes, cheek or nose, all these are designed to encourage a sharp reaction from the adult and the prejudiced.

(134)

In no way do Connie's newfound "friends" espouse the values Ritchie and Ritchie attribute to punk (which makes their appearance even more spurious), with Vasil using their guise solely to epitomise the tensions between the generations.

This is the major difference between an adult author's treatment and an adolescent's. Adult authors rarely depict adult reaction to bad behaviour in the texts, denying adolescents the resistance that would validate their challenge to authority. This text, however, seems to imply that provoking a reaction is the prime motivation for such behaviour, as shown by the following exchange when Eva deliberately parades her followers through her mother's kitchen:

'How many times have I told you not to wear that make-up downtown...?'

'I don't have to listen to you anymore... I'm going out now, like this, and so are my friends.' (33)

Here Vasil demonstrates her own acculturation in accepting the myth of the generation gap, with none of the characters (other than Connie) "surprised by the shouting" (33) that ensues. Even while acknowledging the power wielded by both generations in this encounter, the novel sides firmly with the adults. Distanced from her peers physically and philosophically, Connie is the last to leave, giving the adults "an apologetic look." Such a gesture is not enough, however, when her appearance betrays her, as shown by the father's response: "Just another one of those punks. Her make-up is worse than Eva's!" (34). As well as giving the adult the final say, the use of first person narration ensures these words directly target the novel's readers, reinforcing renunciation of (misguided) adolescent behaviour in favour of pleasing adults.

The assumption that wearing teenage fashion is incompatible with conformity to parental mores serves as a motif in Vivienne Joseph's *Worlds Apart* (1996) to identify the villains. Described by the protagonist Cara as wearing "designer beachwear, sculptured hair and dark lipstick. Their eyes

heavily globbed with black stuff,” the school bullies introduce themselves to her unsuspecting father as “Annie Lennox...Janet Jackson and ...Mariah Carey” (28). The contrived appearance and allusions to contemporary pop stars not only serve to reveal their insincerity and transient values, their disrespect for adults also reinforces the undesirability of these adolescents in particular, and, by extension, manifestations of youth culture in general.

### **Peer Pressure**

Such depictions accept not only the perceived differences between the generations, but also the insidious influence of the peer group. All members of society can be said to operate within peer groups; however, the term tends to be applied almost exclusively to adolescents, who are defined as occupying a liminal position “in between recognized structural cultural categories<sup>1</sup> ... and, therefore, ... actively [seeking] membership in groups that provide a sense of belonging and basis for identity” (Sardiello 118, 119). The generally negative connotations associated with the term can be attributed to the concomitant lessening of adult influence in the face of this apparent “switching [of] allegiance from parental guidance to the tutelage of an adolescent subculture” (Shorter 275), leading to the notion of “peer pressure,” a potentially corrupting power base diametrically opposed to adult authority. On the other hand, novels are in the ideal position to counteract this influence, as reading, by its very nature, is a solitary task. Behaviours within the group can be revealed as misguided through the focalising medium of the narratorial voice that expects readers to see beyond their initial appeal.

In *Dark Secret*, Vasil’s protagonist, fourteen-year-old Connie, yearns to be popular, a typical adolescent condition according to this description of the in-crowd:

Eva, whom everyone admired and who had everything her own way, was a great person to be friends with. If you were, it meant you were popular. You were in the group of girls who were trendy, whom everyone admired because they were so *en vogue*. They

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<sup>1</sup> No longer children nor yet adults.

were THE girls to be seen with, so I was pretty thrilled to be invited. (24)

The plethora of words such as “in,” “fashionable,” “trendy,” and “*en vogue*” should arouse readers’ suspicions; while reflecting the novitiate’s excitement at being chosen, they also suggest the superficiality of this constellation, an observation Connie’s later dilemma about not having “the ‘right’ clothes” to wear (26) confirms.

Willingness to modify one’s appearance to suit someone else’s criteria is presented as the first of many betrayals of integrity. As well as the punk make-up previously discussed, the novel continues its exposé, all the while stressing a counter-message:

They were playing heavy metal, a type of music I absolutely hated, but pretended to like because everyone else did...

I wished I could get up enough nerve to say I despised it. Surely they wouldn’t dislike me just because I disliked their style of music? (26-7)

The language is sufficiently loaded for readers to recognize the fallibility behind Connie’s decision to compromise her integrity in order to fit in with a group to which she patently does not belong. This is further reinforced when Connie betrays herself a third time by inventing a boyfriend:

‘There’s this really neat-looking boy that lives near us. His name is’ — think! — ‘Andrew, and he’s really nice. He likes me too, I can tell. He asked me out again yesterday.’

‘Yeah?’ Eva was impressed. ‘What did you say?’

Never mind what I said to him, what was I saying now? I thought for a moment, then fibbed as if it was the most natural thing in the world. ....Andrew this, Andrew that. It was nice being the centre of conversation for once, a new sensation for me. All the time I knew

I was getting into trouble.... (36-7)

Here the focalisation of the narrative voice is made overt, so that “the attitudes of character, narrator and implied reader coincide” (McCallum 35). The passage continues at some length, with Connie providing a running commentary on the foolishness of her own actions, but persisting nonetheless, even when the others, suspecting her mendacity, ask to meet Andrew:

‘Well, you can’t,’ I blurted out quickly. Then, at the look on their faces, I carried on desperately. ‘He’s — he’s studying today.’

‘Poor boy,’ Susan sneered .... (38)

Now the “desperate” commentary jeopardises the usually close relationship that exists between first-person narrator and audience, requiring implied readers to distance themselves from Connie in order to question the price of friendship with such a group.

Smoking serves as Vasil’s ultimate example of the corrupting influence of the peer group, an adult vice that signifies the endpoint of Connie’s rebellion. For the first time, she attempts to make a stand: “I pushed up my glasses nervously. ‘No thanks — I — don’t smoke.’ There, it was out” (39). However, confronted with the collective might of the peer group’s derision, the individual once again succumbs, with the inevitable result: “I grabbed the cigarette from Eva, nearly burning myself, and took a deep puff. A minute later, I was coughing and spluttering. It tasted so foul I could have thrown up!” (39). Here, finally, Connie’s genuine reaction leads to her renunciation of the flawed values of the peer group. The moral is handled more didactically than in works written by adults (who tend not to reveal their agenda in this way): “I think it was then I first started to realise — I hated being with the popular girls. I wanted to be myself, and that was impossible with them” (40-1). Being oneself, however, does not mean independence. Rather it represents conformity of a different sort, as Connie now opts for wholesome activities such as bike riding, and befriending a neighbouring blind girl and her sister. In this way, *Dark Secret* seems to suggest that — in order to “be herself” — the protagonist must repudiate adolescentness completely. Adolescents as a collective are portrayed as lacking in humanity, exhibiting all the worst excesses: rudeness to adults, outrageous attire, smoking, and deceit. On the other hand, the individual adolescent (as virtuous as any child in literature) can be empowered to resist the temptations of peer-pressure, conforming to adult mores instead.

Such representations never doubt that peer-pressure corrupts. Unlike *Dark Secret*, however, whose use of the first person narrative stressed the undesirability of belonging to the “in” group from the very beginning, Paula Boock’s *Home Run* (1995) takes the opposite approach, exploring the insidious

desire to belong. Fourth-former Bryony is portrayed as a good all-rounder, well liked at her old (single-sex) school in Christchurch. However, moving “two-thirds of the way through the year” (*Home Run* 7) invalidates her previous standing, and — abandoning her former scruples — Bryony compromises her integrity in a misguided attempt to fit into the tougher co-ed Auckland environment she finds herself in. By creating a character who possesses all the attributes required to be both popular and good, then displacing her from her milieu, Boock warns readers against conforming to a peer group founded on flawed values — “to do too well at something made you enemies...Rule Number One” (20) — as well as showing what happens when teenagers disobey adults’ rules.

Beginning with the non-regulation uniform already mentioned, the text portrays Bryony engaged in increasingly delinquent behaviour: graffiti-ing the girls’ toilets, cheeking the principal, and smoking. Like Vasil, Boock also rejects smoking, but Bryony’s growing deviancy is shown when she redefines the act on her own terms:

It was horrible to smoke, so Bryony blew out most of it without trying to draw in. She’d tried cigarettes before but had always thought it was dumb. Another rule for ‘fitting in’ at Merimeri, Dad? she thought. Shelley and Ata really enjoyed it when she burnt holes in rude shapes into the new vinyl flooring. (40)

The narrative aside invokes the adult point-of-view directly, the panoptic gaze indicating the adolescent is well aware of the inappropriateness of her actions.<sup>1</sup> Boock has said that she tries “very hard not to provide good role models, [but does not] always succeed” (Email to the author). The depiction of Bryony satisfies both possible interpretations of her statement: by portraying undesirable behaviour, Boock invites readers to consider the alternative.

*Home Run* is one of the few New Zealand YA novels to engage adolescent and adult, in this case, Bryony’s form teacher, head-to-head:

When ... Mr Kirk asked her to spell budgerigar she spelt out loud ‘B.. U.. G.. G.. E.. R.. Y.. until, amidst the laughing, he told her off.

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<sup>1</sup> Bryony’s liberal parents suggested she could make friends by joining in the local activities, but readers can easily infer that neither Bryony nor her father had this sort of behaviour in mind.

She looked down at her desk then, because she quite liked Mr Kirk  
and felt bad about having set him up. (40)

Despite her challenge to authority, the final sentence makes its wrongness overt, as Bryony literally hangs her head in shame. At the same time, however, in the next sentence, “Shelley nudged her and passed a note from Ata which said *Softball after school. Be on my team?*” (40). The allure of peer-pressure requires the protagonist to make a choice: her display of disrespect in class is the very reason the gang has now accepted her. At this stage of the novel, peer pressure wins out, an outcome that reveals its insidiousness, if it can corrupt a strong character like Bryony.

Boock’s novel also suggests a classist critique of the peer group when the narrative takes juvenile delinquency to another level, and the gang “wag” school to go shoplifting (64). Bryony’s participation cements her status within the group, but her booty, a copy of *The Merchant of Venice* in contrast to the others’ make-up and cigarettes, signals to implied readers that she does not belong. Where the narrative previously allowed misguided adolescent autonomy free rein in order to establish the corrupting influence of the peer group, Bryony’s solo shoplifting attempt results in immediate intervention: police, headmaster, and parents. At her mother’s command, “Wipe that muck off your face” (79), the delinquent reverts to her obedient, “true” self. After an initial period of readjustment, Bryony renounces the unacceptable peer group, “fitting in” perfectly at a new (private, single-sex) school, while the narrative rewards her for reforming by sanctioning her relationship with the one gang member, Ata, with whom she had an affinity. Both girls are selected for a representative softball team coached by Bryony’s mother, a resolution that not only provides a wholesome outlet for adolescent energies, but also allows for the on-going adult supervision that adolescents apparently require.

Further evidence of the insidious nature of peer pressure is illustrated when the adolescent collective actively torments a virtuous outsider, who subsequently triumphs. In Joseph’s *Worlds Apart*, the narrator, fifteen-year-old Cara, is also a new girl at school, her reticence attributable to the recent suicide of her older brother. Here two aspects operate to empower the individual to overcome the collective. First, the adolescent voice directly conveys the

authorial message, thereby inviting implied readers' allegiance. Second, at no time does the protagonist succumb to the temptations of the peer group, whose negative attributes are reinforced throughout. Cara likens Jody the ringleader to a vixen, before adding "at least [foxes] didn't make my life hell. Accuse me of staring at her (I wasn't) and then slam me 'accidentally on purpose' into my locker" (11). Jody also calls Cara "thunderthighs" (36), "weirdo" (65) and "nutter" (116), disrespects the teacher (8, 11, 54) and Cara's father (28), and — sealing her undesirability — spreads a rumour that Cara's brother was "mental" (89).

Countering this, the text stresses the conformist adolescent's virtues: Cara's loyalty to her brother's memory, her burgeoning friendship with other (equally virtuous) pupils, and her natural talent as Ophelia in the class production of *Hamlet*. Joseph uses Cara's eventual triumph over bullying primarily as a metaphor for overcoming her sense of guilt at her brother's death, but it also serves as an exemplar of right behaviour:

It would be good to give Jody some of her own medicine. ...there was a hush as everyone waited to see what I would do. I looked at the face I thought I hated. How easy it would be to smash my backpack in that face — to see her fall. (117)

To act thus would be to sink to Jody's level, and the text preserves the upper hand by describing signs of Jody's weakness: dry lips, flickering eyes, and recourse to "firing obscenities" (118) as Cara walks away. Without explicitly mentioning the concept of one's "true self," nevertheless this confrontation acts as an epiphany, depicting Cara as able to accept herself, irrespective of others' opinions. With a happy ending in the same vein as Vasil's *Dark Secret, Worlds Apart* validates the individual over the deviant collective. In this way, although not directly influenced by adults, Cara's rejection of peer-pressure models socially-acceptable behaviour.

### **"Getting wasted"**

Within New Zealand children's novels, delinquent behaviour generally occurs in the absence of adults, reinforcing the notion that adolescent independence leads to wrong choices. While this refusal to recognise the need to practise autonomy

negates the traditional behavioural tasks laid down for adolescence, it accords with Ritchie and Ritchie's view that, in New Zealand, the definition of being adult consists of obeying rules, rather than acting independently. Seen in this light, the influence of the peer group could be said to support these aims, the individual adolescent conforming after all, were it not for the adultist imperative that seems to require obedience to the "right" rules. This social control is most clearly shown in novels that deal with potentially harmful behaviours. Although Bernard Beckett, writing in 1999, defines "normal" teenagers as those who "fall in love of course, go to parties, drink too much [and] do some dope" (*Lester* 40), a definition shared by practically all the novels of the final two decades, this is not to say authors condone it. Teenagers are encroaching upon adult territory without permission. As already demonstrated, "most YA fiction is heavily moral" (Beckingsale et al.), and, in accordance with the didactic impulse underlying children's fiction, as well as society's impulse to protect citizens from themselves, depictions tend to magnify the negative consequences: drinking invariably leads to vomiting; driving under the influence always kills; unprotected sex results in pregnancy, or worse.

According to one of the adolescents interviewed in the sociological study, *Teenangels: Being a New Zealand Teenager*, "Getting drunk is part of being a teenager," based on the rationale that "if adults do it, it must be worth a try" (Gray 90-1). While such a comment suggests New Zealand culture displays a *laissez-faire* attitude towards alcohol consumption, Ritchie and Ritchie interpret this as a corollary to the demand for conformity, suggesting that getting drunk liberates adults from the "inhibitions of social order" (56), excusing behaviour not otherwise condoned. On the other hand, they note "adolescent alcohol use is associated with independence from adult supervision" (52), a flawed independence its literary representation seeks to redress.

As has already been shown, adult authors tend to uphold more conservative values than may operate in reality, and all the texts strenuously warn against the dangers of alcohol, beginning with William Satchell's *The Greenstone Door* (1914):

As for the beer, one mouthful was enough for me. Anything more  
nauseous had never passed my lips, and despite the whispered

remonstrances of my companion, not another drop would I take.

Nor have I drunk beer from that day to this. (151)

Satchell's Cedric is rare in that he abstains completely, but other works also stress the unpleasant side effects of alcohol. In *Worlds Apart* (Joseph), Cara's first taste of (stolen) spirits is highly volatile, "The drink made me cough and I felt the liquid burn all the way down to my stomach. Any minute smoke would pour out of my ears" (49). Robyn, in Faville's *Stanley's Aquarium*, describes the "highlight" of a typical teenage party as seeing "who vomits first" (27), with one character, "known as Spaghetti Guts," notorious for "[erupting] as reliably and regularly as a geyser." Nor is this trait restricted to boys:

The young ladies were more unpredictable. They tended to go for such beverages as rum and coke, gin and lemonade, rum and coke and lemonade, gin and lemonade and rum, and whatever else mine host could lay his hands on... The results could be spectacular and sudden. (28).

Here the disapproving tone may be justified in that the narrator is recalling past events, but the use of phrases such as "young ladies" and "mine host" also draws attention to the clear misappropriation of adult roles. William Taylor, in *Beth & Bruno* (1992) takes this misguided adolescent action even further, describing a gathering where "someone [was] spiking just about everything liquid with a plentiful supply of vodka" (3). Even though, in common with Cara and Robyn, Beth is not drunk, she leaves the party in the company of a boy who tries to assault her sexually, his "boozy onion breath...[making] her gag" (22). Such depictions, presented within the text as typical adolescent behaviour, are sufficiently repellent to give implied readers pause for thought.

Other portrayals advocate against more serious alcohol addiction, such as that of Fleur Beale's protagonist, seventeen-year-old Ash, in *Further Back Than Zero* (1998):

'I used to wipe out the whole weekend. Regularly. Sleep right through school Monday and Tuesday. Be ready to party again on Friday night. Loved it. Thought it was the only way to live.' (101)

The matter-of-factness of the account, together with the inference that no one noticed, is mitigated by the irony of the final phrase, together with the past tense, as the story goes on to describe his subsequent reform. Nevertheless, Ash's

newfound virtue is undercut by the depiction of his stepbrother, fifteen-year-old Sam, beginning the cycle yet again: “I’m drunk. I’m well and truly plastered. Pissed as a fart. Good party. Great Party. Wanna drink?” (162). Misguided behaviour, however, serves as a basis from which to promote rehabilitation, as shown by Sam’s subsequent words:

‘I’ve been experimenting. Robbie and Jase, they got smashed every weekend for a month. Me? I had me a good time. Got drunk. I did, I’ll be honest with you. But I walked home each time. Didn’t end up in the cells.

Didn’t go driving with them. And I remembered it all the next day... I knew when to stop.’ (176-7)

Acknowledging that abstinence is perhaps an unrealistic aim, the text replaces unacceptable excess with moderation. It does not occur without adult influence, however, in that Sam’s reform comes about only after his stepmother’s death.<sup>1</sup> Now portrayed as “thinking about being a cop” (179) — the poacher turning gamekeeper — Sam also intends to “go back to school. Pass a couple of exams. Work for a year or two. Travel a bit” (180), ambitions that present readers with suitably sober, grown-up alternatives to drink.

Interestingly, although illegal, “dope,” a potentially corrupting aspect of society (like bodgies), which only appears in New Zealand children’s books well after the initial reaction to its appearance in society has died down, seems to be regarded by authors as a lesser danger than alcohol. Writing in the 1980s and 90s, Marshall and Joseph mention characters who smoke cannabis in passing, and in Beale’s *Further Back Than Zero*, the memorial service for a boy asphyxiated at a party (too drunk to save himself from being crushed in a *mêlée*) offers the following obituary: “He was okay. Into surfing. Got wasted a lot. Liked the dope a bit much” (38). While the undemonstrative attitude appears at odds with the strong sense of prohibition afforded alcohol, this may perhaps be explained by society’s attitude. Drinking, as has been shown, is regarded as an adult preserve, whereas authors seem to consider smoking cannabis a predominantly adolescent pursuit. Therefore, downplaying reaction — as with

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<sup>1</sup> She was fatally injured in a car accident caused by Sam’s drunken father, in which the other driver also died. Adult fallibility will be discussed in Chapter Four.

non-conformist fashions — possibly operates to lessen its appeal. However, while authors overlook possession for personal use, they draw the line at commercial gain (a further encroachment into adult territory), with both Westie in Kate de Goldi's *Closed, Stranger* (1999) and the villain in Bernard Beckett's *Lester* (1999) arrested for their involvement in schemes to grow and distribute cannabis.

The disapproving narratorial voice is at its strongest when dealing with potentially harmful adolescent behaviour. The most delinquent character to be given a name and speaking part, Jacob, in Joseph's *Worlds Apart*, indulges in alcohol, cigarettes, cannabis and drugs, all of which he has stolen. Readers view him through the eyes of the narrator, Cara, with the novel's title directly alluding to the differences in values between the two. Cara initially finds him attractive (she is new to the district, has yet to make friends, and "he was there for me" [75]). However, each succeeding reference is qualified in some way, either by Cara's own reservations, or the imagined comments of her late brother: "*He's a crim — his eyes are too close together*" (20) and "*A bludger, squatting and smoking cigarettes — Dad'll love him!*" (22). Such conservative observations echo adult opinion, expressed by an old woman in the street: "Just look at that! Street kids they call them. Huh! Bludgers and druggies, that's what they are. Shouldn't be surprised if they're responsible for all the robbery and crime around Shelley Bay!" (79). Despite Cara's initial attraction to Jacob, her words convey increasing disapproval at each encounter. His kiss is "spoiled by the smell and taste of tobacco" (48), stolen alcohol "burns all the way down to my stomach" (49); she questions the appearance of "new CDs" (83), and drug use is overtly criticised. Even though "lots of kids smoked grass, ... as I watched Jacob's eyes losing their brightness...I was aware of a chilly, disappointed feeling inside me" (83), a disenchantment implied readers are expected to share as well.

Where West and Harland kept their bodgies firmly in the reported past, Joseph gives her delinquent a speaking role. However, the first person narration lessens the likelihood that Jacob's anti-social behaviour will corrupt readers, because their perception of him is filtered through a focalising point-of-view. In Jacob's own words, Cara, the narrator, is every parent's ideal child: "You don't

smoke, you say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’” (47). Her virtuous restraint contrasts with Jacob’s supposed independence: “Free, that’s what I am, free! No hassles, no one bawling me out like a sergeant major. Just the seagulls, the wind and me!” (23). However, readers are invited to question a freedom that entails no home, no money, and no social conscience. Jacob’s subsequent drug overdose (102), testimony to his recklessness rather than a deliberate act, confirms the undesirability of his lifestyle, with Cara’s reaction — “I could see him clearly for the first time and I wasn’t certain I liked what I saw” (112) — presented as an appraisal with which readers are expected to concur.

Teenage drink-driving is perceived as one of the most dangerous aspects that children’s fiction seeks to curb, by using the adolescent voice: “‘It’s just like [the driver] has a loaded gun and you others kept telling him to shoot, kill, yay man Jase, get him guy!’” (*Further Back Than Zero* 91). New Zealand Land Transport Safety Authority statistics (1980-2002) reveal that 1985 saw the highest number of 15-19 year-old drivers involved in car accidents causing injury (4427), while the most fatal car accidents occurred in 1987 (195). Tessa Duder, writing in 1987, is the first to address the issue, when Alex and Andy go for a drive with Andy’s friend Keith and his girlfriend. On the way home the boys stop off at the pub for “‘a couple of bottles’” (*Alex* 74). The text overlooks the fact they are seventeen (in 1959, when the story is set, the legal drinking age was twenty-one) in order to press home its message. Neither boy appears drunk, but the forthright Alex is portrayed as insisting that Andy walk her home, whereas Keith and Vicky have an accident, and are literally scarred for life. A modern consciousness seems to colour the narrative when Alex challenges Andy, and he asks indignantly, “‘What did you expect me to do? [Take] his car keys away’” (*Alex* 82). Her rejoinder “‘Why not?’” seems to speak for itself, in an episode reinforcing the notion of adolescence as a time of irresponsibility, at the same time as inculcating right behaviour.

A similar message is conveyed by Heather Marshall’s *Gemma, Brooke & Madeleine* (1988), which describes Madeleine, having sampled her boyfriend’s father’s whisky, getting caught doing “‘one hundred and fifty’” (150) without a licence. In this case, Madeleine’s refusal to admit her guilt, coupled with her boyfriend’s misguided loyalty in taking the blame (thereby losing his father’s

respect), doubly reinforces adolescent recklessness. This is the only instance in the texts that does not result in an accident, possibly because Marshall mixes the even more volatile combination of drugs and driving in a later example, when Gemma's former boyfriend crashes his father's car, killing his twelve-year-old brother, and maiming the other passengers into the bargain. Duder and Marshall report these events in retrospect, but in *Closed, Stranger* de Goldi graphically depicts travelling with someone whose "system's loaded with lysergic acid" (100), resulting in the death of the narrator's girlfriend. The grimness of these consequences<sup>1</sup> seem to indicate that New Zealand children's fiction of the late twentieth century is, in many ways, even more didactic than the earlier works in the study, when society awarded adolescents less freedom, and their conformity to adult mores was perhaps more certain.

In each case, disempowerment of characters within the text operates to empower implied readers to right action, a treatment that treads softly when confronting the most disturbing aspect of adolescent "storm and stress:" suicide. New Zealand has had the highest rate in the developed world for teen suicides since 1987, with 39.9 per 100,000 of population between 1991-93 (compared with 24.6 for Australia, 21.9 for USA and 12.2 for the UK) (Mental Health and Wellbeing 2000). By 1998, the suicide rate for New Zealand adolescents aged 15-24 had dropped to 26.1 per 100,000 (38.5 per 100,000 males aged 15-24 and 13.3 per 100,000 females), but this is still significant when compared with 14.2 per 100,000 for the total population (NZ Health Information Service 2002). The novels that deal with the topic pick up on these statistics, recognising males as particularly vulnerable, and invoking the therapeutic nature of literature to dissuade readers from similar pathways.

Each author presents suicide as inexplicable, an extreme symptom of adolescent "storm and stress" brought about by characters acting independently of adult guidance. In most cases, novels downplay the act itself in much the same way as delinquent behaviour, relegating it outside the boundaries of the text, which means none of the suicides is given the opportunity to explain his

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<sup>1</sup> In the event, the incidence of teenagers causing fatal road accidents has dropped steadily from its 1987 peak, with fewer than 100 a year since 1992, down to only 60 in 1999 (NZLTSA).

intended actions. Vivienne Joseph wrote *Worlds Apart* in memory of her brother. Establishing parallels with Hamlet, the text presents the narrator's brother Aaron (who threw himself in front of a train before events in the novel began) as a thinker who “didn't *ever* talk about his feelings” (114), alerting implied readers to how his death could have been avoided. Jerome, in Taylor's novel of the same name (1999), dies in a shooting “accident” (*Jerome* 7), also before the narrative begins. In this case, the death is attributed to his inability to find affirmation of his sexuality in a homophobic society, once again suggesting how it could have been prevented. Westie, in de Goldi's *Closed, Stranger*, is the only suicidal character readers meet. Described by David Hill as “protean, amoral, ruthless, hugely vulnerable” (2000 44), Westie has a long history of mental instability and drug abuse, and jumps off “Suicide Point” after a cumulative series of crises brought about by his own excesses. In this way, adult authors portray suicide as a needlessly tragic consequence that readers should recognise as a further example of flawed autonomy.

Within a study that focuses on the presence of adult authority within New Zealand children's fiction, the texts examined in this chapter are unusual in that they portray adolescents acting independent of adult control. Behaviourists consider such autonomy is the very purpose of adolescence, yet, New Zealand works depict such actions as flawed, an attitude effectively expressed by Boock's term, “addled essence.” Boock ascribes this response to authors' desire to protect readers “from making mistakes” (email to author 1998). However, it is this underlying ideology that, by its very nature — which Nodelman would term ‘imperialist’ (34) — disempowers adolescents, reducing them to the status of children. Far from exploring the power relations between adult and adolescent, the emphasis on “the adolescent problem” becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, at the same time serving to shore up adults' own sense of self and stability. Zornado alludes to the Calvinist notion that “the adult is *reformed* and the child *wicked*” (76), and, certainly, the works examined in this chapter imply that the only good adolescent is one who behaves according to adult expectations. “Bad” adolescents, on the other hand, are removed from the narrative: silenced, incarcerated or killed. Although authority figures are absent within the text, the narrative voice maintains control, with each account of deviancy invoking a

counter reading that upholds orthodoxy, a didactic imperative that extends to readers as well.

## Chapter Four: “What about the olds?”

The inherent power relationship between author and reader is made manifest by the depiction of adult and adolescent characters within the texts. Trites considers that “central to the construction of adolescent literature as a tool of socialization is the issue of how adult writers depict authority in the literature” (54). As already shown, this depiction may alter in form, but the dominant ideology remains. Works set before 1965 tend to depict adults’ influence as undisputed, with any examples of adolescents behaving independently bearing a remarkable similarity to how adults would act in the same situation. The representation undergoes a shift towards the end of the century, however, which can be attributed to social factors such as an increasing relaxation of moral standards, rising divorce rates, and the resultant breakdown of the ideal middle-class family unit, with works portraying a significant number of single parent families. In response to the destabilisation of traditional roles, such portrayals tend to downplay adults’ hegemonic status by presenting them as characters in their own right, rather than just as authority figures, thereby inviting readers to empathise with the adult point-of-view directly, sometimes at the expense of an adolescent character. As further evidence of this apparent pluralism, roles may even be reversed, with adolescents acting as caregivers, while adults display the irresponsible behaviour typically associated with youth. While “immature” behaviour lessens the authority of the individual adult, nevertheless, its depiction continues to exert control over adolescents within an ideological discourse. Not only must they now assume the responsibility previously displayed by parents, they frequently express a desire for more “normal” (authoritarian) parents.

A notable development of New Zealand YA literature towards the end of the twentieth century concerns the appearance of flawed adult characters. With the demise of the nuclear family, the absent partner —often the father — is portrayed as forfeiting the rights normally associated with the role of “parent.” In each case, however, the outcome is the same: the adolescent must adapt to the adult’s wishes, forgiving his or her parent’s foibles, and realising what it is to be properly adult at the same time. As well as depicting how adults and adolescents *should* behave in relation to each other, a number of works portray child abuse:

physical, psychological, and sexual. Incest represents the ultimate expression of flawed adult power, with its fictional treatment providing an occasion to apologise for this abuse, as shown by representative British and American novels on the topic. However, although fulfilling a bibliotherapeutic aim, in that the adolescent victim is empowered to survive the abuse, New Zealand YA works in this study — unlike novels for younger children, such as Maurice Gee's *The Fire Raiser* and *The Fat Man* — rarely portray adults being punished. Moreover, while the cessation of abuse is presented as a positive outcome, a corresponding emphasis on the perpetrators' weakness seems to imply an adultist call for forgiveness rather than condemnation.

This chapter traces a significant shift in the representation of power relations within the texts. Beginning with the unquestioned adult authority evident in the early decades, works reveal an ever-diminishing sense of parental certainty towards the end of the century, not only as a result of the liberal parenting advocated during the 1980s, but also of the role revisions that seemed to be occasioned by marital break-ups, when adults may revert to “adolescence” once more. Nevertheless, works continue to foreground the adult point-of-view, requiring adolescent characters to place their parents' wishes before their own, thereby reinforcing within the texts an authority that may well no longer exist in reality.

The early works in this study presuppose automatic obedience to adult direction. In Esther Glen's novels, *Six Little New Zealanders* (1917) and *Uncles Three at Kamahi* (1926), for example, adult characters remain in the background, but their influence is all pervasive. Ngaire, the twelve-year-old narrator of both novels, comments that she cannot find words to describe them: “Father is just father, and mother is — well, think of everything good and kind and gentle and loving and understanding, and you've got mother” (*Six Little New Zealanders* 4). Even though the children's parents are absent for the majority of both novels (at “Home” in England in the first, and attending a conference in Sydney in the second), the formalised descriptions acknowledge the hegemonic authority inherent in their titles. As well as physical distance, Glen's characterisations suggest an emotional distance between adult and child, revealed by twelve-year-old Ngaire's accounts of the uncles who act as

surrogate parents. Uncle John “is big and fierce, and talks as if you were deaf, but is believed to have a kind heart” (2), although he has a “moustache, which seemed to perk at the corners when he stormed,” and Uncle Stephen has “eyes, which went right through you and out the other side” (11). Such descriptions seem to establish their physical and moral dominance from the first.

Events in the novels reinforce this impression of fair but impartial authority, and the uncles’ decisions are not expected to be questioned. Jan, for example, may be incensed to learn that nineteen-year-old Kathie is to dine with the adults, and she and her younger siblings will eat their meals separately:

‘[In] the nursery, mind you, and I’m fifteen.’

‘All but five months,’ I added, for I like accuracy, and Jan is apt to lose count of the months when her dignity is in question. (31-2)

Nevertheless, here is a further example of the child narrator voicing adult opinion, as both tone and characterisation indicate such outrage is inappropriate. Jan might declare her intention to “to walk straight into the dining room and sit down and say I’ve come to breakfast,” but the very next sentence reveals that she thinks better of it:

‘What are you waiting for? Why don’t you go in straight away?’

Rob asked unkindly.

‘Because I don’t choose to,’ snapped Jan. (33)

Jan’s words imply a choice that is, in fact, denied her. From the first, the text implies fourteen-year-olds should know their place. Irrespective of her opinion, Jan is still a child, an appraisal endorsed by comic reports of her blunders throughout the novels.

The generational divide is made explicit in the account of her older brother Rob’s experience. Having remained “carefully indifferent” (34) in the face of the same edict, Rob appears to acquire a persuasive force his sister’s indignation lacks:

Rob drew himself up till he seemed growing before our very eyes.

‘I’m sixteen — seventeen nearly,’ he said.

‘And I’m twenty-four,’ answered uncle, laughing. He put his hand on Rob’s shoulder. ‘Breakfast is waiting for us in the dining-room, old chap,’ he said. ‘Come along.’

One moment Rob hesitated, then drew himself up straighter than ever.

‘Thanks, *Dan!*’ he said; and they went up the veranda together and in at the dining-room window. (34)

The italicising of “*Dan*” is significant within the context. The children have previously discussed how they should refer to their elderly uncles’ adopted ward, with Rob indicating his refusal to call him “*Uncle Dan*” on principle. Entry into the symbolic adult domain, the dining room, can be seen as a graphic representation of their equality. It should be noted, however, that, at twenty-four, Dan also occupies a liminal position; his status will only be fully ratified when he marries, and Rob is still on probation.

Glen’s examples reveal the inherent power dynamic dictating when a child becomes an adolescent (or an adolescent an adult), irrespective of the child’s own wishes. Edith Howes illustrates this further in *The Golden Forest* (1932). Written primarily as a treatise on reproduction (as will be discussed in Chapter Five), the work also deals with human development. Howe employs the term “adolescence” for the first time in New Zealand children’s literature, using analogies from nature to make her point, as in this unsympathetic portrait of a fledgling albatross:

...one of the younglings was plainly defying its parents. They had swept in on broad pinions from the sea and stood gravely regarding him, on each side of the nest.

They were slenderer than he: fat had given way to stretched and hard-tested muscle; and the dark plumage of youth had changed to a snowy and glistening white. They had the greater strength and determination of their age, too, for now they closed in on him and quietly heaved him off the nest.

...The young bird was funny. He sprawled on the ground beside the nest, tried clumsily to scramble on it, made fat and amusing gestures of discomfort and rage. Every time he tried to mount the nest he was met by a sharp beak of the father or mother. (*The Golden Forest* 148-9)

A sense of adult superiority pervades the focalising description, which contrasts the youngster unfavourably with its parents: “fat” versus “slender” and

“muscled,” “dark” versus “glistening white” plumage, defiance versus “determination,” and “fat and amusing gestures” versus “a sharp beak.” Not only do these comparisons place him at a disadvantage, both physically and morally (with the description normalising adult violence), his behaviour is made to appear ludicrous.

The text justifies the adults’ actions, in that, having devoted a year to this chick, they need the nest for a new egg. The inference is clear: youth in contrast is a selfish, non-productive state. Howes’ text goes on to make this view of adolescence as a state of indolence even more explicit: “‘He’s never learned to fly, nor even to walk. He’s just sat there and been fed until he’s as fat as a porpoise” (150). Clearly, such an ideologically undesirable state cannot be allowed to continue:

‘His parents will make him go down to the sea, and on the way he’ll certainly learn how to walk, and perhaps to fly a little. When he reaches the sea he’ll learn to float and fish and find his own food.’ (150)

The adult point-of-view governs this whole passage, with attaining maturity (learning to “float and fish and find his own food”) assumed a straightforward process, once it has been initiated by the parents. Neither the narrative voice nor the human onlookers within the story consider the dangers a vulnerable fledgling might encounter on its journey:

Now they all stood laughing, for the youngling, trying again to scramble on the nest, had been ignominiously bundled down and rolled head over heels. He righted himself a couple of yards down the slope and sat there with the most comical look, rueful and astounded, objecting loudly. (150)

By describing the young bird’s efforts as ridiculous, and further reinforcing this elsewhere with words like “fuss,” “ungainly,” “waddle,” and “tumble” (150), the narrative voice mitigates against the intended audience feeling any empathy for the adolescent, literally caught between two worlds. Any objection is futile. More than that, it is regarded as socially unacceptable.<sup>1</sup> Only when the young

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<sup>1</sup> Peacocke, in her 1932 novel, *The Cruise of the Crazy Jane*, characterised the human equivalent as “whining” (133).

bird successfully reaches the sea (and adulthood) will he be described favourably:

With some of his fat used up and his muscles hardened [he will grow] more powerful in flight, ... till he becomes expert. This time next year he will be fit to go off with the older birds to the far, trackless ocean, where he will fly as royally as any. (152)

This can be seen as a rare example of a successful rite of passage. The conclusion — “all young things have to be turned adrift one day, to find their own powers” (151) — however, in no way implies autonomy. Rather, it emphasises his disadvantage, affirming the expectation that the fledging will conform to behaviours laid down by adults.

Adult control as a fact of nature is confirmed with a literal instance of “sink or swim” in Howes’ description of the otter family, when the idyllic scene of mother and babies “gambolling” in the sunlight alters abruptly on the agency of the parent:

She swam for some time, the young ones high and dry on her back. Suddenly, without a sound of warning, she sank from under them, leaving them in the water, there to struggle as they might. (179)

A text-book example of what Zornado calls “detachment parenting” (186), the account stresses the mother’s refusal to help her young, forcing them to make their own way to shore:

Wet and shivering, sulky and afraid, they would not come back at their mother’s call. It was she who had played this cruel trick on them, their mother, who had hitherto been all kindness, all gentleness, all love. (179)

Here the omniscient narrator makes a rare sortie into irony, confident that implied readers will recognise the mother’s overall purpose, as well as sharing her view that the sooner the youngsters stop sulking and do as they are told, the better. Any power the young otters might manifest by refusing to obey is totally negated by the realisation that, within the animal kingdom, the alternative is death. Not only does such a consequence endorse the ideological imperative to conform, it affirms adulthood as the measure of success.

Within this discourse, independence is awarded only on adults’ terms. The relationship between father and child in Phillis Garrard’s *Hilda* series

(1932, 1938, 1944) has already been introduced, with Leach commenting that even though Hilda's father encourages her "to be a free thinker, he also cautions her to be responsible" (61). In other words, she must still behave as he would wish. Moreover, at the very moment when the father acknowledges the adolescent as separate from the child — "I've got to face it. You're a person now, with a mind and a will of your own"— he does so by foregrounding adult dominance:

'You think you've got [your children] just where you want them, and they slip through your fingers like quicksilver. I'd give anything if I could take you home, give you a good spanking with my slipper and tuck you up with your favourite doll. But.... (*Hilda, Fifteen* 173)

While acknowledging his lessening hold, nevertheless, the father's allusion to giving her "a good spanking" seems to suggest a causal link between Hilda's newly-acquired status and his parenting. Moreover, as already shown in Chapter Two, the adult is only prepared to "face it" because the adolescent's values mirror his own. If they did not, the narrative voice would have conveyed a quite different reaction.

In contrast to Hilda's father, whom Leach considers "unrealistically fair and good" (61), Garrard depicts the father of one of Hilda's friends, Priscilla, "an international, obsessive, 'yuppie' parent" according to Leach, who "compulsively meddles" (62) in his children's lives: "Papa always has lots of ideas. He tries them out on me mostly, because he says The Young are Plastic Clay — with capital letters. It's rather fun." Priscilla goes on to explain her father's grand scheme for turning his family into "citizens of the world, not just of one country, thus preventing wars" (*Tales Out of School* 55). Despite his admirable aim, the narrative voices a rare critique, portraying him as ignoring his children's own needs in his zeal "to improve" them. Although "for one flying regrettable second," Hilda wished her father shared "a little of this intriguing eccentricity" (60), Priscilla and her father form only a minor, comic, interlude. In line with Garrard's overall advocacy of "free-thinking" within the bounds of orthodoxy, this episode serves to reinforce the preferable relationship between Hilda and *her* father, in which, Leach concludes, "Hilda moves from

being unconsciously influenced by [him] to respecting and understanding his position in her life” (63). Nevertheless, in both Garrard’s instances, as with the previous examples from Glen and Howes, the adolescent must choose to defer to adult authority.

### **“You know what parents are like”**

An alternative depiction of the adult/adolescent power dynamic explores what happens when each party appears to be acting unreasonably from the other’s point-of-view, although the onus is always on the adolescent to accommodate the adult world view, rather than the other way round. This is put to the test in Paula Boock’s *Dare, Truth or Promise* (1997), which portrays Tony and Susi, Catholic parents of Italian extraction, struggling to come to terms with the sexuality of their seventeen-year-old daughter, Louie.<sup>1</sup> She, in turn, cannot allow herself to acknowledge her feelings for Willa without her parents’ approval. In order to highlight these tensions, the text always has the girls meeting at Louie’s house, enabling Susi to surprise them naked in the spa pool, and “grimly” suggest that Willa leave. Despite Louie’s attempts to negotiate extra time, Susi refuses to listen, ““It’s Sunday morning ... and we’ve got church in seven hours.”” Louie’s refusal to attend mass only seems to reinforce the adult’s hand: ““Well the rest of the family is. And your father and I can’t sleep with the noise of the spa motor”” (81). Faced with the combined force of both parents, Louie’s undertone, ““What a bitch! You’d think I was twelve years old”” (81), foregrounds the problems inherent in direct confrontation between adult and adolescent. Both girls are seventeen, but, in the face of adult authority, Louie is as powerless as a child.

The adolescent may consider her parents unreasonable, but, within the text, adult authority remains inviolate:<sup>2</sup> “[Louie had] never really lied to her family before. She liked her family, actually. ...She tried to go to church, to regain something of a sense of family, of trust, of being the daughter they

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<sup>1</sup> A more detailed discussion of Louie’s sexuality occurs in Chapter Five.

<sup>2</sup> Susi’s desire for control, while focused on Louie, affects all her children. The youngest daughter, Marietta, is going through a stage of “insisting that everyone call her Ettie,” which her mother “[refuses] to do” (Boock 1997 33).

always thought she was” (103). This conflict forms the basis of the *Entwicklungsroman*, the tension between the adolescent’s individual wishes and her duty to her parents, an obedience Louie cannot bring herself to challenge:

Why did Susi keep on pretending? Why did she keep confronting Louie about Willa in snide, sly ways to try and bait her into saying the one thing she didn’t want to hear? [Louie] was on the verge of saying *You hate Willa because I love her* but at the last minute she drew her legs up onto the seat and sank back into the leather. (95)

Here the omniscient narrator presents the daughter’s point-of-view — which remains unvoiced in reality. In the face of Susi’s steadfast refusal to broach the topic of the girls’ sexuality coupled with the imperiousness of her next words — “Get your feet off the seat” (95) — Louie has no response.

Until this point, Susi’s characterisation, seen from Louie’s perspective, has emphasised her apparent ruthlessness. Now, the narrative voice switches to Susi’s point-of-view, describing how she “lurched from understanding and concern to fits of exasperation over Louie” (128). This intimation of Susi’s humanity is offered in mitigation for her authoritarian façade, and further reinforced by the narratorial return to Louie’s own reaction:

Louie was equally confused. She could see the worry in her mother’s eyes and wanted to make it go away, but when Susi snapped at her to stop moping or eat something for god’s sake or just pull herself together, Louie’s anger was violent. She said anything, anything that would hurt her mother as much as she’d hurt Louie. (128)

Seen through Louie’s eyes, the focalisation’s complex layering of points-of-view appears to measure the relative grievances, expecting readers to recognise that, despite its clumsiness, Susi’s behaviour is motivated by “worry,” evidence of a maternal concern that outweighs Louie’s childish reaction.

*Dare Truth or Promise* uses its omniscient narration to give adults the final say, as shown by the portrayal of other parents’ reactions to their daughters’ attempts to chart their own lives. In many ways, Boock’s parents represent the changing face of adult authority throughout the century. The most extreme response comes from the fundamentalist parents of Cathy, Willa’s former girlfriend, who, refusing to accept her lifestyle, reject her as a sinner,

which leads to her suicide attempt. This is an instance where a novel does not endorse parental power, instead presenting Cathy's distress (and her brother's bigoted "hate mail" campaign against Willa (145)) as argument against its abuse. A completely opposite reaction comes from Willa's mother, Jolene, who is as liberal as Cathy's parents are intolerant: "I didn't like that business with Cathy. ... But then I'd never had to think about it before. I hope I'm more understanding now, love" (115-116). Even while affirming Willa's sexuality, Jolene's words emphasise the adult's ability to decide how to respond, made explicit in her comment about Susi: "Mothers can grow up too, you know" (115). Adult hegemony has the potential to alter (reinstating itself in the process), but the power relationship between parent and child remains intact.

A further example of adult control is shown by Louie's father's apparent willingness to award his daughter autonomy:

'Whatever you decide in the long run is your decision. Much as we'd like to, we can't make it for you.' (130)

Delivered in the context of an anecdote about his own schoolboy crush on a fellow pupil (who has grown up to be as "camp as a row of pink tents" [131]) Tony's words function both to liberate and constrain Louie's ability to choose, as does his final comment: "it's easy to make too many decisions too early" (131). Of the three adolescents, only Willa has the freedom to be herself, because her mother has given her permission to do so.

These depictions suggest adolescent autonomy is a fiction, dependent as it is upon adult authorisation as Louie's words reveal:

'My parents think it's wrong, my friends can't mention it, the doctor says it's a stage, the church says it's a sin. Of course I'm beating myself up.' (157)

Each of these represents a further authority governing the life of the adolescent, who is unable to act without their permission. Although Louie and Willa are the protagonists, and the novel ultimately validates their relationship, they do nothing themselves to bring about the resolution. Adult points-of-view prevail, with Susi in the final chapter still maintaining Louie will "get over it" (162), as she arranges her a date with a "lovely boy" (163). Separated by Susi's determined efforts, both girls are portrayed as utterly miserable, until Willa

saves Louie's life after a car accident, which leads to a *dénouement* of sorts brought about by adult agency. In recognition of Willa's actions, Susi finally concedes that the girls are free to “form whatever relationship [they] decide upon together” (178). Even though the narrative voice points out that the speech was “painfully delivered” (176) rather than spontaneous, “practised” (178) rather than sincere, the inference seems clear: without adult consent, Willa and Louie's situation could not have been resolved. Moreover, Susi's point-of-view remains the novel's final image, as she is depicted “reading a magazine, trying not to think about what Louie and Willa were up to” (180), a portrayal that highlights adult influence over adolescent behaviour, even in its absence.

As Trites observes, “adolescent literature is ... an institutional discourse...that socializes adolescents into their cultural positions” (54). Spacks also acknowledges the inexorable connection between the generations in her observation: “eventually [adolescents] will turn into our counterparts” (6), yet the nature of the relationship remains unclear. For the first decades of the twentieth century, as already shown, society tended to regard adolescents as “ungrown-up grown-ups” (Garrard 1944 32), biding their time until permitted to make the transition to adulthood. This certainty affirmed the natural order of things, a reflection of the stability of the bourgeois family unit, whose values had remained relatively unchanged since the nineteenth century. By the 1950s, however, New Zealand was undergoing rapid social changes, accompanied by the increasing visibility of youth culture. Through the 60s and 70s, “youth” became synonymous with freedom, and by the 1980s the term “Yuppie” (Young Upwardly-Mobile Professional) described adults who were indeed “grown-up kids” (Garrard 1944 32), with few responsibilities and seemingly unlimited discretionary income. Over time, in recognition of the blurring of boundaries between the two states, adolescence became regarded as a “floating signifier” (Weinstein 73), a state of flux this thesis contends equally applies to “being adult.”

Society's changing attitudes can be inferred from a 1988 definition of parenting:

...[the parents of 'healthy' families] keep a strong sense of 'family' alive, giving family members security and a sense of

belonging; they are flexible and able to adapt to change, allowing teenagers to become independent; and they give everyone a chance to learn to communicate well, through conflict as well as consensus. (Gray 9-10)

Such a call for consensus could be regarded as impinging on adult authority. Certainly it requires a reassessment of roles, shown by much closer interaction between parent and child than in earlier novels, which took the hegemonic order for granted. The following exchange between seventeen-year-old Christy and her father from Kate de Goldi's *Love, Charlie Mike* (1997) for example, illustrates "flexible" parenting in action:

"Youth," grumbled Dad, stomping past my bedroom at 8 a.m.  
 'All care, no responsibility.' It got right up his nose that I stayed in bed till half past whenever and he had to slope off to work. ...  
 'Milk, no sugar please,' I called out. 'And honey on rye. *Rata* honey!'  
 'Get stuffed,' said Dad. (12)

Seen in terms of the Foucauldian power dynamic, the adult now appears the loser, as shown by the father's words when he returns with the breakfast:

'When did your last slave die?'  
 'Went mad so I had him put down.' (12)

In this case, however, father and daughter are playing out a familiar ritual that demonstrates their affection for each other, its humour arising from a sense of the "normal" hegemonic relationship indirectly being reinscribed. De Goldi's ironic allusion to the tyranny of youth represents a marked shift from Glen's 1916 account of an adolescent required to eat in the nursery, as evidence of the shifting intergenerational power dynamic.

One way of reasserting power is to foreground the adult standpoint directly. Introducing parents as characters in their own right, rather than simply in relation to their children invites readers to share their point-of-view. This is shown in Margaret Mahy's *The Catalogue of the Universe* (1985) by the description of Mr Potter's epilepsy, which has "circumscribed" the parents' lives to such an extent that

Their battles with the outside world were all conducted through stormy Africa or through Richard, who chose to violate every

precept they had concerning how people should look, speak, and particularly how they should behave to parents. (24)

Despite implying that the parents are the weaker force, this passage still succeeds in asserting their authority. The Potters' eldest, twenty-one-year-old Africa, for example, may be characterised as "difficult and demanding" (23), in that —even though she has left home — phone calls chronicling her marital strife permeate the narrative, with Mr and Mrs Potter depicted as having to mind their grandson, and/or receive their daughter any hour of the day or night. Nevertheless, Tycho, the obedient youngest child, identifies Africa's dependency, likening their mother to a bird: "whichever chick makes the loudest noise — that's the one she feeds" (28). This image perfectly fits with Paula Boock's observation that "[adolescence] is a strange, extended mollycoddling period which reminds me of those skinny little thrushes tending their fat, oversized chicks which have outgrown the nest but won't fly away!" (email to author 1988). Reminiscent of Howes' albatross, both metaphors imply selfish dependency on the part of the adolescent, whilst stressing not only parents' selflessness, but also their absolute centrality in their children's lives.

If Africa refuses to grow up, Richard, the Potters' middle child, directly challenges his parents' authority, although the text implies, by virtue of his unemployed status, that such disrespect is unmerited. As Tessa Duder observed, when asked about "adolescence" in general:

When I grew up in the 1950s, very clearly you became an adult, more or less when you left home at about 17 or 18, either to study or to work — or to travel, maybe a bit later. But the expectation was that you became — emotionally, financially and physically — independent from your parents.

Now that is no longer the case: we have students dependent on their parents for the purpose of study — money — up until they're twenty-five. I believe there is much more emotional dependence on parents now than there was then — and physically many of them have come back home in the 1980s and there isn't that degree of separation that there used to be. (Tape-recorded interview with author)

Duder's observation informs the reading of Richard's character, suggesting a dependence upon his parents he is unwilling to acknowledge.

His non-conformist appearance has already been discussed in Chapter Three, and his disrespectful behaviour operates in a similar fashion, simultaneously challenging and upholding adult authority:

'Richard, the whole hall reeks of that incense you burn,' Mr Potter said sternly.

'Oh, yes,' Richard said vaguely, sitting down and shaking muesli...into his bowl.

'I hope you don't think I'm fooled by it. I know it's there to hide something else,' Mr Potter went on in a knowing voice. 'I mightn't be what you call "trendy" but I...'

'Do you think I've had women in there?' Richard asked, growing alert and defensive at once. 'I haven't, but even if I had, so what? You're not the Lord God watching over the Garden of Eden, you know.' (30)

Descriptors like "sternly" and "in a knowing voice" validate the father's position, whereas Richard's defensiveness appears to imply his guilt. His words invoke the ultimate example of parental authority — "the Lord God watching over the Garden of Eden" — which the description of his father's reaction takes further: "He managed to suggest, with a single bitter smile, that if he had been watching over the Garden of Eden a great deal of subsequent trouble would have been averted" (30). However, Mr Potter actually says nothing at all. Within the text this suggests that, in allowing the adolescent a voice, the liberal parent has forfeited control. On the other hand, the narrative voice speaks directly to implied readers, making adult authority clear despite his forbearance. The relationship is further reinforced by Richard's response to speculation that he may have been "smoking something not quite ..." (ellipsis in original): "'Perish the thought!' cried Richard, casting up his eyes. 'Defile the room that little Hamish was conceived in. Father, you do me wrong!'" (30). By introducing yet another apparent consequence of flexible parenting (Africa's pregnancy with Hamish being the reason for her precipitate marriage), the adolescent character challenges the foundations of the traditional family hierarchy, even as the narrative voice reasserts it with mention of its violation.

In the earlier father/daughter exchange in de Goldi's *Love, Charlie Mike*, lack of filial respect signified mutual affection. Richard is also able to address his father as "you old goat" (31) without his father taking offence. However, Mr Potter's comment to his younger son Tycho's friend Angela — "His mother says he was a dear little boy once, and she's an honest woman on the whole, so I suppose he must have been" (31) — suggests nostalgia for a time when roles were more clear-cut. Moreover, the narrative voice evinces more sympathy for the adults, describing the Potters as *calm* and *anxious*, reacting *invitingly*, *kindly*, and *jovially* (30-31). Leach considers it remarkable that "Mahy shows us inside Mr Potter's head" (127), but it is precisely this device, as well as having the protagonist, Tycho, empathise with his mother, which enables the narrative to foreground the adult point-of-view:

'You know what parents are like, always thinking safe and happy come to the same thing where their kids are concerned.' His own parents had certainly felt that about Africa. ... 'Or maybe "safe" means less trouble for a parent. I don't know.' (37)

Presenting "the adolescent problem" in this way can be interpreted as serving an adultist imperative, in that adult forbearance may operate to influence "right" behaviour among implied readers where the direct imposition of authority no longer does.

Another text that invites readers to sympathise with the adult at the expense of the adolescent much more directly is Heather Marshall's *Gemma, Brooke & Madeleine*. Seventeen-year-old Madeleine has never known a father, which, coupled with the fact that her mother, Nanci, is a social worker (and, hence, "liberal"), gives Madeleine substantial power in their relationship. This first manifests itself in hostility towards her mother's longstanding boyfriend, but — as he is portrayed as undesirable (a chauvinist in thrall to his domineering mother) — the antagonism appears justified. However, when her aunt moves in, Madeleine's jealousy results in Nanci having to choose between her own wishes for moral and financial support and those of her daughter. Madeleine wins; the aunt and her seven-year-old son move out, with the implications of the resultant exchange chilling in terms of distorted power relations:

'I'll never forgive you, Madeleine,' her mother said.

Madeleine smiled lovingly at her. ‘Of course you will, darling.’

(95)

Here Marshall invites readers to consider the cost to the adult, with Madeleine’s smug response a direct result of her mother’s surrender, rather than the mutual “consensus” advocated by Gray.

Throughout the novel, Nanci is depicted as caring and supportive, whereas Madeleine, unusually for a protagonist, is a truly unpleasant character, as evidenced by her callous response to her mother’s question, “Does it matter that you’ve made me unhappy?”: “You’ll get over it” (164-5). Later, when the plot conveniently pairs up Madeleine’s mother with Gemma’s father — “I’ve given Madeleine sixteen years. Now I’m going to think of myself” (159) — it stresses they will not be able to contemplate marriage until Madeleine has left home. With this creation of a tyrannical adolescent, Marshall appears to challenge the wisdom of liberal parenting, in that Madeleine is depicted as unwilling to allow her mother the power Nanci has granted her: “Bugger them both...Nanci was *hers*” (184). Though extreme examples of the consequences of the apparent shift in power relations, both Mahy’s and Marshall’s depictions invite sympathetic consideration of the alternative, the traditional dynamic in which adolescents do not challenge their parents’ supremacy.

### **“I was as happy as a teenager”**

Another way in which New Zealand children’s fiction highlights the shifting relationships between the generations is through the portrayal of single parent families. All the novels deal directly or indirectly with the relationship between adults and adolescents; however, those that portray single parents make this an integral part of the plot, as both parties reassess their respective roles. In part this can be attributed to their increasing visibility in society: the divorce rate rose from less than 4% per year in the 1960s to 9% in 1980, peaking at 17.1% in 1982, remaining at around 12% *per annum* thereafter (Statistics New Zealand 2002). The single parent family also lends itself to literary treatment in that the 1:1 ratio between adolescent and adult enables a closer examination of the power dynamic. A great many works within this study portray single parents, more than 85 percent of them written after 1980. Moreover, within these texts

adults no longer tend to serve as role models, often being “depicted as flawed and limited” (Hourihan 215). This comes as an ironic consequence of the breakdown of the nuclear family, which means, under the terms established by Havighurst’s life tasks, that adults may well revert to “adolescent” behaviour themselves as they search for a new partner. The floating nature of adolescence becomes obvious in novels that contrast irresponsible adults with adolescent characters who must adopt the desirably conformist behaviours their parents have abdicated, making allowance for parents’ foibles at the same time.

Mahy explores the power dynamic within a single parent family in *The Changeover* (1984), the title of which could be a synonym for adolescence itself. On the surface, it relates most obviously to the transformation of Laura into a witch, but Robyn Sheahan aptly also regards Mahy’s use of the supernatural as a vehicle that “metaphorically translates an adolescent’s growth into a more profoundly felt, imaginative experience for the reader” (37). Thus, the novel depicts a series of “changes,” including a growing acceptance of her parents’ rights to live their own lives. In these ways, Laura’s “changeover” represents a new direction in relation to her own sense of self, and that of those around her.

A characteristic of a single parent family is that — out of practical necessity — the adolescent child may become more like his or her parent’s equal than a dependant. One of the first signs of this altered relationship is that the narrative refers to “Kate,” rather than “Laura’s mother,” a technique also employed by Marshall. Using first name instead of role descriptor establishes a less formal relationship between implied reader and adult character, although Laura’s still calling her “Mum” acknowledges her hegemonic role as well. In the absence of a father, the adolescent takes on added duties, and Laura becomes her mother’s “[confidante] and partner in running the household” (Murray 1998 193), sharing cares and responsibilities: the car that won’t start, the unpaid phone bill.<sup>1</sup> Leach comments that this economic necessity cements Laura’s relationship with her little brother (120), as she is the one who must collect Jacko from day care, “take him home, give him his supper and read him a story” (*The Changeover* 5) on the evenings when their mother works late. Cat,

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<sup>1</sup> Concerns also shared by Angela and her mother Dido in *The Catalogue of the Universe*.

in Kate de Goldi's *Sanctuary* (1996) undertakes a similar role in relation to her little sister: "I held her hand on the first day of school" (164). Such depictions blur the boundary between parent and child, as the exigencies of daily life necessitate a realignment of the traditional hegemonic roles.

A further example comes from David Hill's 1992 novel, *See Ya, Simon*. Hill notes that he has been "attacked quite severely" by Agnes-Mary Brooks for what she sees as his "obeisance to political correctness" by depicting "kids from one-parent families"<sup>1</sup> (tape-recorded interview with author). In this novel, such kids display awareness well beyond their years, as shown by fourteen-year-old Nathan's insights:

Mum hasn't been in a very good mood for the last few days. She got a letter from Dad on Wednesday, saying he was sorry to hear she was having financial problems, but he'd spent more than he could afford in the last two months, and wasn't it time she sold some of the household luxuries she was still clinging to?

'Household luxuries!' Mum's been going around snarling. 'I wonder if he means the washing machine that won't spin properly, or the vacuum cleaner that won't suck properly?' I guessed Dad must have got another expensive girlfriend. (*See Ya, Simon* 21)

Nathan's perspective shows an adolescent who is not only party to the demands of running a household, but also of his parents' private lives (his mother's voice implicit in the appraisal of his father's girlfriend), seeing beyond the mother's irritability to the cause, the financial<sup>2</sup> and emotional implications of solo parenthood:

'Look!' sighed Mum [to Fiona]. 'I've got to pay the power bill and the car insurance this week. You don't want to eat raw sausages and then have to walk to dancing lessons, do you?' (38)

The passage draws readers' attention to the sacrifices parents make for their children: the daughter's dancing lessons are the one thing that remains

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<sup>1</sup> "I really do put them in because I know of people who are in such situations" (tape-recorded interview with author).

<sup>2</sup> Although the New Zealand Matrimonial Property Act (which divided assets equally between both partners) had come into effect in 1976, Nathan's parents' are not divorced (which allows for their later reconciliation).

uncompromised. In this way, the adolescent narrative voice is used to foreground the problems of parenting (just as other texts portrayed the problems of adolescence), in order to emphasise how children's lives are determined by adult actions, by making them privy to the economic realities of everyday existence.

Elevation to quasi-adult status lasts, however, only as long as the parent remains single. In *The Changeover*, when Kate enters into a relationship with Chris, Laura feels resentment that her mother should turn to "a stranger" (122) for support during Jacko's illness. However, the text puts her in her place, with acceptance of her mother's right to her own life, separate from her children, presented as part of Laura's maturation process. Directly addressing the disruption to traditional roles occasioned by divorce, Kate justifies Chris's unexpected presence at the breakfast table: "Laura, you are a consolation to me, but you can never be an escape, because I feel responsible for you." Her words dispel the equality that appeared to exist between them, reiterating their hegemonic roles, just as her later statement, "I wanted escape" (122), makes it clear that a relationship with another adult overrides that with an adolescent.

In *See Ya, Simon*, literal displacement of the children occurs when their parents reunite, signified in the text as follows:

She's either sending Fiona the Moaner and me out of the room while she talks on the telephone, after which she comes out blowing her nose and wiping her eyes, or else she's going for half-hour walks by herself. (107)

Now the adults are talking again, the mother no longer needs her children as confidants, who are portrayed as reverting to passive dependants once more. Such depictions reveal the adult-centric nature of the temporary equality between the generations, which lasts only until the adolescent is supplanted by another adult, and is more apparent than real.

On the other hand, if no other adult support exists, the teenager may undertake the role of caregiver for a parent, who — bereft of partner — is emotionally or physically dependent. At the first level, this can simply demonstrate the closeness of a relationship. In Boock's *Dare, Truth or Promise*, for example, the affinity between Willa and her mother is reinforced both by

their physical similarity — “Jolene had the same red hair as her daughters, but nowadays she dyed it auburn to cover the greying temples” — and by the reciprocity of their roles. Willa brings her mother a cup of tea and her first cigarette for the day (17), just as Jolene brings “a pot of tea” and wraps a shawl around Willa’s shoulders (114-5) when her relationship with Louie founders. Zoë, in Jane Westaway’s *Love & Other Excuses* (1999), takes on a more self-consciously maternal role, urging her father to “try to eat properly and get enough sleep” (22), after her mother leaves him for another man. In each case, caring for the adult can be seen as a significant factor in an *Entwicklungsroman*, a means whereby the adolescent — and the narrative voice — acknowledge the parent’s former role as caregiver by reciprocating the gesture.

The next level, where the child supplants the adult, however, is presented as an unnatural role reversal. William Taylor’s *Beth & Bruno* (1992) explores the parameters of the parent/child relationship in its depiction of nineteen year-old Bruno, an unwilling caregiver for his 78 year-old father, recently blinded in a car accident. A former street kid, Bruno is now the epitome of diligence, an adult<sup>1</sup> student at a rural high school, trapped at home both physically and emotionally until he reconciles with his father. Bruno never openly expresses his feelings for his father, other than to complain, but readers are expected to extrapolate his devotion from his daily routine:

“Shopping. A bit of housework. Cooking. Time for just sitting with his father. Too little time for the old man. (*Beth & Bruno* 57)

By default, Bruno’s sense of obligation and guilt reveal he has taken on the role of an adult without the privileges, his minority status emphasised in that he needs “special permission from the cop” (82) to buy alcohol for his father. However, Bruno is portrayed as overstepping the mark in his assumption that his father’s physical dependency nullifies his hegemonic status as man of the house. He may disparage his father’s attempts at farming the rugged bush-clad countryside — “We still have some sheep, don’t we Arch? Like about six?” — but the text immediately counters his remark with the words: “The father overrode the son” (53). Moreover, his status is further affirmed through the

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<sup>1</sup> An ironic term that officially distinguishes Bruno from school-aged pupils. The whole point of the novel is that he cannot begin to be an adult until he accepts his place as his father’s child.

depiction of Arch's conversations with Bruno's girlfriend, Beth, which reveal a gentle man whom Beth considers "the nicest old person I've ever met" (106).

The changing relationship with his father serves to demonstrate Bruno's character growth, as — just before Arch's death — the two reconcile. Bruno calls his father "Dad," a term he "hasn't used in years" (101), and Arch calls Bruno "son," rather than his more usual "boy." The affirmation of their hegemonic roles redresses the former imbalance, which now makes possible a symbolic transference of power, as Arch asks, "Give me your hand. Indeed, if you could spare a moment, just hold me for a while. Please," and Bruno accedes: "Kneeling, the young man took his father in his arms and did as he was asked" (103). Here the narrative voice calls Bruno a "young man," suggesting that this status comes as a direct result of fulfilling his filial obligations. In a fairy tale ending, Bruno can now be set free — to stay: "up that bloody awful track with old Arch and his, our, my useless land" (130-1). The story ends with his decision to continue his schooling in order to fulfil his ambition to become a social worker, a choice that also serves the demands of adult society. *Beth & Bruno*, while ostensibly about adolescents, reflects adult points-of-view at every stage. The former street kid's reformation affirms family values; the fact that Arch dies before he and Bruno can fully voice their love for each other provides a graphic reason why a child should honour his parent, with the role reversals directing adolescent readers' attention to the selfless obligations of parenting.

On the other hand, if the adolescent takes on adult responsibilities, this can have the effect of freeing the adult to behave "like an adolescent." The implication that they should, not, however, is made overt by Spacks' observation that such conduct is

...a generalized description, usually of blame: the middle-aged man who abandons wife and job, we say, is behaving in adolescent fashion, although teenagers rarely have wives and jobs to abandon.  
(6-7)

These negative associations also apply in works for children, as in Westaway's *Love & Other Excuses*, when Zoë's mother attempts to justify leaving her marriage for a new lover by saying, "I was as happy as a teenager" (206), a sentiment the text counters with the unhappiness of her abandoned husband and

child. In de Goldi's *Sanctuary*, Cat's mother Stella, a nightclub singer who stays out late with her boyfriends, is described as behaving "like an irresponsible teenager" (Darnell 44), an observation that reveals the hegemonic influence on the construction of adolescence. Adults may act in ways deemed inappropriate for teenagers, but the disapproval of the adolescent narrator operates to shore up a generalised sense of adult stability by emphasising such behaviour is aberrant. However, even irresponsible adults have power over adolescents, in that Cat must become her mother's caregiver by default:

Stella would be lost without me, I knew. Who would organise her, run her house, keep an eye on her money? Who would listen to her maunderings, tuck her in bed when she was sad? (de Goldi 6)

For the child to adopt such a role has previously been shown to connote mutual affection. In *Sanctuary*, however, the narrative employs a complex layering of associations. When Cat observes, "[Stella] was seventeen when I was born and she's been having her adolescence ever since" (64), the word's connotations vary according to perspective. To Stella, "adolescence" represents freedom from commitment. To Cat, it means unseemly self-indulgence requiring her to display the responsibility her mother lacks, in the face of her desire for a "proper" parent.

The role reversal becomes explicit when Cat falls in love and neglects her parental duties: "I didn't nag her so much about smoking. I hardly complained when she left her dinner half eaten" (56). By describing a maternal role that criticises rather than praises, the text explores the mother/daughter dialectic from the opposite side: if "children" misbehave, what can "parents" do but chastise? Presented in this way, readers are expected to infer from Cat's words what all parents feel for their children: "I was attached to her by some invisible umbilical cord which tugged and nagged at me, filling me with love and fury" (56). By making the parent the child, these works turn the tables, advocating the "proper" relationship through the portrayal of "back-to-front roles" (66). Stella may not behave like a traditional mother, but the novel's resolution — "we talk a lot now, about everything — there's years to make up for" (166) — makes it clear that the parent/child relationship is the single most important factor in Cat's life.

### “Normal” parents

Depictions that suggest parents should behave like parents (and children like children), establish an equally clear view of what it is to be an adult. Margaret Mahy explores this inherent irony in *The Catalogue of the Universe*, when Tycho describes his girlfriend Angela’s idealised version of the father she has never known:

‘...you’ll end up by *just* wanting him to ... start doing what fathers do — forbidding you to go out with the wrong sort of boys, and all that stuff.’ (87)

As seen previously, stereotypes govern both adolescent and parent: the one misbehaving, the other admonishing. These expectations are made even more overt by the characterisation of Angela’s mother, Dido, who does *not* behave like a “normal” parent. Readers first encounter her in the moonlight, scything the grass in dressing gown and gumboots. Dido may be pragmatic, “I couldn’t sleep and it needed doing” (*The Catalogue of the Universe* 7), but her daughter considers her behaviour out-of-place:

‘Isn’t there some sort of crab that behaves in a certain way at high tide, and even if you take it away from its home, it still goes on doing its high-tide things according to the beach it came from? Well, it was as if Dido was acting according to high tide in another dimension.’ (41)

If adult society fosters an image of adolescents as problematic (Côté and Allaher), Angela’s discomfort suggests adolescents have an equal expectation that adults should be conservative. Even though mother and daughter enjoy the equal status previously shown to be conferred in single-parent families, Angela is depicted as wishing it were otherwise: ““Why don’t you forbid me to go to pubs and things? That’s what a responsible mother would do. You used to advise me”” (76). Such an expectation directly addresses what Trites identifies in American children’s fiction as “the construction of the power/repression dynamic” that occurs when “repressive parental figures” (54) are used as a literary device, enabling adolescent characters to rebel as a way of achieving their own power.

However, as has already been shown, New Zealand YA fiction stresses conformity, not rebellion, obedience not empowerment. Creating an adolescent who wants to be repressed enables the omniscient narrative voice to foreground the parent's point-of-view:

Dido looked surprised and then concerned. ... 'But you *hated* the advice!' she said. 'We had such dreadful fights ... As far as I can see I have a very strange choice. Either I let you go and worry about you, which I do, or I can keep you at home and have you raging around complaining ...and probably in the end telling ... lies about where you're going and who you're going out with and so on.' (76)

As well as normalising the repressive paradigm, such an argument presents the adolescent with no choice but to act responsibly of her own accord, internalising parental rules as already shown by Duder's Alex in the previous chapter. In this way, New Zealand children's literature reinforces conformity even through the apparent renunciation of adult authority, behaviour readers can be expected to take on board as well.

Trites considers YA literature to be an "Ideological State Apparatus, an institution that participates in the social construction of the adolescent" (83), a definition this study extends to include the social construction of the adult as well, since these terms function as binary opposites. New Zealand works depict adolescent characters calling for parental control, which is tellingly described as "normal." In Hill's *See Ya, Simon* (1992), for example, Nathan describes the visits with his (non-custodial) father as follows:

Things are always awkward at first; [Dad's] so polite, and lets me do anything I want. It's better later on, when he starts telling me off the way a normal parent would. (53)

Normality is reinstated when his parents reconcile, as Nathan comments: "It'll be neat to get told off by two parents again" (119). If adolescents signify "problem," such a representation equates adults to "authority." The assumption behind this observation is that the adolescent, elevated beyond his proper status by his parents' separation, can now return to the realm of child once more. As already shown, adolescents and adults seem to define themselves in opposition, the one *not* the other. Here the adolescent voice (constructed by an adult author)

conveys the apparently ideal situation with the adult in control once more, a reaffirmation of the power dynamic that “adolescent” adult behaviour threatened to jeopardise.

Other novels also portray adolescents yearning for traditional parenting that seems to come from a bygone age. De Goldi, for example, has Cat longing for a return to the time when Stella was a “proper” mother who “‘cooked and ... bottled *fruit*,’” a brief and happy interlude before “‘she stuffed it up by having an affair’” (*Sanctuary* 65). While Cat’s logic is inherently faulty (being a mother, preserving, and having an affair are not necessarily mutually exclusive), the text depicts Cat as the most conservative of adolescents. This is made clear when Cat resists telling Stella about her new boyfriend, for fear “‘she’d shower me with advice and sisterly tips’” (55); what she wants is a parent, not a fellow adolescent. The feeling is echoed by fifteen-year-old Marco in *Jerome*: “Dad says him ’n me are flatmates...I don’t want a sodding flatmate. I want a sodding father!” (Taylor 23). Implicit in Marco’s *cri de coeur* are unspoken connotations about what a “father” should be. As stereotypical as Cat’s cosy image of domesticity, Marco’s ideal father is one who will take him fishing, although he knows this will never happen: “‘This father and son do the bars, the pubs and the clubs’” (23). With these ironic (and unsatisfactory) role-reversals, the texts appear to be saying more about adults than adolescents, suggesting a nostalgia for a time when parents behaved like parents, and, by inference, adolescents knew their place as well: a state of affairs that appears compromised if adults regress, and appropriate the world of the adolescent.

### **“Don’t expect her to be perfect”**

With blurring of boundaries comes a shift in the balance of power. In order to redress this, while ostensibly stressing the reciprocity of the adult-adolescent relationship, New Zealand *Entwicklungsromane* empower adolescent characters, but only towards an understanding of the adult point-of-view. De Goldi sees this awareness as a crucial element of YA fiction, and — by inference — of adolescent development as well: “It’s only when you see your parents as people that you are able to look outwards” (Paris 3). This re-definition of the adolescent life tasks is noteworthy within this study in that it seems to require adolescents

to come around to the adult point-of-view. This has the effect of reinforcing Foucault's concept of power/ knowledge, in terms of what Spacks calls "dual identification," where adult authors "imaginatively participate in the adolescent experience" (271), while remaining conscious of their own hegemonic agenda and control. Consequently, *dénouements* often hinge on the adolescent's forgiveness of adult failings.

The first example of "the child seeing the parent more clearly" (de Goldi qtd. in Paris 3), occurs in Mahy's *The Changeover*, when Laura's father, Stephen, first appears, together with his "noticeably-pregnant" wife:

Laura turned and found herself looking at a man she knew. ... he seemed totally familiar, but she could not remember his name or how she knew him, and then realized he was her dark, powerful father. (130)

Laura's ambivalence can be attributed to the fact that — in leaving her mother — her father also left *her*. Moreover, Julia's pregnancy serves as graphic evidence that Stephen no longer needs his first family, just as his words, "Can this be my woolly baa-lamb? ... Oh, Laura — you've grown up" (130), accentuate the extent of his estrangement. Mahy uses Laura's relationship with her father to symbolise a further stage of her "changeover":

Laura found herself forgiving him for that day ... long ago in the past, when she had come home to find all his favourite things gone and the house empty of his presence as if he had cut himself entirely out of her life and taken part of her with him. It no longer seemed to matter that he loved someone else more than he loved her or loved Kate, and in a way, she felt ... she had begun to recover from a secret illness no one had ever completely recognized or been able to cure. (179)

This passage stresses adolescent power, but it is power only in relation to her acceptance of an adult who has failed her.

In her 1992 essay, Josephine Rayburn considers Braque, the lemur who possesses Laura's brother Jacko, to represent "a fleshed-out symbol of the resentment [Laura] has toward their natural father" (34), a thesis that does not explain why Laura's feelings for her father should be directed against her beloved baby brother. Another interpretation could be that Braque embodies

adult power, leading to a direct confrontation when Laura reaches her potential: “She felt enormously strong as she suddenly became aware of the full extent of her power over [Braque]...she was free to be infinitely revenged” (183). Braque merits supernatural vengeance, but Laura’s power also extends to forgiving her father’s eminently human foibles: “because she herself hoped to be forgiven, too” (183). Therefore, whatever Braque’s symbolism, his defeat represents a victory for both adults and adolescents, in that Laura’s acceptance of her father, together with the realisation that she is a person in her own right, “no longer formed simply from warring Stephen and Kate” (152), also absolves adults from the guilt associated with divorce.

In *The Catalogue of the Universe*, Mahy portrays an even more flawed adult, Angela’s father, whom Leach refers to as “the ghastly Roland” (132). He fails to act like a father at all when confronted by his eighteen-year-old daughter for the first time: “‘If I *am* your father (which I don’t for one moment admit, I hasten to add)’” (94).<sup>1</sup> Once again the climax of the novel occurs only when Angela symbolically strips her father of the idealised status she had bestowed upon him: “I’m not his little girl” (126). This is less an example of understanding than Laura’s relationship with her father is; nevertheless, having created powerful fathers *in absentia*, both Laura and Angela are portrayed as thriving even in the face of the less-than-perfect real thing. In this way, such depictions seem to suggest a readjustment of the adult/adolescent relationship, with characters’ acknowledgment of their fathers’ failings possibly vicariously allowing adult society to vindicate its shortcomings as well.

Foregrounding adult foibles also features in Mahy’s 1986 novel, *The Tricksters*, where nineteen-year-old Christobel must come to terms with something the rest of her siblings (and readers) have already guessed, that her father had an affair with her best friend Emma, as attested by the presence of Emma’s two-year-old daughter. The revelation about Tibby’s paternity shapes the novel’s climax, and even though Christobel says, “...who wants to have to *understand* their father? I just want him to be marvellous and leave it at that —

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<sup>1</sup> The narrative excuses his unpreparedness to accept paternity by revealing the input of his parents at the time of Angela’s conception. His mother gave Dido money for an abortion (172), and Roland himself was sent “‘over to Australia on a long visit’” (173).

blow being human!” (259), these words seem to invoke a plea for exactly such understanding. The text makes the absolution overt with Christobel’s words, “Life is *just too short* ...to waste it moaning about things that can’t be helped” (241), a sentiment that sounds like something more usually voiced by adults than adolescents.

Parents are only human, and Mahy suggests to be human is to be flawed, something the representation of adults examined in the previous chapters was not prepared to admit. Here, however, the *dénouement* of *The Tricksters* culminates in the child’s forgiveness of the parent. This occurs not only with Christobel, but also with the “tricksters” of the title, Ovid, Hadfield and Felix. Reincarnations of the murdered Teddy Carnival, they cannot rest until his true story is told, recalled in the words of his sister: “Teddy forced our father to kill him, although my father loved him best and meant well. That was Teddy’s triumph” (213). Tacitly forgiving the adult’s crime by indicting the child (an indictment justified by evidence of the trio’s manipulative behaviour throughout the novel), the text enforces its message by having the Tricksters literally vanish in the aftermath of this revelation.

Intergenerational understanding does not necessarily work both ways, as shown by Heather Marshall’s *Gemma, Brooke and Madeleine*, in which the narrator, as Claudia Marquis puts it, “[shifts] omnisciently from head to head” (1991 338). Brooke’s father, the custodial parent, is initially portrayed as apparently understanding his daughter’s point-of-view:

She’s from a broken home, he reminded himself. Her mother rejects her. Her father doesn’t understand her. Her two best friends are more attractive than she is. She thinks she’s got a big bottom. She’s got a cold sore on her lip and she’s getting a new crop of pimples. She’s got every right to chuck things around her bedroom.  
(65)

However, the very next sentence undermines this empathy with a reassertion of the adult perspective: “It was difficult to believe that the eager to please little girl of three or four years ago was this bad-tempered, sharp-tongued, unreasonable, disobedient juvenile tyrant” (66). By overstating stereotypical

examples of adolescent self-absorption, the text seems to expect readers to concur, an attitude later reinforced by Brooke's own voice:

All these years he'd been coping with a responsibility thrust on him willy-nilly. He was waiting to get on with his own life. [Brooke] felt she ought to say 'thank you' and 'I'm sorry' ...[vowing] never, never, never [to] do or say anything to hurt him again. (145)

Privileging the adult's perspective, the focalisation places the onus on the adolescent character (and implied reader) to change behaviour accordingly.

As well as having characters express how much they owe to their parents, another tactic is to have a third party expound the sacrifices made on their behalf, despite an apparently negative first impression. In Taylor's *Beth & Bruno*, Beth has been estranged from her mother since the death of her illegitimate baby, citing "harsh, bitter talks" and "other conversations, painful in their pointlessness" (36). Taylor does not describe Prue, the mother, but implied readers can extrapolate her superficiality from her success as a real estate agent and the description of her boyfriend, Gino: "fortyish, white shirt open almost to the waist ... Too many gold chains nestling among the greying hairs of his upper torso" (91). Her reaction to Bruno compounds her failings: "'Goodness, who's this coming up the path? Are you expecting a Maori visitor, Stella? Where's Gino? He simply doesn't like them at all. Bit of a racist, poor lamb, but rather sweet'" (93). Excusing Gino's bigotry reveals Prue's own narrow-mindedness, as the description casts the parent as the villain.

Nevertheless, it is the adolescent who must change her attitude, not the adult. The animosity between mother and daughter, "their dislike of each other so intense it was almost tangible, almost like a third person in the room" (95), operates solely to emphasise their similarities, as voiced by Beth's aunt, Stella:

'Honey, in her own way she loves you. She's not some two-horned devil...She's your mother. You're just so alike...both as stubborn as wretched mules.' (96)

This reinforces the interconnectedness between adult and child, while Stella's comment that Beth's mother is "'some sort of focus for everything you do'" (97) expresses the hegemonic assumption underlying many of the texts in this study. Other authors who also depict mother/daughter estrangement, such as

Westaway, Marshall, de Goldi, and Boock, present acceptance that she *is* her mother's daughter as the turning point in each protagonist's self-actualisation. In *Beth & Bruno*, the narrative achieves this by shifting the focus from Prue's superficial personality to her role as idealised mother, as revealed by Stella's words: "Everything you hate her for is no more than some all-out try at protecting you, arming you against what happened to her" (96). In this way, adolescent resentment is portrayed as childish in comparison to the sacrifices a mother must make for her children:

'Mikey was only eight and you were only two when your father took off. Left her with nothing. Think about that. No help from anyone and a load of debts as big as Everest.' (97)

Stella's words imply that Beth owes her mother for her upbringing, as well as conveying the expectation that she will change her attitude in the light of this homily. Although Beth and Prue are never depicted talking to each other, and her mercenary nature remains, as shown by her change of attitude towards Bruno now he is a landowner —"Call me Prue" (154) —her presence at Bruno's twentieth birthday apparently suffices to represent the restoration of the mother-daughter relationship once more.

In some novels, the child is expected to defer even if the parent has no redeeming virtues. In *Gemma, Brooke & Madeleine*, Brooke's mother Meredith has abdicated all responsibility for her children: she left when they were toddlers, is not home when Brooke is to due to visit, does not "want [her current] young man to find out [she's] got a sixteen-year-old daughter and a seventeen-year-old son [because] he thinks they're five and six" (Marshall 141), and fails to attend Brooke's sixteenth birthday celebration, belatedly sending a card wishing her a happy seventeenth (143). Despite evidence of Meredith's failure as a parent, Brooke is the one who must make allowances: "Give her another chance,' Dad had said. 'Be a little forgiving. Meredith isn't a happy woman. You're older now. Don't expect her to be perfect'" (184-5). Nothing in the story justifies the claim of Meredith's unhappiness, but neither characters nor readers are expected to demur. The father's words align even estranged adults against the adolescent, absolving the mother. Moreover, the loaded phrase, "You're older now," illustrates how adults manipulate the

construction of adolescence to suit their purpose, in this case obliging Brooke to accommodate adult failings by sublimating her desires in favour of her mother's. Despite Brooke's initial reluctance, readers are expected to agree with this course of action, as shown by the "real understanding" (187) mother and daughter achieve when they do meet.

In each of these examples, the instance varies, but the result is the same: the adolescent yielding to the adult point-of-view. Rarely does a work challenge the adult's right to this deference, and then only when the adult is patently flawed, as in Beale's *Further Back Than Zero*. Ash's stepfather, Rex, is the villain in the piece, as revealed by Ash's description of their relationship: "Rex said I was lazy, selfish and so up myself it was a wonder I didn't need a torch to see with. But then, I didn't like him a hell of a lot either" (3). Rex fails as an adult, guilty of causing Ash's mother's death in a drink-driving accident, yet in relation to the adolescent his authority appears unassailable: "Rex had built me the sleepout when I was thirteen and I'd learned to shut my mouth and disappear when he started hassling me" (7). A similar displacement occurs when Rex's own son, fifteen-year-old Sam, turns up on the doorstep, no longer able to live with *his* mother and stepfather: "The Arsehole has chucked all the stuff out of my room and now he's painting it bilious blue for the baby<sup>1</sup>" (13-14). Even though the story deplores such behaviours, it offers the adolescent characters no alternative but to submit to adult power, however despotic.

With Beale's novel the exception, the works uphold the adult point-of-view. Nowhere is this made clearer than in Joseph's *Worlds Apart*. Ostensibly a depiction of a completely autonomous adolescent, the novel describes Cara's "boyfriend," Jacob, whose sole ambition in life is to "get the dole," as having apparently been "chucked out" by his mother's boyfriend. According to Jacob, "They couldn't care less about me" (22), but this is an opinion the focalising adolescent narrator disproves. Although Jacob is almost eighteen, he is always referred to as "a boy," and this, together with the fact that readers learn he is

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<sup>1</sup> Mahy also alludes to a step-parent's desire to replace the partner's own child in *The Changeover*: "Julia had had a small fantasy in which Jacko died and that her own new baby was a boy, making her even more important than ever to Stephen because she was the mother of his son" (1984 180).

squatting in a beach house, living off mince pies and Pepsi (51) and “bludging” cigarettes (22), suggests he is unable to care for himself. The adolescent proclaims his freedom from adult rules, yet the text emphasises only his dependency, made explicit when Cara finds him unconscious after an overdose: “[he had] chosen — not the free life he’d described to me — but a prison of addiction and lies” (100-101). His bravado is further called into question as he recovers in hospital:

‘The doctor made me give him [my mother’s] address and all that stuff. Not that I want her down here. Anyway, she probably doesn’t give a stuff...’

He stopped in mid-sentence as a small fair-haired woman hurried into the cubicle.

‘Geez — it’s my old.’ (111)

In contrast to Jake’s story of maternal neglect, Cara’s description points out the son’s indifference:

He looked so funny crouching down into his sheets, trying to hide from his mother that I couldn’t help smiling.

... She smothered him in a hug and I saw tears smearing her face.

‘Jake...Jake,’ she murmured... until, embarrassed, Jacob pushed her away.

‘I’m all right, Ma.’

Jacob’s mother flashed me a look that said she didn’t believe that (111)

As further evidence, Cara’s father relays a counter version of Jake’s account of events: “‘Apparently he didn’t get on with his mother’s friend and took off to be on his own’” (112). Even as the two adults discuss how to “‘sort something out,’” Cara observes, “whatever happened it would be what Jacob decided, not them” (112). This could be seen as reaffirming adolescent autonomy, were it not for the fact that such an interpretation is immediately rejected: “I could see him clearly for the first time and I wasn’t certain I liked what I saw” (112). Jake, in refusing to accept his place in an adult-driven hierarchy, is portrayed as a loser. Regardless of the various roles they award to parent or child, these texts all stress the significance of the adult within the adolescent’s life. Indeed, without

reference to the parent, such depictions suggest, the adolescent appears unable to determine his or her identity.

### **“I learned to hide”**

The most extreme treatment of adult/adolescent relations in New Zealand children’s literature occurs in works that depict psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. Abuse of children demonstrates adults’ utmost power: a manifestation of what behaviouralists refer to as “black pedagogy” (Zornado 77), the practice of dominating the child for its “own good” (79), or — put another way — for adults’ benefit. Within literature, the representation of abuse is ostensibly therapeutic, seeking to empower victims to overcome the experience. Such empowerment of the adolescent, however, requires a concomitant lessening of adult power, something this study suggests runs counter to the tenor of most New Zealand children’s works, which surprisingly tend to stress perpetrators’ weakness. This can be seen to have a two-fold effect: not only lessening the perceived severity on the victim, but also inducing the adolescent to forgive the abuser.

Few authors depict physical violence. That this receives such little attention may be a reflection of New Zealand attitudes towards corporal punishment, which seems to be more common during childhood than in adolescence, according to Ritchie and Ritchie’s findings. What is significant in terms of this study is the tendency for novels to portray the adolescent as rationalising the abuse, accepting it as his or her lot. In Mahy’s *The Changeover*, for example, Sorry’s foster father,<sup>1</sup> Tim, having been made redundant, takes out his frustrations on the boy: ““he was a really b-big man and he b-beat me up. When I was little he used to play a fighting game called “Bears” with me. This was a game of “Bears” for grown-ups, I suppose”” (115). Laura voices implied readers’ horror: ““Your father doesn’t sound as though he could have been really very kind in the first place”” (116). However, Sorry excuses the abuse as symptomatic of his foster father’s “constant despair” (117), and makes

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<sup>1</sup> His mother’s justification for having put Sorry into foster care at an early age — ““I am not a motherly woman and when I thought of my son, I felt quite trapped”” (91) — represents a further example of the power dynamic.

allowances: “I think life got to be like war for him” (116). Moreover, he also adopts tactics — “I learned to hide [my supernatural ability] ...pretty quickly once I could see how it was upsetting him” (114) — that recall Zornado’s account of black pedagogy:

The child...learns early and often that the only way to ameliorate his suffering is to ... avoid adult interventions. (77-78)

A similar example occurs in Jack Lasenby’s *The Lake* (1987), where abused children are portrayed as trying to “camouflage” themselves, offering the following solution to threat during a classroom game: “If we vanish [the perceived enemy] won’t notice us, and if they don’t notice us, they can’t hurt us” (23).

While such reactions underscore adult dominance, the treatment of abuse in this, and other New Zealand texts, appears instead to stress adult weakness, empowering the adolescent, but only at the price of exonerating the perpetrator. Mahy makes apology explicit in *Sorry*’s very name, the adolescent capitulating, not, as in the works examined earlier, to adults’ power, but to their equally powerful vulnerability. Nothing in the description of Tim’s psychological and physical brutality can possibly justify his actions, yet the very fact that he has tormented a child entrusted to his care is offered as evidence of the extent of his emotional turmoil. Sam, in Beale’s *Further Back Than Zero*, does not forgive his bullying father himself, but — by constantly portraying him as a pathetic drunkard, as “a loser. Doesn't know when to stop, that's his trouble” (Beale 107) — his words seem to imply his abuse is a manifestation of weakness rather than power. Bernard Beckett, in *Lester* (1999) is the only author to expose his implied audience to characters’ physical abuse, when Toni’s father hits both her and her boyfriend after catching them *in flagrante*. In no way do any of these texts condone the adults’ behaviour. Mahy describes Tim as “currently doing cane work or whatever in occupational therapy in some nuthouse” (*The Changeover* 118), Beale has Rex imprisoned for his dangerous driving, and Toni’s father is suspected of having murdered someone in the past. Nevertheless, none is portrayed as apologising to his adolescent victim, and, in each case, characters’ development during the course of the novel entails

learning to get “over it” as best they can: as Mahy’s *Sorry* says, “ ‘If ninety-percent of the world thinks I’m normal then I *am* normal” (118-119).

Within society, sexual abuse, and incest in particular, represents an even greater indictment of adults’ misappropriation of power over children than physical violence: the ultimate in a long line of “invasive techniques” associated with parenting, all the more damaging because “violence and love become fused...in the child’s mind” (Zornado 83). For this reason, according to Trites, its only justification for inclusion in children’s literature is bibliotherapeutic, in that implied adolescent readers learn they can “overcome their victimization by talking about it” (96). Thus, a work such as British author Sylvia Hall’s *When You Can’t Say No* (1994) may begin by depicting fifteen-year-old Lisa as having harboured “Dad’s secret, my secret” (18) for the past “six fucking years” (186), but it subsequently moves quickly towards disclosure, resulting in punishment of the offender. Lisa has had “nobody to tell” (25) until now (her parents’ estranged relations having caused the mother to become increasingly preoccupied with her career), but she is determined not to let her father’s incestuous actions “ruin” (37) her newfound relationship with a boy her own age.

The novel empowers the adolescent throughout. When Lisa reveals that her father “touches” her, her mother expresses concern over her daughter’s distress, although she initially appears reluctant to believe her (48-55). However, Lisa’s boyfriend Mike has heard rumours that her father’s attention to her seems “not natural” (59), and infers that he beats her, which leads to Lisa’s revelation: “No, he never hits me. ...He fucks me” (71). Mike tells his mother (73), who “used to work in a refuge” (180), immediately initiating a course of action that involves social workers, police, doctors, and a safe environment away from the father’s influence.

The adolescent victim may express doubts about posing a challenge to parental authority: “...he couldn’t help it. He did love me, he did! And everything would be my fault. Mum would hate me for splitting us up” (88). Nonetheless, focalising characters validate Lisa’s conduct at every opportunity. Mike’s mother offers reassurance: “...you’ve taken the first step. You’ve told someone and that was brave” (78); the social worker gives her a book of poetry

by Maya Angelou,<sup>1</sup> and encourages self-affirmation: ““Just keep saying, I’ve a right to own my body and a right to own my life and nobody is going to abuse me again”” (152); her boyfriend’s fidelity attests that “it was possible for someone to love me even though they knew what Dad had done to me”” (198). As added confirmation of the rightness of Lisa’s actions, where she previously suffered from anorexia, her appetite and periods return after she reveals her father’s secret. Moreover, the focalisation directly pits adolescent against adult, when Lisa, safe in hospital, sees her father in the car park outside her window: “Across the space our eyes met and I was shot through with guilt...but somehow I found the strength to stand there and stare him out. He was the first to look away” (138). Such unequivocal adult submission in the face of adolescent power serves a strongly bibliotherapeutic purpose, as well as presenting a direct challenge to the hegemonic power dynamic.

In addition to championing the adolescent victim, *When You Can’t Say No* does not shy away from requiring adults to admit culpability. Begging her daughter’s forgiveness on two occasions (120, 185-6), Lisa’s mother also openly acknowledges her wrongdoing: ““I didn’t want to hear. That was unforgivable of me. I failed you when you needed me most”” (206). Moreover, the novel never questions the father’s guilt, denying him a voice within the narrative (except in Lisa’s imagination) from the moment she speaks out against him, at the same time clearly outlining the ramifications of his deeds: ““What your dad did was against the law and he must answer for it in court”” (150). Although the story ends before formal prosecution takes place, judgment has already been passed: ““He can’t go back home,’ [the social worker] said. ‘... Your mum has asked him to leave... He’s lost you, your mum and his home. He is being punished”” (202).

A similar treatment is evident in American YA novels such as Francesca Lia Block’s *The Hanged Man*<sup>2</sup> (1994). A complex plot, reflecting its Los

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<sup>1</sup> (1928 - ), an African American poet, educator and civil rights worker, whose autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), is recognised as a landmark text in the campaign to expose sexual abuse.

<sup>2</sup> Rather than being directly applicable to the fate of the perpetrator, the title derives from the Tarot, referring to the card that symbolises upheaval, and —significantly— rite of passage.

Angeles' setting, it interweaves intimations of incest, anorexia, death, heroin addiction, rape, Aids, mental illness, and abortion, with a strong inference that the foetus was a product of the incest: "One of those seeds had made me...What kind of baby would we have made. Twice born" (124). The seventeen-year-old narrator, Laurel, appears more damaged than Hall's Lisa by her father's sexual abuse, with the novel's action interspersed with nightmarish vision sequences: "I imagine the reason I don't bleed anymore each month is because this demon, this lie-baby, is sucking up all the blood to feed itself, to keep itself alive" (96). She never actually tells anyone she has been abused, but the narrative itself acts as catharsis, with implied readers able to piece her story together from clues such as, "My mother tells me my father said to her, 'I love only a very few. First, there's my love for you and Laurel. But that's like one thing almost'" (119).

Less openly accusatory than *When You Can't Say No*, *The Hanged Man* nevertheless calls adults directly to account. Laurel's boyfriend articulates the implicit allegation — "He touched you, didn't he? ...Your father" (124) — with absence of a question mark obviating the necessity for her to confirm the truth of his words. Once again the father is shown to be punished, in this instance, dying from cancer at the beginning of the novel: "I think of my father in the room down the hall — what is supposed to still be my father. Gaping, hooked up with tubes" (4). The phrase "what is supposed to be ...my father," clearly not only implies Laurel's rejection, but also the father's failure to act as a father should. The mother is also held complicit, a verdict she openly accepts when her daughter finally confronts her:

'You let it happen.'

'I never wanted anything to hurt you.'

'You let it happen.'

She covers her face with her hands and rocks back and forth, back and forth. 'Forgive me.' (133)

Laurel's subsequent returning appetite and menstrual periods are presented as a direct consequence of the mother's apology, which can be read as being offered on behalf of both parents, while her reconciliation with her mother signifies the completion of the healing process: "That's the way it's supposed to be" (136).

While the victims are portrayed as loving daughters who are reluctant to disrupt the family unit, British and American novels about incest do not hesitate to censure guilty adults for their abuse of power.

An examination of New Zealand works in this study that deal with the same topic, however, reveals a strikingly different approach, in accordance with the adultist imperative that generally operates to privilege adult over adolescent. Proportionately, a relatively high number of novels deal with adult sexual abuse of adolescents (four out of the forty-odd works in this study). Although the very inclusion of incest as a theme draws attention to the enormity of the crime, victims within the text are noteworthy for their silence. Knowledge of the abuse most often remains confined to the family circle, victims rarely seem adversely affected, and — even though the abuse ceases — no perpetrator is held to account by his fellow adults.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, by often portraying incestuous adults as pathetic (as a means, perhaps, of lessening the impact of their actions), New Zealand works appear to call for forbearance rather than condemnation. Such treatment, however, should come as no surprise within a corpus that generally exhibits reluctance to cede power to adolescents.

Barry Faville is the first author to allude to incest in his 1986 novel, *Stanley's Aquarium*. Physically unattractive, with pockmarked skin, “thin and leathery lips” (18) and a gold front tooth, the elderly Stanley hires seventeen-year-old Robyn to mow his lawns. Narrated by Robyn several years after the event, the main plot centres on Stanley’s scheme to release piranha into Lake Taupo, but his insanity is further revealed by intimations of an incestuous relationship with his daughter. Surprisingly, no reviewer has ever commented on this aspect of the plot. Diane Hebley, in her examination of landscape in New Zealand children’s fiction, *The Power of Place*, mentions Stanley’s “twisted personality” (1998 136), but only in relation to his scheme to release the piranha, while a book review cited from the *Wellington Evening Post* (9 December

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<sup>1</sup> One notable exception is Ruth Corrin’s *Secrets* (1990), in which the victim does eventually confide in a school friend. She is sheltered by the friend’s family, who arrange for counselling for both the victim and her mother, while the father ends up in “the loony-bin” (144). A powerful indictment of the damage incest causes to all concerned, nevertheless *Secrets* falls outside this study’s definition of “adolescence”, in that its main characters are only twelve, and still at primary school.

1989) recommends *Stanley's Aquarium* as “‘a must’ for holiday reading” (qtd. in Hebley 1998 170), bypassing the disturbing nature of its themes entirely. This can perhaps be explained by the veiled nature of its treatment within the novel. Stanley and his wife always refer to their daughter Celie as “departed” (44) or “gone” (55), leading Robyn and implied readers to assume that she has died. Stanley says that Robyn “‘reminds [him] of her in many ways,’” insisting that “‘young people need protecting’” (55), because they are “‘threatened by so many dangers they are only half aware of’” (55-6). These dangers are never made explicit, with Stanley initially portrayed simply as an overprotective father unwilling to allow Celie a life of her own.

Stanley's relationship with both girls converges when he takes Robyn into his shed to look at his beloved fish:

‘I closed my eyes for a second, then nearly leapt to my feet as I felt a hand on my shoulder and recognized Stanley's grimy fingers resting on my shirt. I was a second away from screaming, ‘Rape!’

Stanley is apparently oblivious to his actions: his “mouth hung half-open and his eyes seemed to have sagged” (98). Although this could be read as sexual arousal, the text suggests an alternative interpretation:

I remembered [his wife's] comment about my astonishing resemblance to the long-gone Celie, and ... Stanley's hand resting on my shoulder took on a whole new meaning. There was no question of the middle-aged cad seeking to ‘take advantage of me,’ as they used to say in polite circles. (101-2)

Such an explanation would suffice, were it not for the parenthetical remark, “(My God, I was innocent, but you must remember that I was but a cocky adolescent at the time!)” (102), as Faville builds tension, discrediting the adolescent point-of-view, but at the same time making the description increasingly more explicit:

... his taut voice whispered, ‘Celie, Celie,’ and I thought, oh God, the screwball thinks I'm his daughter ...

It was like watching something in slow motion as I saw his arm go round my waist. I leaned away from him, beginning to panic, and his hand slipped up against my breast and I thought, oh shit! (112)

This is the closest the text comes to an accusation of incest, relying on innuendo to obfuscate the issue. It describes Stanley “muttering something like, ‘I didn’t mean anything. I thought you were her again,’” as Robyn breaks free, an interpretation further qualified by Robyn’s observation that she could not “make out all the words” (113). Ambiguity prevails. For example, Robyn tells Stanley’s wife, “that bloody husband of yours just tried to grope me!” (113), but her response — “I am most dreadfully sorry. I had no idea. I should have been more watchful” — could, in context, equally refer to Robyn’s accompanying accusation that “the crazy old pervert is ... going to put those homicidal bloody fish he keeps in the backyard into the lake!” (114)

Where Trites considers that “nothing demonstrates the power relationships between adults and teenagers as effectively as the abuse of sexual power,” rather than examining the “emotional repercussions” of sexual abuse in order to provide “some possible bibliotherapeutic potential” (96), New Zealand works downplay the effect on the victim. In this case, Stanley’s wife, Elizabeth Amelia, gives Robyn a letter from Celie, who, contrary to expectations, is “alive and well, and leading a happy life in Sydney” (122). Its contents add little to the account, but the postscript is significant:

*I’m glad your gardening girl is still working out well. .... I still find it strange that the old man has taken to her so happily. In fact at times it worries me. I wonder what he is really seeing in her. I keep remembering you said she looks much as I did then. After what happened between the old boy and me, I should have thought a second version would be the last thing he would want. (119)*

Further evidence of the peripheral way in which incest is handled as a whole, the novel never elaborates on the “first version” of “what happened between the old boy and me,” with marriage, children, and material wealth offered as proof that Celie has “got over it.” Certainly, in person, she is no victim. “A barracuda who had been to charm school” (131), Celie is portrayed as having put her past, which she describes as “like having a long-lasting anaesthetic slowly drip-fed into me” (Faville 140), behind her. Now, she treats her father as if he “were the family’s pet spaniel, a shaggy smelly old beast whose occasional pranks could still raise eyebrow or provoke an indulgent smile” (119). Not only does this

description dismiss any intimation of their former relationship, the atypical reversal of power serves to lessen any impact the father's conduct may have had.

The text continues to emphasise Celie's strength in contrast to her father's apparent powerlessness, culminating in her destruction of the piranha collection, which effectively emasculates him, as revealed by Elizabeth Amelia's words to Robyn: "Incidentally, don't worry your head about Stanley. That matter is taken care of" (121), and "He really is most contrite and ashamed of himself — he's a changed man" (124). Although Hebley's entry on Faville in *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* describes Stanley as a vindictive man warped by bullying and social scorn" (1998 177), the novel appears to mitigate the effect of his abuse by portraying a strong victim. This impression is further reinforced by Celie's memories of Stanley as a pathetic father, an "oddball" (137) struggling to make a living as a door-to-door salesman, while harbouring impossible dreams of El Dorado. Moreover, readers also learn about Stanley's own traumatic youth, and the smallpox scars that made him the butt of classroom taunts:

'Someone cut out his face from [a] photograph ...pasted it on a piece of paper and wrote underneath, "Do you suffer from acne? Just think how worse off you could be! Take a look at this!" This person then pinned it to the noticeboard in Stanley's form room. When his form teacher saw it he laughed.' (128-9)

His wife offers this as an excuse for Stanley's subsequent obsession with piranha (129), and his suffocating devotion to his daughter: "when the real world became too much he began to dream, and then I suppose he began to live in his dream" (129). She neither confirms nor denies the allegations of abuse: "...it was all true for Cecilia, but if you asked Stanley he would tell you differently." In this way, adult power is upheld, reinforced by the wife's complicity: "Do you think I was oblivious to what was happening? Give me credit for some sense. But what was I to do? Who was I supposed to choose? My husband or my daughter?" (141). By protecting her husband at the expense of her daughter, Elizabeth Amelia makes the power relations explicit: once again it is up to the child to modify her behaviour (in Celie's case, by leaving home at seventeen), rather than the adult.

The novel ends with Stanley ostensibly chastened, moving to Australia, and Robyn getting on with life, her fading memories “transforming [Stanley] into a harmless old eccentric with daughter troubles” (144). These words serve to diminish the intimations of sexual abuse, but his power is reasserted by the novel’s finale, which reveals Stanley has succeeded in releasing his piranha after all. Aware that “the authorities” (*Stanley’s Aquarium* 151) would not believe her, the adolescent narrator’s only recourse is “to write it all down” (152) in the book readers have just finished, an exposé ultimately more concerned with the threat to Taupo’s tourist industry than a father’s abuse of his daughter.

Another work that portrays sexual abuse is Jack Lasenby’s *The Lake* (written in 1987, but set in 1952). Once again, it by no means condones incest. However, nor does it call its perpetrators to account within the text. In fact, *The Lake* contains four cases of incest, all involving fathers and daughters, with only one adult showing any signs of remorse at all. The first account involves a fellow pupil, when the narrator, Ruth, is still at Intermediate:

We knew her father beat her and her brother. We knew he beat her mother. We wondered why nobody did anything about it. But Pam told us something much worse about Smelly Lisa and her father.

(10)

Lasenby invites readers to extrapolate what “something much worse” might be. Certainly, the teacher’s suggestion that Lisa’s fellow pupils “try and make her happy and safe at school” (10), seems a response both inadequate and irrelevant, although Leach points out its historical accuracy in that “no formal structure for reporting abuse to a state agency existed, until the 1980s” (156). On the other hand, viewed from a bibliotherapeutic context, characters’ inaction within a text can also spur readers to right action. In the event, Lisa’s character is no more than a cipher, a non-speaking part designed to introduce the topic of incest (if readers are able to extrapolate as much from the euphemistic allusion to “something much worse”), and her fate remains unresolved in the light of her teacher’s and fellow pupils’ apparent acceptance of her lot. Moreover, the significance of her nicknames, variously “Smelly-” and “Sad Lisa,” remains unexplored within the text. Connoting an uneasy mix of rejection and

compassion on the part of her fellow pupils, nevertheless, they serve to stigmatise her, not her father.

The main story concerns Ruth's own experience of sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather. Several years later, after the sudden death of her beloved father, Ruth's mother, portrayed as distant and "untrustworthy," remarries a man "who is even more untrustworthy than her" (Leach 157). Bearing a son, she suffers from postnatal depression ("each day she seemed to be going further away" [29]), which, coupled with the "changes" to Ruth's body, is offered as the reason why Ruth's step-father, Harry, begins "kissing and touching" her:

There were ways I could avoid him, by keeping Emma [the younger sister] with me so he didn't have much of a chance, but now and again I got caught. ... I even liked it a bit, at first, being noticed. It made me feel grown up in a way, but then I began to worry about it. (25)

This presents an unsettling image, made even more disturbing when Ruth realises "somebody" has been coming into her room at night (26). Hebley considers the inference that the victim initially finds such attention flattering is "a male rationale or excuse" for incest (*Power of Place* 1998 128), a critique supported by her interpretation of the later description of Ruth's dream, in which the faces of her beloved father and Harry merge, as a "doubling of an Electra complex" (129). The first person narrative does not develop this intimation of unnatural attraction further, but nor is Harry ever held accountable for his actions, perhaps because — in common with other depictions in New Zealand children's literature — the victim is portrayed as unable to tell anyone. Ruth's school friends do not believe her and the mother's steadfast refusal to listen, together with her insistence that Ruth should not lock her bedroom door, and her gradual withdrawal, "her eyes...remote, as if they were looking at another world" (39), possibly hint at an unresolved "secret" (17, 24) in her past as well.

This lack of support could be interpreted as having a bibliotherapeutic effect, showing readers how not to react if facing a similar appeal for understanding. In the event, however, rather than confronting these issues, Lasenby has Ruth run away into the bush, where she remains for a year and a half: literally hunting, shooting and fishing (a common motif in his works).

During this time, the story uses an attack by a crazed assailant to introduce an old hunting companion of her father's, leading to the third and fourth accounts of incest. Tommy tells Ruth the Māori myth of Tane and his daughter,<sup>1</sup> an allusion significant in that it, too, stresses the victim's strength, while overlooking the perpetrator's culpability. The final example of incest is revealed with Tommy's deathbed confession, in which he recounts "about how he had slept with his own daughter, and how she had a baby" (150). She ran away (the inference being that she turned to prostitution), dying a year later of septicaemia after an abortion. Tommy never saw her again, learning of her fate from his best friend, Ruth's father. The baby is not mentioned, but — as Tommy's daughter's name was Ruth and he regards the protagonist's presence here as "if my daughter had come back and forgiven me" (151) — readers may deduce that the 'Ruth' of the novel is that very child,<sup>2</sup> or perhaps, as Leach posits, that Ruth's father named her "after Tommy's Ruth" (162). Either way, despite the daughter's grim fate, the narrator does not once condemn Tommy. Seen within a Foucauldian context, this scenario both diminishes and reinforces the adult's power. His admission of weakness guarantees his forgiveness, which is manifested when Ruth accepts him as a surrogate father: "I was filled with love for Tommy.... I knew what he had done was terrible, but I wanted to forgive him, for his daughter" (152). That the text also considers Tommy's confession sufficient atonement is signified when Ruth buries him on "the tapu island in the lake" (Hebley *Power of Place* 1998 42).

Forgotten for over one hundred pages, the abuse of the narrator by her stepfather is recalled in relation to her little sister (who now must be nearing puberty herself), as the motivation for Ruth to return home:

...to confront Harry and my mother ... to ask her why she didn't love me, why she didn't look after me.  
 ...I was fifteen, able to look after myself. I was going home to look after Emma too. (164)

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<sup>1</sup> Hine-titama, the Dawn Maiden, on realising her father, Tane, is also the father of her children, in her shame and anger becomes Hine-nui-te-po: guardian of the night, and goddess of death.

<sup>2</sup> This could explain why Ruth does not resemble the rest of her family, although the description of her as "tall and fair" (*The Lake* 6) hardly fits.

These, the novel's final words, are regarded by Paul Millar, writing in *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* (1998), as a positive ending (300). Certainly, Lasenby's detailed account of Ruth's bushcraft reveals her to be a survivor, but a complex series of issues remain unresolved: the stepfather's actions, the mother's heartlessness, the inference that, in saving herself, Ruth may have sacrificed her younger sister to become Harry's next victim. Moreover, while Tommy's self-imposed exile in the bush can be interpreted as penance (Leach), Harry's life to date remains unaffected. Although condemning incest, in that its failure to call adults to account serves to exacerbate their culpability in readers' minds, nevertheless, *The Lake* remains curiously reticent about strategies to overcome the abuse of adult power.

In a further variation, Heather Marshall depicts an incestuous grandfather in *Gemma, Brooke and Madeleine*. Again, the perpetrator is portrayed as despicable, but his behaviour remains uncontested. No motive is offered for Granddad Corey's perverted tendencies:

He was not senile. He was just nasty, as he had been all his life. And dishonest. He might do something really terrible one day. He hated women. He hated *her* [Gemma] even though he couldn't keep his hands off her. (81)

Nor is he required to change: that is for his victims to do. None of Gemma's friends can visit because of her "creepy grandfather" (110); her father cannot leave her alone with him (81, 124). Even more disturbingly, readers learn that Granddad Corey abused his own daughters: "Gemma says all her father's sisters had to leave home when they were young to get away from him" (124). Nevertheless, despite the evidence against him, the omniscient narrator seems to suggest he has not done anything "really terrible" yet, placing the onus on sixteen-year-old Gemma to "manage Granddad when he tried to touch her" (30).

In fact, Marshall's treatment of incest empowers Gemma's father, Ron, more than it does Gemma, who is portrayed as escaping into a fantasy world. According to the jacket blurb, she "imaginatively compensates for an anxious father and malicious grandfather by acting out the lives of famous women," the psychological implications of which remain unexamined in the text. Ron has been aware of his father's perversion since his own childhood, but does little

other than make empty threats to put the old man into a home, until he directly experiences his malign influence:

For the first time Ron was conscious of the swellings beneath his daughter's blouse, that had meant no more to him than that Gemma was growing up. He would never again be able to hug her, kiss her goodnight, without seeing [his father's evil eyes] leering at her.  
(169)

This account provides clear evidence of the inherent hegemony within the text: until abuse affects an adult, no action need be taken. Even though the obvious solution presents itself — “His father could look after himself in a flat if he had to”— still Ron vacillates: “could he live with it if his father assaulted a woman or a girl, and ruined a life?” (169). Not only does this insight reveal that he considers Grandad Corey's behaviour a given, it discounts the impact it has already had on the females in his own family, apparently condoning the abuse so long as it does not become public.

Only decades later (and less than twenty pages from the end of the book), does the son finally act: “the old man was not going to destroy this home as he had destroyed his own” (169). However, his words appear shallow in the light of the damage already caused, with the implied future tense of “not going to” suggesting he does not consider Gemma has been affected to date, an assumption her obsession with Heloise and her medieval lover, the castrated Abelard, calls into question. The novel ends with the old man finally moving into a flat, which just happens to be next door to the local policeman, but this action is explained as much by Ron's newfound relationship with Madeleine's mother as by concern for his daughter's wellbeing. Although the presence of the neighbouring constable finally contains the threat of abuse, the story's resolution fails to address the needs of the victim, whose mental wellbeing is called into question by readers' final image of her “draping herself in curtain velvet” (189), having replaced her fixation for Heloise with Scarlett O'Hara.

Incest appears as a topic in New Zealand children's literature before adolescent sexual activity, reflecting its true nature as an expression of adult power over children, rather than of sexuality as such (which remains the most contentious aspect of adolescence from an adult point-of-view). Sexual abuse

most often takes place outside the novel, or is euphemistically described as a touch or “a cuddle” (Marshall 30) to avoid details. Faville’s description of Stanley’s hand on Robyn’s breast (112) is as explicit as a text becomes until Tania Roxborough’s 1997 novel, *If I Could Tell You...: When a Family Secret is Revealed*. Technically, incest still occurs outside the story, in that the victim is the protagonist fifteen-year-old Kelly’s late mother, Beth, although the narrative device of a diary (written when Beth was a teenager) makes the most despicable incest, that of father with daughter, immediate once more. Claudia Marquis notes the artifice inherent in such a technique, maintaining that the diary serves to “hide” the adult author at the same time as proclaiming the “authenticity of the text” (1991 338, 339), although its bibliotherapeutic purpose is made obvious by jacket notes that advertise the availability of an accompanying “set of teachers’ notes” (Roxborough).

Roxborough’s novel proves the exception within this study in that it depicts an incest victim standing up for herself. The device of the diary gives her a voice with which to accuse the adults who have failed her, as well as filtering readers’ response through the focalisation of the “actual reader,” Kelly: “I’d have chopped his willy off like that lady did to her husband in America” (91). This focus, however, is not the same as punishing the perpetrator. Both victim and abuser are long dead by this time. Moreover, the novel’s ultimate message is one of adolescent fortitude rather than adult guilt; the victim has to adapt her behaviour (eventually running away from home), while the abusive father’s life continues unaffected.

Presented in italics, Beth’s entries chronicle a chain of abuse over the period of a year, beginning with mere hints, “*Things I hate: pumpkin, fleas, ...Dad coming into the bathroom*” (28), before moving from “*Dad keeps giving me lots of hugs*” to “*He tried to put his hand up my nightie*” (30), to “*when I woke up in the night Dad was in my bed and he was asleep but he had his hand in my undies*” (31). Despite a diary’s potential for “confessional openness and intimacy” (Marquis 339), the objectivity of the final entry seems to distance the narrator from involvement in the action, the father’s power holding sway even when he is asleep. Beth’s only avenue of response in this last example is to sleep with her older sister, yet — inexplicably within the story

(except to enable it to explore the topic of abuse in depth) — she always begins the night in her own room.

Nevertheless, the double layer of narrative enables Roxborough to imbue Kelly's reading with a more overt critique of incest than if events ostensibly happen at the time of narration: "Here was a story about a little girl who had to face things no one should have to face. It was bizarre: almost as if her mother had accepted what he did and even justified his behaviour" (35). In this way, Roxborough guides adolescent readers to condemn the actions of the adult, something no adult within the text ever does, even when they clearly know.<sup>1</sup> Kelly learns that Beth tries to tell a teacher, but "*all hell [breaks] loose*": her mother tells the teacher to "*mind her own damn business*," and accuses Beth of being "*a little liar*," while her father complains, "*that everyone was ganging up on him and that even his children don't respect him*" (32). The diary could be interpreted as the victim's "voice," but it, too, stresses her silence: "*I didn't tell [the teachers] about home or anything*" (82), nor, even after she drunkenly reveals to strangers that her dad loves her to "*play with his willy*" (99) and a social worker calls at her home, does she say anything, because "*I knew [Mum] wouldn't believe me*" (99). As with the earlier example of Lasenby's Sad Lisa, adult characters' indifference may well serve a bibliotherapeutic function, in that failing to heed a cry for help contradicts all contemporary counsel about how to react in such circumstances (Marris 307). On the other hand, as Hall's *When You Can't Say No* demonstrates, the same message can be equally conveyed by having an adult character who does stand up for the victim.

*If I Could Tell You...* culminates in the most sexually explicit description in New Zealand children's literature, all power and no pleasure. The language is deliberately shocking, in order to justify Beth's reaction:

*You wanna know what that sicko did last night?*

*...I see him coming toward me. He's got no clothes on and his thing is sticking up.*

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<sup>1</sup> Beth's sister, Jennifer, "*told me [Dad touched her friend] Leanne and that she's going to leave school at the end of the year and go and stay with Aunty Judy*" (32), revelations that suggest Jennifer may also have been abused.

*...I still play like I'm asleep and then the bastard shoves that thing right in my face trying to get it into my mouth.... [I turn my head away, but] he just kept on shoving it into my neck and hair and then he gave his pathetic cry and I knew he'd finished — all over my hair and pillow. (84)*

Writing the piece is presented as cathartic for the narrator, but the details cause the diary's "actual" reader, Kelly, to feel "physically ill" (85). Moreover, the focalising effect of the present tense, together with the direct address ("You wanna know..."), makes implied readers complicit witnesses. Unlike other New Zealand works, *If I Could Tell You...* accuses the perpetrator outright, as Beth's outburst in the next set of diary entries matches the violence of his assault:

*I did it! On Wednesday night I was doing the dishes and Dad comes up behind me and puts his arms around me and he smells of beer and he is ...rubbing himself into me and trying to put his hands on my breasts and I'm washing one of the meat knives and something inside me just gets red hot and I ...turn on him and I'm holding the knife at him. I said, 'If you ever touch me again, I swear I will slit your throat. I will come into your bedroom while you're asleep, just like you've been doing all this time and while you're lying there, pissed as a fart, I'll take this knife and cut off your head.'*

*...I could tell by the look in his eyes that he knew I'd do it. (102)*

Here, for the first time in a New Zealand work about incest, adolescent confronts adult head-on. Her victory is acknowledged (as in Hall's *When You Can't Say No*) by the father turning away without a word. This represents a significant triumph of adolescent power — but no one within the text acknowledges it (other than the daughter, more than twenty years on).

Granted, the abuse ceases, but further events present readers with a confused message. Far than portraying Beth's healing process or calling the perpetrator to account, the focalising diary entries recount her increasingly delinquent behaviour (which is not presented as being in any way connected with her traumatic home life). First, she enters into an underage sexual relationship; then, fearing she might be pregnant, she falsifies having been raped, which leads to the wrongful arrest of an innocent suspect. Charges are

laid against her for “*lying to the police*” (115), and she is placed on probation. After a further argument with her father, she steals from her mother, hitchhikes to the South Island, and, having told her “*whole life story*” (119), is placed in foster care, where she is “*given a second chance and no one knows me from before and I don’t have to prove myself*” (120). This dénouement portrays caring adults who finally do believe her, but the remove at which this validation occurs (in reported form, thousands of kilometres from the scene of the crime, and in the absence of those responsible for the abuse) once again seems to lessen its impact.

*If I Could Tell You...* exposes the incestuous abuse of adult power to the adolescent gaze (on several levels), but — as this study demonstrates — it is the adult reaction that counts. Occasionally, mothers, as in Hall and Block’s novels, and the wife in Faville’s *Stanley’s Aquarium*, have sought forgiveness for their complicity, but this is not the case here. The novel’s narrative style, combining diary entries with “real” life appears to protect adults from having to confront their culpability. June, the foster parent, contacts Beth’s mother, who “*was crying and stuff and June and she had this big talk. Then I got on the phone and Mum said I had to come home but I told her that if she made me ... I would leave school and that shut her up*” (119). Although clearly demonstrating adult capitulation to the adolescent’s verbal power (and possibly hinting at further disclosure to a fellow adult), nevertheless, the mother’s only communication with her daughter precludes any gesture of atonement. Moreover, readers have already “heard” her previous refusals to concede the truth (32, 99). Kelly’s grandmother never appears in the text (she is still alive); therefore our version of her is shaped through the focalisation of others. After reading the diary, Kelly may observe that it “*didn’t sound like she was a very nice mother,*” but her father counters with: “*Life hasn’t been very kind to your grandmother,*” and “*...your mum loved her mother very much. I just think Alice finds it difficult to express herself*” (38-39). Her description as “*withdrawn and bitter like a sour prune*” (40) may lead readers to infer the emotional damage occasioned by her failure to support her daughter. However, her impassiveness is also given as the reason why Kelly decides against tackling the subject with her, which, in effect,

absolves the grandmother from ever having to acknowledge her role in the abuse.

No New Zealand work written for adolescents portrays an adult abuser openly confessing his guilt. In Roxborough's novel, Beth and her sister Jennifer, as adults (in other words, now their parent's equals), are described as having confronted their father shortly before his death:

Their mum was so angry with them, but they stuck at it.  
...Eventually they got him to admit what he had done, but there  
was no apology.

Kelly's immediate reaction, "'The creep'" (91), is endorsed by her father: "'I've never understood how a parent could hurt their child in that way'" (89). However, despite this retrospective condemnation, the text never shows the perpetrator called to account in person. Grudgingly admitting "what he has done" is not the same as "confessing he was guilty of incest." Moreover, the fact that this disclosure only occurred years after the event, reported second-hand by his son-in-law after even more time, reinforces the impression within the text of an adultist imperative reluctant to relinquish hegemonic power.

In contrast to other New Zealand works, *If I Could Tell You...* does not require the child victim to forgive her abuser. Beth does not do so within the diary, and her attitude seems substantiated by Kelly's father's account of the grandfather's death: "Your grandmother maintains they [the daughters] killed him with their confrontation. Elizabeth said the guilt and rot got to him" (91). Moreover, his death throes are clearly intended to be read as retributive: "he choked and spluttered and blood came out his ears, nose and mouth. It was horrible." Readers share Kelly's expectation that "'I betcha mum was pleased he was dead,'" therefore it comes as a surprise when the text goes on to describe the adult Beth grieving for "'the only father she'd known.'" As a way of justifying this unanticipated reaffirmation of patriarchal authority, Kelly's father is also portrayed as not fully understanding her reaction, but he concludes: "'She was special like that. She forgave people and was prepared to accept them no matter what'" (91). Thus, in the absence of a direct narratorial invocation for adolescent forgiveness, the grown-up victim grants it unbidden, an absolution further affirmed by the death notice, which commemorates a "devoted father...

and respected father-in-law” (125), in spite of incontrovertible evidence that he is neither.

Abandoning the adolescent voice, the novel makes the adult point-of-view overt, with Kelly’s father summing up the moral of the story:

‘Yes it [the incest] was terrible and she hated it more than we can imagine, but at some stage she decided she wasn’t going to let what he did to her spoil the rest of her life. She still had the scars, but she had healed.’ (90).

In this way, the emphasis on adolescent resilience (which allows the perpetrator to remain unpunished) brings about the absolution that forms a necessary part of the healing process, as revealed in a poem written by the adult Beth, entitled “To My Father”:

... I carved a picture in the sand  
 And while I toiled  
 Your face appeared.  
 ...  
 [God and I] waited and then watched the incoming tide wash  
 And draw you clean away.  
 The sand rubbed against my heart as well.  
 And I see there are no traces left on my soul.  
 It is finished. (25)

This resolution concludes the most overt treatment of incest within the New Zealand corpus of children’s fiction, *If Only I Could Tell You...*, which graphically exposes adult guilt to the adolescent gaze. However, both actors are dead, the story is filtered through a variety of narrative layers and voices (adolescent and adult), and actual and implied readers are located decades after the “reality.” For these reasons, despite its clear bibliotherapeutic impact, and strong adolescent characterisation, the text once again reveals traces of the adultist imperative at work, in that its complex structure serves to evade a direct admission of adult guilt, whilst placing the onus upon the victim to endure.

Where American and British works dealing with incest present a clear-cut challenge to adult (abuse of) power, New Zealand novels treat the topic more equivocally. This may be an accurate reflection of the inherent ambivalence of parties within a dysfunctional family; nevertheless, the tendency to downplay

the culpability of the perpetrator conveys a message that Hebley rightly considers “sociologically disturbing” (*Power of Place* 1998 130). Such treatment, however, is in keeping with the tenor of the relationships examined within this chapter, which tend to empower adolescent characters only insofar as they accept the adult’s point-of-view. The straightforward assertion of authority is most obvious in works written in the first half of the century, in which a powerful sense of adult certitude governs the narrative voice. Towards the end of the century, adult characters become significant actors within the plot themselves, a device that invites readers to view themselves from a parent’s perspective. At a time in society when the nuclear family was breaking down, children’s novels stress adolescents’ maturity, requiring them to take on added responsibilities: thereby freeing parents to revert to adolescence themselves. Such role reversals last only as long as they suit the parent. Often the corollary to adults’ descent into adolescence is adolescents’ desire for the (re-)imposition of “normal” adult authority and repression, an authoritarian ideal that presupposes “normal” (i.e. deferential) adolescents: the one dependent upon the other.

Irrespective of adult behaviour, adolescent characters are portrayed as having to come to terms with their parent(s), a *dénouement* that often requires compromise on the part of the child, with empowerment occurring only insofar as adolescents forgive adult foibles. Whereas New Zealand works depicting younger children often remove adults from the narrative (secure in the knowledge that characters’ power remains limited to the realm of fiction), the constant emphasis on the adult point-of-view in works for adolescents —often literally the last word — operates to reinforce within the texts an authority that may not exist in reality.



## Chapter Five: The Birds & the Bees

Central to all the manifestations of the power dynamic between adults and adolescents is the inextricable association between adolescence and the sexual maturation that begins at puberty. David Hill, author of *See Ya, Simon*, makes this clear in his definition of “adolescence”:

It’s essentially a sexual term, I think. It has to be seen as this because it seems to be connected essentially with the growth of sexual identity and the physical development of sexuality. (Tape-recorded interview with author)

Generally regarded as an adult preserve, sexuality functions as a powerful force within society, with much of that power coming from its forbidden nature. As Foucault observed, “What is peculiar to modern societies...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*” (*History* 35). This, he contends, results in a fixation with sexual taboos, the knowledge of which enhances the pleasure.

Foucault makes a distinction between sex, the physical act, and sexuality: the associated attitudes and customs whereby societies seek to define and regulate sexual behaviours (*History* 33-35). The adult need to control sexuality stems from what he termed the power/repression dynamic, recognising that “sex is so powerful that it must be but cannot be controlled” (Trites 87). This contradictory imperative governs much of Western morality, but has particular application to adolescents, to whom society attributes a preoccupation with sex, which must be curbed. Dr Carol Shand addressed this attitude in the 1970 Association for the Study of Childhood lecture series on the “adolescent problem” in New Zealand, noting that, while puberty represents the body’s physiological preparation for reproduction, “conventional Western society ... asks its young to ... sit on their sex urge ... pretending it does not exist.” More significantly, she identified the hegemonic context, in which

...a group of sexually mature people [adolescents] are surrounded by a more powerful group of people who are already in sexual decline [adults], and are being cajoled, coerced and in various ways

subverted to put this strong biological urge into cold storage for about ten years. (50)

The imperative to repress adolescent sexuality has direct application to its representation in New Zealand children's literature, in that one of the most persuasive ways of controlling behaviour is through language. Indeed, Foucault defines "sexuality" as a discursive construct (*History* 69): by talking about sex, texts endeavour to shape readers' attitudes according to society's mores. To this end, New Zealand children's novels portray adolescent sexual experimentation as a misappropriation of an adult prerogative, with the overwhelming message that sex is for reproduction, not pleasure. The rare exceptions reveal a classist hegemony operating alongside the adultist one, with sexual relations permitted only to those in long-term, inherently middle-class, monogamous relationships, a situation that echoes the idealised construct of adulthood revealed in the previous chapters.

Literature enables adult authors to acknowledge adolescents' apparent preoccupation in sex, and simultaneously control its representation through the relationship between narrative voice and implied reader. In this way, New Zealand children's works seem to exemplify Foucault's observation: their proscription of adolescent sexual behaviour serves to justify broaching the topic in the first place. Some of the earliest works function as primers on the "facts of life," acknowledging characters' (and readers') curiosity, but failing to satisfy it. Such works stress theory, not practice, referring to sex solely in relation to adults. The depiction of teenage characters exploring their own sexuality does not occur until the late 1980s, when works portray highly idealised relationships between soul mates. This is not the same as condoning adolescent sex, however, in that such exceptional characterisations bear little relation to readers' own lives, thereby reinforcing the monogamous ideal associated with lifelong commitment. On the other hand, casual sexual encounters are depicted as a meaningless physical act that participants invariably regret. In such cases, the representation highlights the dangers of experimentation: the personal costs in terms of (females') innocence, and (males') performance anxiety, as well as the negative consequences (pregnancy, abortion, and sexually transmitted diseases), which, the texts imply, are the preserve of reckless adolescents. Conversely,

adults' rightful, conjugal, sexual activity is contrasted with depictions of broken marriages, in which parents exhibit irresponsible "adolescent" sexual behaviour. Homosexuality appears in these texts only in the final decade of the twentieth century. Authors, echoing the bibliotherapeutic approach seen in relation to incest, endeavour to validate a section of their adolescent readership, whilst maintaining control over the discourse of sexuality as a whole, by advocating the same restraint demanded of heterosexual characters.

### **"Tubes and cells"**

The growth of movements such as Boy Scouts and the YM and YWCA, designed to channel youthful energies in the early years of the twentieth century, stemmed from a growing concern about the topic of sexuality: a sexuality, as Foucault points out (Danaher et al.143-144), that society considers children should not have. Nevertheless, adult discourses persist in speaking of it *ad infinitum*, as shown in the ritual played out in Esther Glen's novels: lengthening a girl's skirts and putting up her hair. As already mentioned, "the legs and hair were [considered] potent sex symbols which must be concealed. Only a woman's intimates — her family and later her husband — would ever see her hair free and her legs bare" (Coney 151). The inherent paradox of concealing the obvious, while at the same time drawing attention to its concealment, stresses the allure of sexuality's forbidden nature. At the same time, influenced by Freud and a growing interest in child development, New Zealand society began to call for more open discussions on sex education (Coney 178-9), which would enable adults to address the issue of adolescent sexuality directly, while still retaining control over the discourse.

According to Trites, such teaching allowed adults "to discuss the forbidden in that circular pattern of mentioning the unmentionable" (95) identified by Foucault. Nevertheless, Ruth Fry, in her survey *It's Different for Daughters: A History of the Curriculum for Girls in New Zealand Schools 1900-1975*, comments on the difficulties accompanying early efforts to teach bodily functions:

Textbooks ... managed with surprising skill to skirt around topics that might be considered indelicate. ... [The] use of analogies

enabled the teacher to evade the more vulgar reality. A lesson on excretions could safely be introduced with the example of the steam engine producing the waste products of steam, smoke and ashes. (Fry 48)

Not surprisingly, given such reticence, the topic of “sex physiology” proved even more of a challenge. Even so, as early as 1912, a Dr George Home of New Plymouth made a submission to the Cohen Commission, in which, according to Fry,

As well as important reasons for teaching the ‘perfectly wholesome subject,’ he offered a model lesson of instruction. Simply and eloquently, he proceeded from the division of a cell to the fertilization of lilies where he introduced the terms ‘male or father part’ and ‘female or mother part’ and moved on to fish, to birds, to human beings. (48, 50)

Fry goes on to comment, however, “[at] each step, he became a little less explicit and when he came to the birds he gave up explaining how the male fertilizes the female egg” (50), with the result that human fertility eluded him altogether.

In any case, the 1912 Cohen Commission’s recommendations on sex education “went nowhere” (Coney 178), and, according to *Youth and Sex: Dangers and Safeguards for Girls and Boys*, published in the same year, it was left up to

...fathers and mothers to say whether these sublime and beautiful mysteries shall be lovingly and reverently unveiled by themselves or whether the child’s mind shall be poisoned and all beauty and reverence destroyed by depraved school-fellows and vulgar companions. (Scharlieb and Sibly 43)

This quotation may allude to the “beautiful mysteries” associated with the topic, but in practice, as noted by Foucault, the discourse associated with sexuality in Western culture, particularly in relation to adolescents, stresses adult prohibitions and restrictions, what one cannot do, rather than associated *jouissance* (pleasure). At the same time, however, the insistence on discouraging adolescent sexual activity functions as tacit acknowledgement of its power.

The first children's novel to address the topic, Edith Howes' *The Cradle Ship* (1916), which Gilderdale describes as being "concerned with the truth about 'where babies come from'" (6), deals solely in euphemisms. Nevertheless, it was universally acknowledged as a landmark in children's literature; "its subject matter broke new ground...and the book was translated into several foreign languages" (Gilderdale 121). Moreover, in 1921 the Director of the Division of School Hygiene advocated *The Cradle Ship* as recommended reading in secondary schools, in order to satisfy "wholesome enquiry" (Fry 181). The book purports to answer the question "where do babies come from?" with chapter titles such as "Babyland," "Bird Mothers," "Baby-Bags," and "More Babies." Two young children travel with their parents to Fairyland, where they all change into flowers,<sup>1</sup> learning about tree-babies (with mother-cones, father-flowers, seed-eggs, pollen grains and seed-babies), flower-babies, fish-babies, birds, bees, and kangaroo-babies. The only mention of human reproduction comes right at the end: "'Baby grew in a silky baby-bag under your heart, Mother,' said Win" (153). Such a fairy tale may have sufficed, as bedtime reading for young children,<sup>2</sup> but was hardly adequate for adolescents. As Sandra Coney observes,

There is no inkling in the tale about how Win, Twin or Baby got inside Mother, nor how they got out. To girls reared on *The Cradle Ship*, the truth must have come as a shock. (179)

Nevertheless, Howes was an ardent educationalist, and, in 1930, she published *The Golden Forest*, in order to present the facts of life for an older audience. *The Cradle Ship* focused literally on "the birds and bees," but Howes invites older readers to extrapolate to the human condition based on a series of natural history accounts, all of which stress the ideological message that sex is for reproduction, the sole preserve of (married) adults. The novel begins with a chance encounter in London between a twelve-year-old street urchin and a New

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<sup>1</sup> As Betty Gilderdale observed, "perhaps it should be stated without comment that the father becomes a red-hot poker and the mother a violet" (*A Sea Change* 121)

<sup>2</sup> Both Margaret Mahy and Diane Hebley have told the author they recall having it read to them as children.

Zealand farmer, Mr Morne, who brings the boy back with him. As Jack grows up, he encounters reproduction at every turn. The narrative begins with amoeba and methodically makes its way up the evolutionary scale. Where one chapter ends with the statement, “Nature’s children are infinite in variety — yet she builds up all on that one plan, the union of two cells,” the very next begins, “Some of the men on [the farm] had wives and families” (*The Golden Forest* 37, 38).

*The Golden Forest* aimed to inform adolescent readers in theory, not in practice. Gone are the “baby-bags” of *The Cradle Ship* in favour of more “scientific” terminology. For example, having covered single-cell reproduction, the text moves on to explain the process in more complex organisms such as insects and birds:

The father has that fine tube that fits into the mother’s tube and lays his cells close to her cells. Tubes and cells! Everything seems to have them. (109)

A catalogue of “tubes and cells” culminates in “the topmost peak of that ascending series” (185), human reproduction. Having witnessed amoeba, insects, birds, and beasts, Jack finally puts all the pieces together:

...The union of two cells, father and mother cell; the father tube by which the cell was transmitted: the mother tube by which it was received (Nature makes great use of tubes): then, within the mother’s body (man being one of the higher animals), that long, slow marvellous growth, cells sub-dividing and multiplying themselves until part after part of the little body was completed, until at last the young living creature came forth, was ‘laid’: that was, that must be, the way of a baby’s birth. (185)

Morne praises Jack (and, by implication, Howes the reader) for having figured it out. He is then described as showing Jack a textbook containing a series of “beautifully executed drawings,” from the most simple of reproductive systems to the “highly perfected apparatus of the human being, with its contrivances for nourishing the baby and for aerating its blood” (186). However, nowhere do readers have the opportunity to view these illustrations, and, even though events neatly parallel the clinical details when the farmhand’s wife gives birth, the text has never once mentioned she is pregnant, nor do readers get to witness the

happy event: “Peggy and Andy had been away in the town for a month; now they came back, the beaming parents of a baby son” (182). The “facts of life” remain restricted to book knowledge, with scientific terms like “tubes,” “apparatus,” and “contrivances” ensuring that implied readers’ focus remains solely on the theory of reproduction. Practice must wait until marriage.

As well as firmly establishing sex as an adult prerogative, the novel’s emphasis on reproduction accords with the contemporary notion of eugenics. The first description of Jack, hungry and abandoned on the streets of London, reads:

He was a pale-faced, under-sized boy, incredibly thin; but an observer would have noticed [...] that there was a good width between the eyes and a fine open brow beneath the brown straight hair. (1)

Had Jack not exhibited intellectual potential in the form of his cranial capacity, he would not have been selected. Morne’s adoption of Jack is for the good of the species, not the individual. *The Golden Forest* goes on to reinforce this message wherever possible, with moths:

The swiftest one will catch [the female] and give her the cells, and that is for the good of the race (67);

with peacocks:

Consciously or unconsciously, the mother bird must choose a healthy father for her chicks, or they will be poor specimens, not fit to hold their own in the battle for life. The cells he thrusts into her laying tubes must be unblemished. She must never forget the rule: Fine fathers make fine birds (109);

and with stags:

‘For the sake of their children they must always mate with the strongest ...

Through mating always with the victor in the fight, the mothers unconsciously keep up the physical fitness of the race. It is one of nature’s plans.’ (180-1)

The reason for high standards is revealed at the end of the novel. Jack is portrayed as exemplifying this philosophy of “survival of the fittest” in the human species:

In the four years he had grown and filled out and strengthened tremendously. He would never be really tall, as tall as Mr Morne for instance, but he was a nuggety, healthy, normal boy of nearly sixteen, clear-eyed, straight, brown and strong from his outdoor life, hard-muscled from hard work. (197-8)

Such a description has overtones of “*mens sana in corpore sano*,” as well as reinforcing the virtues of the Protestant work ethic.

The key word, however, is “normal.” In order to reinforce this message, the narrative now introduces the character of Morne’s hitherto unmentioned son, one who has disobeyed the implicit rule to defer sexuality until marriage. Readers learn that, after the death of his wife, although providing for his son’s material needs, Morne neglected his moral upbringing with disastrous consequences:

...He was twenty when I went back after an interval of five years in Asia. Only twenty, but already dying... He had wasted himself, his youth, his young manhood. He had depleted his vitality till he could not recover... there must be full growth and maturity of body before the giving of cells. But he had not known; he had not waited.

[...] He had spent himself, squandered those vital forces that should have gone to his upbringing. He had not had all that was necessary: he had not had a parent... training...the teaching of control.

He died within the year.’ (238)

While utterly reinforcing them, this grim little morality tale comes as a shock after the litany of anecdotes applauding survival of the fittest in the animal kingdom. The ellipses within the text are also telling, not only visible testament to all the boy missed out on, but — within the moral climate of the day — representing the father’s continued reticence on the topic.

Gilderdale considers that this passage “leaves the reader in no doubt that he has died of venereal disease” (*A Sea Change* 121). However, although not ruling out the possibility of Gilderdale’s interpretation, phrases such as “depleted his vitality” and “squandered those vital forces” seem rather to imply masturbation, and/or promiscuity, neither of which, with their (forbidden)

connotations of sexual pleasure, had any precedent in the cavalcade of wholesome examples from nature. Howes' words bear a marked resemblance to *Onania*, an anonymous eighteenth-century British pamphlet (of which more than twenty editions were printed between 1715 and 1778), which describes the masturbator,

...[as one] who hardly comes to half the age he might reasonably have expected to arrive at, [finds] his spirits sunk, his body wasted, and his strength decay'd, in continual danger of being forced to resign his impure breath. (qtd. in Stengers and Van Neck 39-40)

Such views continued into the twentieth century, with the notion that masturbation caused irreparable bodily (and moral) harm having wide currency. Moreover, the belief that males had only a limited supply of semen, which must be preserved for its true purpose (procreation), had particular relevance to a society advocating eugenics. G. Stanley Hall warned in his 1924 autobiography that "yielding to mere and sensuous pleasure shortens the growth period [and weakens the race]" (qtd. in Laqueur 369), and Robert Baden-Powell, counselled readers of his handbook *Scouting for Boys* (1914) not to

...[throw] away the seed that has been handed down to you as a trust instead of keeping it and ripening it for bringing a son to you later on. The usual consequence is that you sap your health and brain just at the critical time when you would be otherwise gaining the height of manly health and intelligence. (qtd. in Stengers and Van Neck 146-7)

The passage quoted here comes from the 1930 edition, suggesting that Howes' audience were likely well aware of the message implicit within Morne's ghastly warning. Even though the notion that masturbation caused physical and mental harm no longer had medical credence by this time, still parents and educators continued to stress its moral dangers as a way of maintaining power, thereby reinforcing sex as a (conjugal) adult preserve, intended solely for reproduction, not pleasure.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Witi Ihimaera recalls a similar morality existing well into the 1950s in this account of his own schooldays: "‘You must save yourselves,’ [the guest speaker, a local clergyman] boomed, ‘for your future wives and not deplete yourselves by SELF ABUSE’" (in Gifkins 167).

**“My hour has come”**

New Zealand literature for children only began openly to broach teenage sexuality in the final decades of the twentieth century, nearly ten years after the landmark publication of American author Judy Blume’s *Forever* (1975), whose graphic details about birth control, penises, condoms, venereal disease, ejaculation and impotence, intercourse during menstruation, loss of virginity, pregnancy, giving up a baby for adoption, and a “play-by-play description of how to have intercourse” Trites likens to a “self-help manual” (88). Although Trites goes on to suggest that *Forever* also operates under a repressive framework, because its insistence that sex is “nothing to be ashamed of” (Blume 28) immediately draws attention to the very possibility of shame (88), nevertheless, American YA works, by-and-large, tend to be far more sexually explicit than New Zealand novels. Their depiction of adolescence has never followed American trends, which can perhaps be attributed, as indicated in Chapter Two, to New Zealand’s more conformist national psyche. In each case, unlike American authors’ intention to “liberate teenage sexuality” (Trites 88), New Zealand works tend to stress the need for adolescent characters to defer sexual activity until such time as they fulfil the middle-class ideal of monogamous adulthood.

Margaret Mahy’s 1984 novel, *The Changeover*, is the first to incorporate growing sexual awareness as a major theme. Nevertheless, seen in terms of the Foucauldian power dynamic (*History* 11), it continues to impose adult controls by locating adolescent sexuality within a supernatural context. As witches, fourteen-year-old Laura and seventeen-year-old Sorenson (Sorry) are anything but “normal” teenagers, which has the effect of keeping implied readers at a distance, rather than — as seen in the depiction of desirable adolescent behaviours — encouraging their vicarious identification with the characters. Moreover, references to sex remain at the discursive level: Laura and Sorry may talk about sex and sexuality, but they do not act. Mahy’s characters borrow from the genre of romance fiction, their appropriation of its (adult) language operating to point up the speakers’ immaturity, as shown in the following dialogue:

‘What’s brought you into my parlour?’ [Sorry] asked ominously.

‘It’s late to be visiting a man in his rooms...’

‘I’m wearing my school uniform,’ Laura said. ‘Does that make it better or worse?’ (62)

Her question remains unanswered within the story, but the presence of Sorry’s mother throughout this conversation undercuts his attempt at sophisticated repartee, at the same time functioning as a visible safeguard against impropriety.

The dangers of adolescent sexuality are shown by the omniscient narrator’s admonitory tone early on when, driven by her concerns for her little brother Jacko (who has been possessed by a malign force), Laura sneaks out at night to seek counsel from Sorry, “seventh form prefect and secret witch” (54). As she walks alone through the dark streets, the recollection that a fellow pupil was recently raped in the vicinity draws attention to “her new, and in some ways blatantly female body that had recently opened out of her childish one” (57). This description, while celebrating her femininity, also stresses her vulnerability. Despite physiological maturity, Laura is still a minor, and the narrative contrasts innocence (Laura’s school uniform) with potential experience, as Sorry comments on her “very sexy legs” (57). As already mentioned, danger is averted by his mother’s presence at this time, just as, on another occasion, when Laura stays overnight, Sorry alludes to Laura’s mother’s likely reaction if she knew her daughter were “entertaining older seventh form men in [her] pyjamas” (81). Sorry’s mother and grandmother openly voice the potential threat. While welcoming Laura’s presence as a sign that Sorry is recovering from his troubled past, at the same time they also warn her, “[the relationship] might have its dangers from your point of view.” This is a warning Laura is only too aware of:

Inside her clothes was the body that still surprised her, not yet completely itself, its powers of attraction, great or small, largely unknown. It was because she was a girl that they thought Sorry might be dangerous to her. (94)

Danger, however, has its allure. Later, when Sorry tells Laura how his mother accepted him as a witch, “give or take the little matter of my sex,” Laura’s observation that it is “not so little!” exploits the discursive potential for sexual innuendo, as Sorry thanks her for her confidence, adding that it is “about

average” really (117). Constant references to sex hover unbidden in the air, posing a threat to Laura’s virginity even as she speaks.

Although Mahy’s characters do no more than talk, the text alludes to romance fiction to highlight unrealistic adolescent expectations. The association is made explicit when Laura acknowledges her inexperience — “I’ve never been out with a boy” (106) — by asking Sorry if sex is “like ... the last five lines of a Barbara Cartland<sup>1</sup>” (107). Although unlikely that Mahy’s audience would read such works themselves, the narrative presumes a general familiarity with descriptions such as:

He kissed her until she was no longer herself but his, and it was so wonderful that it was impossible to think of anything except that she loved him and he filled her whole world, and she was no longer afraid. (Cartland *Love on the Wind* 1983, qtd. in *Books & Writers*)

Much was written during the 1980s and 90s about the power relations inherent in romance fiction,<sup>2</sup> identifying a patriarchal dominance that appears at odds with the feminist tenor of Mahy’s works. Hence, a subtle irony pervades the text. The novel expects readers to reject Laura’s naivety, at the same time undercutting fantasy with reality, as Sorry admits, “It was nice in bits.... As a matter of fact I got into a hell of a lot of trouble over it. But then I might have been the villain, not the hero. If only I knew for sure” (107). Far from describing the *jouissance* Laura expects, Sorry’s bathetic response likens the moment to the curate’s egg, a guarded appraisal that may well operate to discourage, particularly in concert with mention of the “trouble” it occasioned.

The inappropriateness of adolescent sexual activity is further reinforced when Sorry, attempting to console Laura, later observes that he seems to have “all the disadvantages of being married ... and none of the advantages” (119). This causes Laura to throw down a challenge: “What advantages? You want to make out? All right then. It doesn’t take long does it? And then you can shut up about it. It’ll be over and done with” (119). The bluntness of her words negates

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<sup>1</sup> The British author (1901-2000) of more than 700 works of popular romance fiction.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Jeanne Dubino’s “The Cinderella Complex: Romance Fiction, Patriarchy and Capitalism.” *Journal of Popular Culture* 27. 3 (1993): 103-119, and Daphne Watson’s *Their Own Worst Enemies: Women Writers of Women’s Fiction*. (London: Pluto Press, 1995).

her former romantic illusions, clearly revealing the power relations inherent in sexuality. Laura may think she holds the power, but, by reducing sex to a purely physical act devoid of meaning, her uncharacteristic outburst, which results in Sorry's "consternation" (119), warns implied readers that now is neither the time, nor the place.

Borrowing from romance fiction occurs in other novels by Mahy, with the same discursive purpose: overblown descriptions stress the unreality of adolescents playing a game intended for adults only. In *The Catalogue of the Universe* (1985), for example, the lovers engage in role-play markedly at odds with their true selves; the painfully-shy Tycho potentially becomes "a merciless beast" whom Angela commands to "lay [her] beautiful white body bare!" (135). This could suggest *jouissance*, were it not for the self-conscious banter that follows, with Tycho appealing to Angela not to laugh at him, while she reminds him that he's supposed to say he loves her "for [her] mind ... not just [her] body" (136). On the other hand, in Mahy's *The Tricksters* (1986), Harry (Ariadne), teased by her family as an incorrigible romantic (228-9), creates fictional lovers "eternally ravishing one another among flowers and jewels" (52), yet she herself has to fend off a violent sexual assault. In this case, the "reality" of one book appears to challenge the fantasy of another, suggesting that sex is *not* like romance fiction. As Harry is seventeen, and *The Changeover's* Laura only fourteen, the only apparent justification for allowing Tycho and Angela's sexual activity lies in their ages: they are both eighteen and have left school (which qualifies as a transition from adolescent-as-child to adolescent as adult-in-waiting).

Commentators such as Sheahan (1991) and Rayburn (1992) have tended to concentrate on the feminist elements within *The Changeover* rather than the sexual, although the two are clearly intertwined. Certainly, the combinations of witchcraft, moonlight and metaphysical transformations have strong feminist overtones, and the narrative employs allusions to fairy tale and myth to reinforce the archetypal *passage* from girl to woman. However, equally as strong as its celebration of the feminine are the novel's warnings against sex. It is no coincidence, for example, that Laura is likened to "beautiful Fatima, [going] into Bluebeard's chamber" (95), an allusion to a tale from Charles Perrault's *Contes*

*de ma Mère l'Oye, ou Histoires du Temps Passé* (1697), in which a young bride enters a forbidden room, only to find the bodies of her equally disobedient predecessors. Bruno Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* interprets this “as a cautionary tale which warns: Women, don’t give in to your sexual curiosity” (302). Sorry’s room contains no corpses, but his trophies include a snapshot of Laura pinned to a poster of a naked woman “intended to be looked at by men” (*The Changeover* 64), which serves as a warning just the same, especially as the Bluebeard metaphor is followed by an image of Laura imagining herself “the heroine of a jungle movie who, waking to find a serpent coiled on her breast, [is] unable to move in case it bites her” (97). With these allusions, the text draws attention to the disjunction between fiction and reality.

Mahy locates Laura’s “changeover” within a context fraught with obstacles. In terms of the plot, the title refers to her becoming a fully-fledged witch, but the narrative’s many allusions to fairy tales point — as Bettelheim suggests— to psychosexual interpretations as well. Sheahan sees the changeover as a reference to birth, evident in passages such as: “The trees cried out to her as she passed, some seductively, others in voices of pain, and Laura herself began to ache and throb ... [as] writhing briars ... began to drip her own blood on her” (146-7). Lawrence-Pietroni (1994) considers the same imagery evocative of “the ongoing rhythms of menstruation” (36). It could also be argued that “seductively” and “throb” have strongly sexual connotations, which, coupled with “pain,” “ache,” and “blood,” might well suggest the loss of virginity. Sexual symbolism continues as Laura squeezes through cracks, making her way along a “wet, helical path” (*The Changeover* 150) similar to the “spiral staircase” in a tale such as “Sleeping Beauty,” which, according to Freudian symbolism, equates to “sexual experiences” (Bettelheim 232). Finally— rising out of the water — Laura is “expelled” (*The Changeover* 151), emerging as her new self: the changeover complete. As she recovers, Sorry kisses her, making the allusion explicit when he calls her ““Sleeping Beauty”” (151). The description of Laura’s white dress, “splashed with bright, clear crimson from waist to hem” (151), echoes Bettelheim’s interpretation that the fairy tale

represents the onset of menstruation and the anticipation of sexual maturity<sup>1</sup> (232). An aspect that Bettelheim overlooks, however, is the “pricking of the finger on a spindle,” which possibly suggests, as does Mahy’s imagery earlier, the breaking of the hymen. Laura is not yet sixteen, yet the dangers of sex are imminent.

In this way, the text fulfils both adolescent and adult needs, acknowledging the power associated with adolescent sexuality, while at the same time repressing it by depicting temperate role models, as shown by Sorry’s words: “I keep wanting to go to bed with you. ... I knew I could make you want to. But it’s not [so] simple at all” (202), not least of which is the fact that it is “not even legal” (203). Rather than forbidding, the novel postpones sex, employing Sorry’s adolescent voice to establish the limits:

‘You’ve got three years of school ahead of you, and I’ve got four years of training. Round about then we might, oh...get married, I suppose. Live together somehow.’ (203)

While it is noteworthy that by the mid-1980s marriage and living together are regarded as interchangeable in terms of commitment, either alternative suffices to delay the resolution beyond the novel, thereby affording both characters and readers the requisite time to consider their actions.

Indeed, it has always been held that the main signifier distinguishing novels written for young adults from those written for adults is that the former “contain no sexuality” (Frenier qtd. in Jamgochian 107). Nodelman, establishing parallels with Said’s *Orientalism*, sees this silence as part of the inherent power relationship governing the discourse: “presumably in order to allow ourselves to believe that children truly are as innocent as we claim ... we think children with such concerns are abnormal” (30). Foucault claims this notion of silence about sexuality exists as one of “a web of discourses” on the subject (*History* 30), based on the “different ways of not saying such things” (27). Thus, although no New Zealand YA work depicts sex explicitly until the very end of the twentieth century, the topic of sexuality *is* mentioned: as something to be avoided. In

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<sup>1</sup> Although feminist criticism has since questioned Bettelheim’s assumptions “that the arrival of any old prince intent on sexual congress must be a happy solution for an over-protected girl” (Hourihan 198).

Mahy's *The Catalogue of the Universe*, for example, Mrs Potter is described as having found a copy of *The Joy of Sex*<sup>1</sup> hidden in Tycho's room when he was younger (25-26), a moment of embarrassment made all the more galling because Mrs Potter and (Tycho's older brother) Richard could not disguise their mirth at his furtive curiosity. Although Tycho insists for three-quarters of the novel that Angela is just a friend, readers know this is his way of coping with a girl whom he finds "a continual torment, which he had learned to live with rather as he lived with hayfever" (26). Moreover, en route to visit her father Angela and Tycho pass, among other establishments, "a shop ...selling remarkable red and black underwear and what it vaguely described as 'marital aids'" (49); skimming through *The History of Western Philosophy* "at random, like a man trying out a lucky dip," Tycho chances upon a passage noting that Democritus "disapproved of sex because it meant consciousness was overwhelmed by pleasure" (83); and, later, he refers to the family cat, who (prior to her recent spaying) was "a voluptuous creature, luring suitors on...followed by a procession of enchanted toms, all compelled by her seasonal power" (109). In each case, the allusion acknowledges sex's inappropriateness, but also its power.

*The Catalogue of the Universe* presents a further exception to Jamgochian's observation about the absence of sexuality in its account of Tycho and Angela's relationship, although the sexual act remains beyond the confines of the text, in accordance with a discretion, despite Jamgochian's claim, that is often seen in works for adults as well. When physical intimacy finally occurs, it remains (at least for the implied audience) strictly above the waist: "They hugged each other furiously, ... Tycho buried his face in her shoulder [and] Angela ...stroked [his hair]" (135). The text goes so far as to describe Tycho placing his hand on Angela's "naked breast" (136) — before turning out the lights, and relegating the actual moment of intimacy to the interstices between chapters:

They kissed for the third time and fell into Tycho's darkness (136).

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<sup>1</sup> *The Joy of Sex: A Gourmet Guide to Lovemaking* (1972), written by Alex Comfort (1920-2000). *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes it as "the free-love generation's homage to the *Kama-sutra*." It was not a book for children.

In the early morning Tycho woke with Angela beside him. . . .

Yesterday he had been a faithful friend, and today he was a lover.

(137)

As previously noted, the novel condones their intimacy as the product of a committed relationship similar to that of *The Changeover*'s Laura and Sorry. Nevertheless, readers are not privy to events reserved for adults only, a control over the discourse first seen in Edith Howes' account of the married couple "Peggy and Andy [having] been away in the town for a month" before returning "the beaming parents of a baby son" (*The Golden Forest* 182).

Even though *The Catalogue* is the first novel for adolescents to incorporate sexual intercourse, it continues to uphold traditional values. Earlier, Tycho, his mother, and implied readers have been led to infer from Angela's provocative attire that "she probably sleeps with [other boys]" (110), a prejudice that is challenged by Angela's confession that she is still a virgin. She has a boyfriend, but readers never meet him, an omission that adds credibility to her celibate status, while her comment, "In a funny way being a virgin — a closet virgin — made me feel powerful, as if I had a lot of choice that no one knew about" (131), is revealing on two counts. First, it draws attention to the myth that equates provocative outward appearance with inner principles already observed in Duder's account of Alex's aberrant "widgie costume" (*Songs for Alex* 105) with Mrs Potter's attitude: "those shorts she [Angela] sometimes wears are so short they show the beginning of her *derrière*" (109). As Friedenbergs identified, the myth governs adolescent behaviours as well, in that Angela's embarrassment about her virgin status implies a peer group that apparently values sexual experience over chastity, values the novel counters with the phrase "closet virgin" (more usually associated with homosexuals' reluctance to "come out"), in order to highlight the inappropriateness of her shame.

Second, within the context of this study, Angela's words reveal a further instance in which the text appears to empower an adolescent. This only happens, however, when adolescent choice concurs with (implicit) adult values, as revealed when a drunken Angela is almost seduced by a stranger. In this

instance, the omniscient narrative stresses her (flawed) volition,<sup>1</sup> ““I don’t really blame him because I’d sort of led him on and I — oh well, he did try to insist, but ...”” (128-9), as well as invoking the panoptic gaze as Angela describes herself ““staggering out with this guy to the disgust of all”” (128). Not so drunk that she cannot recognise the wrongness of her actions in the eyes of the (adult) bar patrons, Angela’s realisation that she ““couldn’t do it!”” (129) represents the climax of her quest for self-awareness within the novel. In this, both *The Changeover* and *The Catalogue of the Universe* foreground adolescents’ apparent preoccupation with sex. At the same time, however, as shown by Angela’s words to Tycho — ““What with knowing you so well, I feel as if we’ve been married for ages in a way”” (182) — Mahy upholds the traditional adult values of fidelity and conscientious decision-making associated with monogamy.

Tessa Duder, who published the first volume of her *Alex* quartet in 1987, two years after *The Catalogue of the Universe*, also subscribes to the myth that “sex is a preoccupation of young adults”:

And how can you write books for them without writing about the thing in which they are most interested, and about which they have the most confusion? (Tape-recorded interview with author)

Her comments recognise the potential for adult control over the discourse, which invites a Foucauldian interpretation that, in writing about adolescent sexuality, adults may also be exploring their own preoccupation with sex. Although *Alex* is set in 1959-60, its descriptions of nascent teenage attraction are much more explicit than if they had been written at that time, and — as Duder herself acknowledges — even more explicit than in novels written only a few years earlier (tape-recorded interview with author).

Mahy’s protagonists engaged in verbal foreplay long before any physical encounter as a way of displacing tensions; Alex and Andy talk about everything else, but kiss in silence, driven by animal instinct: “Another (wonderful/amazing/unbelievable/ incredible) kiss, our bodies pressed hard together all the way down” (*Alex* 78). The text offers no further details, but—

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<sup>1</sup> The cocktail is called a Fallen Angel, and Angela confesses, ““I had quite a lot of them — about five green metaphors”” (127).

only a few pages further on — the two are left unchaperoned again, and “one thing led to another”:

With anyone less strong, I might well have gone, as my older classmates at school so delicately put it, the whole hog. But Andy had firm views about some things and this was one of them. I suppose I did, too, when it came to the point. So we only went half-way.

Pity really, because the sensation of wind against my bare breast and Andy kissing it softly was almost too much for me.

...He hadn't shaved this morning, and his chin was rough, like sandpaper, like a cat's tongue. (107)

The characters may only go “half-way,” but the graphic description of Alex's bare breast and Andy's foreplay demonstrates a shift in the depiction of sex in the three years since *The Changeover* (1984). Eighteen-year-old Angela and Tycho in *The Catalogue of the Universe* (1985) remained fully clad in readers' presence, with any touching occurring only with the lights out; fourteen-year-old Alex, on the other hand, is on Takapuna beach in broad daylight. Nevertheless, far from endorsing *jouissance*, by portraying the dangers of getting “carried away” by the moment, the call for restraint is made clear. Andy and Alex's “firm views” about premarital sex are unspecified, but it can be assumed that they accord with those of adults.

*Alex* can hint at the possibility of love-struck teenagers contemplating sex, not least because Andy dies before anything untoward takes place. On the other hand, intimacy with an adult, twenty-three-year-old Tom in *Alessandra: Alex in Rome* (1991), is another matter. Although fifteen-year-old Alex pretends to be ““eighteen, nearly nineteen”” (60), readers know she is not, and the only thing making the relationship acceptable is Tom's restraint:

He thanked me for the day. I thanked him. He wished me luck for Friday. I said thanks. We got out of the taxi and walked to the entrance ... He said ‘Ciao, Alessandra’; I said ‘Goodbye, Tom.’ He took my hand and kissed it formally. (67)

Tom is portrayed as the perfect gentleman in spite of ambiguous messages such as “I could feel my breast hard against his back, and no doubt he could too” (121). Alex's naïve impatience is counteracted by the narrative device of

alternating points-of-view, offering readers a second version of the same event from Tom's perspective:

That ill-judged but understandable blunder of attempting a kiss, upon feeling those superb small breasts against my back, cost me dearly....(138)

This device reveals that he also knows Alex is only a schoolgirl, endorsing the adult call for abstinence despite Alex's impatience:

*It's up to you, kissing-wise* he had said, six days earlier. He's stuck to his side of the bargain. My heart was bursting, but I just couldn't move. We should have done it earlier, if at all. (147)

The final phrase qualifies her view, instilling the need for vigilance against irrational temptation, as the novel further defers the risk of adolescent sexual activity by shifting focus to concentrate on Alex's medal-winning performance at the Olympic Games.

Seen in this light, *Alessandra: Alex in Rome* affords Alex time to "come of age": not twenty-one (the age formerly associated with adulthood), but sixteen, the age at which she can legally have sex, and the final volume, *Songs for Alex*, ends with Tom and Alex together in a hotel bedroom. Readers are already aware that Alex is dressed only in "a pair of scanty knickers and a thin T-shirt" under her chain mail Joan of Arc costume, and that shedding her armour (both literally and metaphorically) will be much more than "a symbolic gesture" (*Songs for Alex* 176). As with Mahy's novels, however, this is not just a physical relationship; intimacy is justified as part of a long-term commitment, as Tom's proposal reveals: "I'm not suggesting a conventional arrangement, mortgages and me coming home for tea every night at five ... I'm suggesting we might have two parallel careers, two equal lives" (179). Much is left unsaid: "... oh Alessandra, la più coraggiosa. Let me find out who you really are" (179). As with all previous treatments, however, the sexual nature of this knowledge remains unspecified.

Nevertheless, its consequences are considerable. The story picks up two hours later; the couple are cheered on their return to the cast party, and Alex's former drama teacher's invitation to "call me Marcia now, Alex" (181) seems

to award her adult status. This is a significant shift in tenor, as indicated by Duder herself:

I think during the *Alex* books I've pushed the boundaries of the 'young adult' genre further and further, and so that, really, when you get to *Songs for Alex*, the last one, that is *almost* an adult book. It isn't, I'm quite clear in my own mind of that, that it isn't, but nevertheless, people have said that it is pushing the boundaries.  
(Tape-recorded interview with author)

The boundaries have been pushed, not so much in terms of representation (the novel reveals as little physical detail as any other "young adult" books at the time), but in its implicit acceptance of adolescent sexual activity. One of the few *Bildungsromane* of the late twentieth century, the *Alex* quartet, according to Hebley, clearly charts "Alex's search for her identity in terms of what it is to be female and feminine" (*Power of Place* 1998 64). In this way, Duder's political agenda drives the narrative, an imperative that could also be applied to Mahy's works. However, in each case, adolescent sexuality is acknowledged only within a strict framework of conditions that impose adult restraint on adolescent impetuosity, with marriage and life-long commitment the prescribed outcome.

### **"Teenage groping"**

Accordingly, sex without commitment is not to be contemplated. By the late 1980s, New Zealand adolescent novels no longer tended to depict sex as the romanticised union of kindred spirits but as a meaningless physical act, often with deleterious consequences. Thus, rather than advocating abstinence until "Mr Right" comes along, they sought to convey the same message by depicting the negative consequences of casual sex with "Mr Wrong." Intercourse was negatively depicted as an end in itself rather than a signifier of true commitment, with the focus on the anticipation and, more particularly, the aftermath, as — without exception — characters start out as virgins, and are given cause to regret their actions.

Barry Faville's *Stanley's Aquarium* (1989), whose treatment of sexual abuse has already been examined, also portrays sixteen-year-old Robyn's relationship with Duncan, a seventh-former at her school. Both are

experimenting; not something the narrative recommends, as shown by Robyn's pejorative description of the scene of Taupo's courtship rituals:

... where the teenage good-old-boys [and their dates] gathered on weekend nights in their cars and planned where they were going to do wheelies that evening. ...[They] downed a few cans, did a few practice runs up Tongariro Street, around the boat harbour and back to where they had started .... In between these forays they communicated their feelings about cars at interminable length and eventually drove home to mother, squealing their tyres and gunning their engines. (29)

This hardly sounds romantic, an appraisal the first person narrator acknowledges:

If this account sounds somewhat cynical it's because I am reporting almost verbatim what was told to me by a [female] acquaintance who made the mistake of agreeing to spend a Saturday evening with one of these cowboys, and was reduced to reading clothing labels to relieve the boredom. (29-30)

In this way, the critique appears to be one of gender, rather than generation, but the message is the clear: there should be more to a relationship than this.

Unlike Mahy's and Duder's couples, for whom spiritual attraction precedes (and sanctions) physical contact, Faville's teenagers go straight to the physical, as shown when Robyn and Duncan park overlooking the Lake:

I was still chewing [my hamburger] when Dunkie finished, screwed up his paper bag and dropped it beside his seat. I was only half aware of what he was doing, but not for long. I had just closed my jaws over a delectable looking hunk of meat, with brown crisp edges, when Dunkie's arm swooped around behind me.

... An instant later his mouth was pressed firmly against my ear, while his hand was up under my sweater making a bee-line for my bra. Well, not a bee-line exactly — more like a frantic crab out to make a kill. (30)

The narrator alerts readers to the fact that a macho public image has displaced the more empathetic person with whom Robyn sought to have a relationship, when "I asked Dunkie to take me to a movie [because] I suspected that if he

were alone, good old Dunkie would become Duncan” (29). Moreover, by devoting more sensuous detail to the description of the hamburger than to the kiss, together with the detached observation of the predatory hand’s progress, any sense of romance is lost. In comparison to Mahy’s and Duder’s descriptions of soul mates, here the metaphors reinforce the senseless urgency of male animal behaviour.

A relationship based purely on physical attraction will founder. The inappropriateness of this scenario, made obvious through the previous scene setting (29), is further reinforced by having Robyn “burst into a hoot of laughter, sending a spray of mangled burger all over the dashboard, before collapsing into a violent coughing fit” (30). No self-defence instructor could have devised a more effective deterrent, and — emphasising their relief once the embarrassing moment has passed — the two agree to start anew. Beginning with a wholesome, chaperoned family fishing trip, they embark instead on “a casual, undemanding friendship that was always there and did not mean the sacrifice of other interests or changes in our relationships with other people” (39), which hardly sounds like a relationship between teenagers at all in its newfound temperance. In the event, Dunkie is killed in a car accident, thereby terminating further attempts at sexual experimentation.

Warnings against teenage sexual experimentation are even more pointed in Heather Marshall’s *Gemma, Brooke and Madeleine*, which provides readers with three different scenarios, all equally discouraging. In the first, Madeleine fancies Brooke’s brother, Leith, and, on their first date — at a school function — they go from dancing together to climbing out the toilet windows to have sex “by the swimming pool” (105) in less than fifty lines. The focalising admission, “[Leith] couldn’t for the life of him remember where he was supposed to stop...but wherever it was he didn’t, and dear God, he wouldn’t have, even if he had remembered” (105), reinforces the mindlessness of their actions. As a prophylactic message — to readers, at least — the text portrays Madeleine’s mother (a social worker) as having warned her, ““it’d be like this [inevitable] when the man wasn’t prepared,”” before putting her on ““the pill”” (105) some six months earlier. However, while Madeleine’s preparedness appears to convey

the right message about contraception,<sup>1</sup> it is offset by the inappropriateness of her behaviour, in that “Madeleine ... wanted sex all the time [while he (Leith)] wanted to do other things as well — talk and go places together” (128). Here, the adolescent voice advocates old-fashioned courtship as an alternative to sex.

Leith proves the exception in a novel written primarily from a female perspective. In the second example, Marshall directly foregrounds the general opinion about adolescents, with a father’s advice to his daughter:

‘And boys,’ [he] went on, consulting his list of reminders on ‘how to bring up Gemma.’ ‘At sixteen and seventeen, they’re rather ... you have to ... you can’t trust them ....’ (32)

Despite this warning, Gemma, whose crush on Steve is fuelled solely by her romantic fantasy about the medieval martyrs Heloise and Abelard, is portrayed as paying little heed, enabling the adolescent audience to learn from her mistakes. Gemma and Steve are never shown together, and the inappropriateness of their behaviour is reinforced by Gemma’s admission that she “let [Steve] make love to her on their [second] date, and it was a disaster” (130). Steve’s unsuitability is further compounded by the revelation that he “doped a little and boozed a lot” (128), and — when Gemma breaks up with him — by his crude reaction: “‘Is this a tease or something? Just when we were coming right fuck-wise’” (167). Such gratuitously coarse language is apparently permissible in that it serves the underlying purpose, to put readers off. Written for a predominantly female audience, Marshall’s novel affirms Gemma’s ability to learn from the experience, “even if it was only what she didn’t like about boys” (167). Moreover, the moral, “‘I changed into a woman today. I’m not a girl any longer’” (168), comes not when she has sex, but when she ends the inappropriate relationship.

Marshall’s third cautionary tale provides the strongest caveat against adolescent sexual behaviour. Completely ignoring her faithful admirer (her brother’s friend), Brooke is described as having “decided” (113) she is in love

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<sup>1</sup> Equating contraception with promiscuity reveals the ambiguity surrounding the discourse, as further shown by a researcher into AIDS education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, who cites findings that indicate “adolescent girls report not planning for sex with condoms available because they know, as adolescents, they are not supposed to be having sex” (Mayo 5).

with Malcolm, “a boy she didn’t even like — who skited about the girls he’d laid ... and went to pot parties too” (100). Readers are thus forewarned: Malcolm *is* bad, further evidenced by his acceptance of a dare to seduce a girl at the school party, an act doubly reprehensible, because, while the other girls in the story are apparently open to a sexual liaison, Fiona is a “born-again” Christian. Even though readers are aware that, in the event Malcolm does no more than clumsily assault her, Brooke’s discovery that he was willing to contemplate rape “just for the fun of it” (113) enables her finally to see “sense” (114) — her father’s word — which translates as a platonic relationship with her brother’s friend after all. That all three characters in these scenarios choose to remain celibate after unwise sexual encounters is no coincidence, as depictions of gauche and/or loveless physical encounters, devoid of any romance, warn female characters (and implied readers) from engaging in premarital sex.

*Gemma, Brooke & Madeleine* uses the focalisation of third-person narrative voices to convince implied readers that premarital sex is wrong, whereas Kate de Goldi’s *Sanctuary* expresses a more complex version of the same message through the character’s own words. Casual sex is presented as a manifestation of Catriona’s psychological trauma (following the death of her little sister Tiggie in a house fire) that forms the basis of the *Entwicklungsroman*. The novel initially appears to condone Cat’s relationship with Jem, “the most beautiful boy I ever laid eyes on” (24), by emphasising its *jouissance* — “prickles of happiness and desire passing between us” (50). The descriptions are also quite explicit, although filtered through Cat’s imagination rather than real:

I kissed him back, thinking of his hands stroking my bare back, my arms, my thighs; his breath brushing my neck, his lithe, slender body rising above me, his beautiful smile, his long long kiss as he sank into me. (74)

However, despite repeated allusions to intimacy, often expressed within the text as “after a long time” (50) or “some time later” (89), Cat’s admission that “[her] caution had caved in under an onslaught of desire” (74) invokes the traditional dichotomies, reason versus passion, together with the inference (the narrative

occurs in hindsight, as Cat retells events to a psychologist) that the former ought to have prevailed.

Moreover, even though Cat has an uneasy rapport with her mother (whom she blames for Tiggie's death), the fact that she is unwilling to tell her about Jem does not bode well for the relationship's future:

‘You’re a happy little bird, aren’t you?’ she said more than once, pleased I could tell, but puzzled ... ‘You’re not telling me something, Cat, I know it. Why aren’t you talking to me?’ She sounded sad, which made me gruff. (56)

Here the description reinforces the inappropriateness of Cat's behaviour, revealing Stella to be more caring than Cat seems prepared to admit. This is made clear when she tells her stepfather, who not only points out the significance of her omission — “[she’s] your mother, she’s got a right to know about this” (62) — but also confides in Stella himself. In this, Cat's betrayal of filial loyalty appears to override the propriety of being sexually active, in that Stella indicates she would not disapprove (126). Nevertheless, readers are invited to weigh Cat's apparent happiness at “playing house” (77-78) against her sorrow, which, together with the psychologist's probing, leads to the realisation that her longing for a “normal” family (57), reluctance to confront Tiggie's death (88), and ambivalence towards Stella have intensified her need for love, with Jem the misplaced object.

This confusion is confirmed by Cat's even more misguided relationship with Simeon.<sup>1</sup> Where Jem's caring nature is shown by his ambition to liberate the caged leopard in a neighbourhood zoo, his appraisal of his brother as a “sociopath” (55) is borne out by Simeon's use of drugs (56, 99-100), alcohol and coarse language (69), and his calculated seduction of Cat. Attracted to him despite her feelings for Jem — “I just couldn't help it” (108) — Cat succumbs after a panic attack triggered by the memory of her sister, a moment of weakness she immediately regrets: “I *hate* myself for sleeping with him... How could I have done that to Jem? I loved him so much and I didn't love Simeon, I *didn't*.”

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<sup>1</sup> That Cat is aware of his status as Jem's antithesis is made overt by explicit allusions to the devil (104), A.A. Milne's “Two Little Bears who lived in a Wood (*and one of them was bad and the other was good*) [and] Cain and Abel” (105).

It was disgusting” (138). The emphasis on “loving” and “not loving” highlights not only the distinction within the discourse between genuine commitment and momentary gratification, but also, in Cat’s case, the momentary lapse that made her susceptible to Simeon’s seduction. Within this context, then, the psychologist’s assessment, ““It was a misjudgement, Cat ... It’s okay to make mistakes”” (138) cannot be read as entirely condoning the act; rather, her words invite the assumption that — had Cat been in her right mind — none of these “heedless actions” (159) would have occurred.

In Foucauldian terms, sexuality may be both a source of power and pleasure (*History* 11), but the depiction of sexual activity in New Zealand children’s fiction tends to fall short of revealing this potential. The only power female characters tend to exercise comes from resisting casual sexual advances, with any suggestion of pleasure merely making their resistance all the more virtuous. On the other hand, adolescent males are denied both power and pleasure by portrayals that emphasise their vulnerability. A characterisation at odds with the media construct of youthful machismo, this once again appears to serve adult interests: rather than counselling against sex, the accent on performance anxiety functions as an equally effective deterrent.

Early adolescence is often regarded as a time of tension for teenage boys, because girls mature, on average, two years earlier (Smart and Smart). David Hill’s *See Ya, Simon* (1992), explores this tension, depicting the behaviour of pre-pubescent males surrounded by pubescent girls: particularly Nathan, the narrator, and Brady, the girl of his dreams. Hill believes young boys may well harbour idealism, “even if it is a sexist idealism, ... to carry the girl off in their arms” (tape-recorded interview with author), an adult attitude the novel seeks to dispel at the protagonist’s expense. From the outset the focalisation makes it clear that fourteen-year-old Nathan’s relationship is doomed to fail:

‘Hi, Nathan,’ [Brady] said.

‘Grnggrrga,’ I said.

‘Saw you walking your dog before,’ she said.

‘Fnnffwlkuh,’ I said. (40)

While amusing in itself, and justified within the plot in that Nelita, a fellow pupil modelled on David Hill’s daughter Helen (tape-recorded interview with

author), is the girl for Nathan, this gauche parody of courtship seems guaranteed to magnify any self-doubt adolescent males may harbour, dissuading them from ever contemplating such a relationship. Hill intends his audience to reject superficial physical attraction in favour of genuine friendship, but the description also illustrates the way the discourse operates both to represent and repress adolescent sexuality: Nathan is effectively rendered impotent through his inability to speak.

Reinforcing the unreadiness of adolescent characters and implied readers, the only mention of sex in *See Ya, Simon* occurs in reference to the school's Health syllabus, rather than the characters' actions. In contrast, Kate de Goldi, writing for an older audience, makes explicit reference to sexual performance in *Love, Charlie Mike* (1997), when seventeen-year-old Christy farewells her boyfriend (who has given her the nickname in the title), due to leave for peace-keeping duties in Bosnia. Initially, the language appears about to convey both power and pleasure:

A very pleasant sensation began in my groin and travelled down my legs. I lay down on his chest, pressing my stomach against his hard belly, feeling the hardness between his legs.

However, the very next line presents a very different image: "'Charlie,' [Sonny] said, moaning and laughing. 'I have to...we've got...where...oh *shit!*'" (66). These words, simultaneously incoherent and perfectly clear, suggest to implied readers that, while searching for a condom, he has ejaculated prematurely. This not only shatters the *jouissance* of the moment, it also postpones intercourse, thereby preserving Christy's virginity. Where previous authors have sought to dissuade female readers (perhaps based on the premise that it is up to them to say, "No"), Hill and de Goldi present male insecurity as an even more powerful deterrent.

The full effect of this becomes apparent in the most explicit account of sexual intercourse in New Zealand children's fiction, in Bernard Beckett's 1999 novel *Lester*. Sixteen-year-old classmates Michael and Toni spend time together as they endeavour to solve the mystery surrounding a local tramp, and, as both are of legal age, the question is not if, but when, they will become sexually involved. Although Michael, the narrator, recounts the moment in graphic detail,

no critic has ever commented on its depiction, perhaps because its denial of both power and pleasure in no way endorses teenage sexual experimentation. Michael's words, "There was sex in the air," could well suggest machismo, were it not for the remainder of his sentence: "... and quite frankly it was frightening" (117). This conclusion exemplifies the adult control over the discourse, in that what is virtually a "how to have sex" manual presents the most persuasive argument for male abstinence: fear of failure.

The reason for this fear can be directly attributed, the first person narrative suggests, to the sex education available to the adolescent:

I'd seen a few videos of course, and the world of advertising had squeezed a little bit of sex into almost everything I'd ever bought, but it wasn't the same. Thanks to health classes I'd memorised the names of six different sexually transmitted diseases and had even been a reluctant participant in a 'put the condom on the wooden dick' relay but that didn't make me feel any more confident. (117)

The actual content of the videos remains unknown, but the emphasis on the negative consequences of sex, coupled with the *reductio ad absurdum* of the lesson on "safe sex," suggest the real agenda behind the discourse. As already explored in relation to New Zealand curriculum development with reference to the works of Edith Howes, sex education can be said to serve an equally adultist function, its effect revealed by Michael's final words. Making this agenda overt adds an ironic dimension to the discourse, diverting attention from the fact that Beckett uses the adolescent narrator with much the same result.

Performance anxiety colours the entire account. The girl instigates events, justified within the narrative because the encounter takes place in *her* bedroom, but also as a further device to unsettle the inexperienced male. Michael's body betrays him — on the verge of proving his manhood — by forcing him to acknowledge his immaturity: "the words came out all pre-pubic, a little squeak" (119). Moreover, the text invokes the panoptic gaze as a control mechanism: "we must have looked ridiculous which I suppose is why teenage groping has never made it as a spectator sport" (119). Overlooking the probability that adult groping may appear similarly ridiculous, the suggestion that adolescents are gauche and self-conscious supports the adultist imperative

to discourage sexual experimentation, at the same time as allowing them to engage in what Trites terms a “Möbius strip of denying sexual pleasure and then deriving pleasure from discussing that denial” (95).

*Lester* awards adolescents neither power nor pleasure, with Michael desperate for the “groping” to stop, ““before anything too disastrous can happen”” (120). The disaster is never made explicit, but its evocation is at odds with society’s image of the typical adolescent male, eager to boost his status among his peers by losing his virginity. Where Chelton’s call for American novels to depict more “*vicarious* male sexual experimentation” has an educative purpose, apparently based on the notion that reading about intercourse may obviate the need for “both sexes [to undertake] *actual* experimentation elsewhere” (qtd. in Donelson and Nilsen 409), Beckett’s portrayal seems designed solely to dissuade. Not only is sex presented as the ultimate ordeal in terms of male self-confidence, it also poses serious logistical problems, referred to by Michael as “all the stuff they don’t tell you, all the stuff they leave out” (151). “They,” by definition, are “adults,” their selective silence a potent weapon in the power play between the generations. Here the adult author endeavours to ally himself with his audience through the adolescent voice, at the same time engaging in limited disclosure, accentuating the negative in order to reinforce the notion that adolescents are indeed not yet ready.

The implicit identification with the first person narrator invites readers to consider the emotional cost of exposing oneself so completely, “mother-selected underwear” (149) and all, as heightened awareness loads every word: beads of perspiration race “sperm-like” down Michael’s body, and he fears a “premature end to proceedings” (149). The “best” part is just “holding each other” (149), while the “next bit” (putting on the condom and trying to “find the right place” [151]) is described as “shabby and embarrassing” (150), metaphorically likened to ‘bunny-hopping’ the car on one’s first driving lesson: “once, twice, three times and it all ends in an embarrassing shudder” (151). The bathetic observation, augmented by the qualifier, “apart from the fact that Dad wasn’t at my side offering advice” (151), highlights Michael’s shame, as well as introducing the off-putting notion of the adult gaze. Moreover, at that moment, Toni’s abusive father bursts in on them, striking out at them both, causing

Michael's life "to flash before my eyes about eight miserable times" (151), before he and Toni escape the "tangle of bedclothes that still smelt of our uncertainty" (152). Within the context of the novel this event functions as a catalyst to reveal Toni's father's violent nature,<sup>1</sup> but, in relation to adolescent male sexuality, the focalising emphasis on performance anxiety operates solely to dissuade.

**“One thing led to another, then to another, and so on”**

Actual depictions of sexual activity are rare within New Zealand children's fiction, because social taboos dictate a discourse reliant on euphemism to explain the consequences for females, as shown by this extract from a 1956 handbook for teenage girls:

A virgin is depicted as a girl carrying a brimming cup of water through a roomful of very thirsty men. She goes carefully, guarding the cup and finally reaches the far end and hands it to her bridegroom. Hard-boiled people say, 'Wouldn't she be more generous if she gave a sip or two to some of the thirstiest on the way?' Well, that's one way of looking at it but remember the cup is going to be a bit grubby and there won't be much left for the one who offers her so much. (58-9)

This anecdote creates the expectation that sex must be deferred until marriage, an attitude compounded by the recommendation of the 1954 Mazengarb Report, which led to a parliamentary ruling making it illegal to provide contraceptive advice to those under sixteen, on the grounds that even *talking* about adolescent sexuality could be seen to signify approval.

Even in the more liberal 1970s, when the availability of the contraceptive pill led to greater sexual freedom in society, and progressive publisher Alister Taylor released *The Little Red Schoolbook* (Hansen and Jensen 1972), which offered teenagers advice on everything from masturbation to abortion,<sup>2</sup> still the

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<sup>1</sup> The novel's dénouement rests on Michael and Toni's discovery of a murder Toni's father committed in his youth.

<sup>2</sup> "Revised for New Zealand conditions by a diverse group of teachers, university lecturers, students, doctors, journalists, editors and lawyers" (Hansen and Jensen n.pag.), *The Little Red Schoolbook* was sold, in a sealed wrapper, only to those over sixteen. It challenges traditional

majority of society preferred to ignore the topic. *Down Under the Plum Trees* (Tuohy and Murphy 1976), a New Zealand “resource on sex and social development” (10) in a similar vein to *The Little Red Schoolbook* (written when its authors were barely out of adolescence themselves), was rated “R18” by the censor, effectively foiling its purpose. A 2002 article described it as a “sex manual” (Simpson 194), further denying its intended role and audience, and — even in 2004 — the book is held behind the desk at the Wellington City Library, marked “Adult Issue Only.” Similarly, very few novels for children mention contraception, with only Madeleine and Leith in Marshall’s *Gemma, Brooke & Madeleine* (1988), Cat, Christy and Sonny in de Goldi’s *Sanctuary and Love, Charlie Mike*, and Toni and Michael in Beckett’s *Lester* (1999) portrayed as using it at all. Even then, it often seems to be presented in a disapproving light, with Madeleine’s use of the pill presented as the rationale for her wanton behaviour, and Michael and Sonny’s ineptitude at fitting condoms yet another reason why adolescents are not ready to have sex.<sup>1</sup>

Not mentioning contraception, on the other hand, allows New Zealand novels for children to dwell upon the dangers of unsafe sex, the most obvious of which is pregnancy. As with the majority of references to sex, actually being pregnant generally occurs *outside* the parameters of the text. This ensures pregnancy remains an abstract menace, enabling the narrative to stress the negative consequences for the female, something less feasible once an infant becomes involved.<sup>2</sup> The earliest mention of teenage pregnancy occurs in Tessa Duder’s *Alex in Winter* (1989), the character having no apparent purpose in the novel other than as a warning to readers:

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values at every turn, inviting readers to stand up to adults: “Kids and adults are not natural enemies. But adults themselves have little real control over their lives. They often feel trapped by economic and political forces. Kids suffer as a result of this” (9). Its chapter on “Sex” contains information such as, “The usual word for a boy’s sexual organ is cock or prick. The usual word for a girl’s sexual organ is fanny or cunt. Many adults don’t like these words because they say they’re ‘rude.’ They prefer words like penis or vagina” (94).

<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, recent debate has mooted decriminalisation of sexual acts between “underage” teenagers by lowering the age of consent to twelve.

<sup>2</sup> The only author to do otherwise, Mahy, in *The Tricksters* (1986), portrays two-year-old Tibby as very much a *fait accompli*. The mother, Emma’s, pregnancy is secondary to the fallibility of Emma’s best friend’s father, with whom she had an affair, resulting in the pregnancy.

Jackie in our class ... in the middle of last year had put on rather a lot of weight and vanished. Dark rumours told of a baby boy, adopted out, and her now working in a bank in town and, according to those who'd seen her, looking defeated and sad and ten years older than sixteen. (15)

That being pregnant equates to the end of one's future is further cemented by the cautionary tale of Alex's eighteen-year-old cousin Ginnie, whose "shotgun wedding" forms a subplot in *Alex in Winter* (1987) and *Songs for Alex* (1992):

Three months ago Ginnie got married in a cathedral. Now she was five months preggers, huge and miserable...I found myself looking at pale blotchy Ginnie and wondering about girls dying in childbirth. (*Songs for Alex* 26)

Setting the novels in the early 1960s, as already noted by Hebley, "allows for criticism to be levelled from the point of view of the present at social attitudes that existed in the past and that still exist in the present" (*Power of Place* 1998 63). Thus, while readers are invited to deplore Ginnie's situation, forced into an abusive marriage because "Dad wouldn't have me in the house" (*Songs for Alex* 63), they are also expected to extrapolate how to avoid a similar fate. In the event, the baby's perinatal death frees Ginnie to divorce. This is not presented as a positive outcome, however, as already shown in Chapter Two. "She'd never been anywhere, had no qualifications, no say in anything" (27): in other words, she is a child, totally disempowered.

Teenage pregnancy, such depictions suggest, represents the end of youth, which is not the same as gaining entrée into the adult realm. As a strong disincentive against adolescent sexual activity, nearly all the characters who have unprotected sex become pregnant.<sup>1</sup> In William Taylor's *Beth & Bruno*, some time "last year" (before the novel began), Beth met a boy at a party, and "one thing led to another, then to another, and so on" (148). Describing the schoolboy father as "a nice guy, but [she] wasn't really all that keen on him" (148) highlights the rashness of Beth's actions, a rashness exacerbated by the

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<sup>11</sup> In 1978, Ritchie and Ritchie deplored the fact that "forty percent of all illegitimate births in 1971 were to adolescent girls and in 1975, 600 pregnancies occurred to girls under 16" (81). By 2003, however, far from falling, the rate had risen to become "the third-highest...in the developed world, with 7324 known pregnancies in the 11-19 age group, according to Statistics New Zealand" (Middlebrook A4).

realisation that she is pregnant. Then ““the old manure hit the fan,”” as her mother accuses her of being the ““greatest disgrace to hit our family for centuries even though...”” (149). The ellipses within the text allude to the fact (a common trope in the portrayal of solo parents) that Beth’s mother was exactly the same age as her daughter when she became pregnant herself. The double message is clear: Prue’s estranged relationship with her daughter is presumably a direct consequence of her own loss of youth, as well as a desire not to see history repeat itself.

None of the novels portrays a main character as a teenage mother; to do so would tacitly condone teenage sex by inviting reader identification. In Taylor’s novel, as further disincentive, Beth, abandoned by her mother and with the baby’s father still at school, must face the consequences alone. She rejects abortion out of contrariness — “no way would I have [one]” (149) — thereby obviating the exploration in the novel of wider moral issues; thus, the only alternative is adoption. Forced to leave school (paradoxically called St. Mary’s), Beth is ““put into a home for young mothers”” (149), the passive voice reinforcing adult dominance. This scenario seems more suited to New Zealand in the 1950s rather than the 1990s, but it serves to accentuate the negatives of unplanned intercourse. In the event, the baby dies shortly after birth, compounding the emotional damage an adolescent must suffer as a result of sexual misconduct.<sup>1</sup>

The consequences of giving a baby up for adoption are taken to extremes in Kate de Goldi’s *Closed, Stranger* (1999). Taking its title from the terminology used in New Zealand until the early 1980s to designate the placement of an infant with “non-biologically related” adoptive parents (de Goldi n.pag.), the novel describes, among other things, eighteen-year-old Westie’s search for his birth mother. Vicky enters her son’s life at a time when he is in his sexual prime. Aware they are mother and son — but to all intents and purposes strangers — they embark upon a sexual relationship, with tragic consequences. De Goldi insists that this should not be read as an example of

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<sup>1</sup> Once again, Mahy offers the exception, with Emma in *The Tricksters* described as ““the world’s best solo parent,”” who is, therefore, entitled to “take it easy for one night”” (115) by going to a party with friends.

incest, but of “genetic attraction,” a well-documented aspect (Ashe; Mathes) of the emotional confusion that may accompany such a reunion, described by Vicky as follows: “the old strangled love and longing batted down so long bursts out” (79). Westie’s best friend, Max, the narrator, directs implied readers to imagine what it might have been like for the sixteen-year old Vicky, “giving away a baby because people tell me I should,” even though he himself can see her “only as a person who caused a whole lot of heartache” (79). In this way, de Goldi shows how teenage pregnancy has consequences for the child as well as the mother.

Vicky’s words, however, reveal a marked distinction between the reactions of mother and child:

‘Each time you see your son, the most disturbing, the most tumultuous feelings are generated between you. You want to hold him, ...touch his skin, sing him lullabies and watch him sleep. And he’s the same. He’s been ... looking for you so long with his mind’s eye that when he meets you, you are, literally, the woman of his dreams.’ (79)

Vicky may say their reactions are the same, but she responds as a mother, whereas the reaction she attributes to Westie contains strongly sexual connotations. The contrast is reiterated by Max’s description of “Westie kissing Vicky Crawford with such passion, [telling] his weeping mother..., ‘...you’re all mine, you’re the one...’” (77). De Goldi explains events as follows:

What happened between Westie and his mother grew out of the natural development of his character. He was competitive, obsessive and ... when his mother came into his life it was a natural part of that character ‘arc’ that he would want to claim her fully. (qtd. in Paris 4)

*Inter alia*, such characterisation supports the myth of adolescent recklessness. Although the narrator (a familiar trope, the reasonable voice of conformist youth) concedes, “things were always different with Westie ...always out of the loop, awry” (80), his words recall Duder’s “aberration” (*Songs for Alex* 105), an association de Goldi makes explicit later on: “Westie and [Vicky’s] relationship ...seemed so aberrant, but exotic too” (86). Max and his girlfriend Meredith take this even further, trying out words like “‘Weird? ... Repulsive?’ ‘Perverted?’”

(84), and “out-of-kilter” (89). No other adults in the story know about the relationship, but — in Max’s words — “a mother can’t go on sleeping with her son, can she?” (91). After five months, Vicky announces that “one of them had to have the strength to end it,” and returns to “her old lover” (93) in Australia, triggering Westie on a path of self-destructive behaviour that culminates in his suicide. *Closed, Stranger*, seeks to apportion blame to the system that denied Vicky and Westie the chance for a ‘normal’ relationship. Nevertheless, it also offers a graphic warning about the irresponsible nature of teenage sexuality, and its potentially lethal fallout.

In keeping with the admonitory tenor of the discourse, the only pregnancy within a novel, in Jane Westaway’s *Love and Other Excuses* (1999), occurs to a secondary character rather than the narrator. Seventeen-year-old Zoë and her boarding school room-mate Monty go “clubbing” during the holidays, and get picked up by two older men, “thirty if [they] were a day” (111). Zoë, the protagonist, refuses her partner’s advances, but the drunken Monty is seduced, leading — inexorably — to pregnancy. Telling no one other than Zoë, Monty arranges to have an abortion. As with the representation of intercourse, the termination is glossed over in the narrative, seen from Zoë’s perspective: “The woman led Monty away. The silence was appalling. She brought her back” (147). While this brevity both avoids a moral debate and protects readers from details, the text dwells at length on the anticipation of the deed, and its aftermath, which it describes as “Monty’s terrible loneliness” (148). Once again, sex is portrayed as leading to loss of power, reinforcing adolescent dependency at this moment of utter independence. Although both girls have been estranged from their mothers, now, faced with the enormity of the situation, Zoë’s “horrible longing for Mum’s face, for her smile and her arms around me, her voice saying everything would be all right” (148) motivates her to contact Monty’s mother on her behalf. Serving as a narrative device to reunite mother and daughter, the abortion itself is presented as having no lasting effect on the adolescent. Nevertheless, the picture of the usually ebullient Monty’s helplessness can be seen as conveying a strong message to readers to avoid the same situation.

Westaway's account of abortion is the exception; in all other novels, sex brings with it the very real risk of parenthood, or worse. As the ultimate deterrent, Fleur Beale introduces a character in *Further Back Than Zero* (1998) who is "dying of Aids that [she] caught at a party when [she] was fourteen" (67). At a school assembly, the typical arena for adult maxims, a guest speaker tells her cautionary tale to characters and readers alike:

'We got someone's older brother to buy us a bottle of rum and we sat there chucking it back as if it was just the Coke without the rum ... I'm willing to bet that a whole lot of you here today have done exactly that and been none the worse for it once the hangover's worn off.... I wasn't so lucky. Some guy decided I'd make a great lay and he had sex with me. I only knew because I was so sore the next day.' (65-6).

This chilling anecdote evokes a fellow pupil being both infected with HIV *and* sexually active in order to press home its message. That casual sex can be fatal is made even more overt by the number of characters who die, forestalling their misappropriation of what — as all the novels attest — is the prerogative of adults. Alex's boyfriend Andy (in Duder's *Alex*) and Robyn's boyfriend Dunkie (in Faville's *Stanley's Aquarium*) are killed in car accidents shortly after the narratives introduce the topic of their sexual curiosity. In this way, adolescents who seek sexual knowledge prematurely are invariably portrayed as being "hurt by their own lack of self control," a punishment Trites (referring to American YA fiction) limits to female characters (92), but which New Zealand works also mete out to males.

### **"When he was younger than I am now"**

A significant number of novels portray parents as having been sexually active in their youth as well, too much of a coincidence not to be read as a warning. These include Mahy's solo mothers, Kate in *The Changeover* (1984) and Dido in *The Catalogue of the Universe* (1985), while in *Gemma, Brooke and Madeleine*, Brooke's brother was born "seven months after Mum and Dad were married" (Marshall 73); in *Sanctuary*, at seventeen, Cat's mother was already "three months pregnant and married to Jim" (de Goldi 7), although

nothing suggests he is Cat's father, and in *Beth & Bruno*, Beth's mother was also seventeen when she was “forced ... up the aisle four months pregnant and into the arms of a man she should never have married” (Taylor 97). These descriptions not only reveal that, in each case, the parent was exactly the same age as the protagonist is now, they also convey a strong sense of adolescent disapproval, made especially clear by Marco in *Jerome* (1999):

Like what guys do you know have fathers only seventeen years older than them? Sweet bugger all is what...And we all know what he was getting up to when he was younger than I am now. Getting mum pregnant when they were both kids! (Taylor 23-24)

Here the parents' adolescent irresponsibility (which often jeopardises their successful entrée into adulthood as well), together with the irony of their children's criticism, operates to discourage similar behaviour on the part of both adults and adolescents.

Even more effective is the depiction of parents who are currently sexually active. As shown by Margaret Mahy's *The Changeover*, Fleur Beale's *Further Back Than Zero*, and Kate de Goldi's *Closed, Stranger*, the presence of pregnant step-mothers and/or newborn half-siblings serves as a constant reminder to characters that married adults rightfully can have sex, and do. Conversely, adult sexuality is made even more explicit — and therefore less appealing to adolescents — when parents behave irresponsibly. In *Jerome*, for example, Marco's discomfort at his father's unorthodox parenting skills (already mentioned in Chapter Four) is exacerbated by his “adolescent” attitude to sex. Far from being the conservative parent such descriptions suggest adolescents really want, Marco's father endorses his son's sexual activity by boasting of his own prowess:

‘You want to bring home a girl and score with her, man, that's fine by me. What goes for your old man goes for you, too...I'm just prayin' you'll be a bit quieter in the sack than your old man!’ (24)

It is highly unlikely, given society's ambivalent attitude towards sexuality, that a “normal” father would talk in this way. Thus, while ostensibly granting permission, the father's words operate to repress both character and implied reader. Taylor does this in the first instance by exploiting the premise that

teenagers are counter-suggestible, permission to do something automatically making it less desirable.<sup>1</sup> Even more disconcerting is the implied adult incursion into adolescent territory, with which the son cannot compete. Furthermore, inferences that Marco has overheard the father's lovemaking (with the associated implication that the father will overhear his) are guaranteed to deter any such behaviour.

Paula Boock uses a similar ploy in *Out Walked Mel* (1998), when the eponymous main character actually witnesses her father with his latest girlfriend: "she was just a baby bimbo: she looked hardly any older than I. My menopausal father was making it with an infant, f'crissake" (31). Here Mel's words not only criticise the adult who behaves like an adolescent, they also condemn his adolescent partner at the same time. Jane Westaway makes the sexual power dynamic explicit in *Love and Other Excuses*, where Zoë's inability to accept her mother's sexuality makes it impossible for her to face her own: "Of course I want to, I want to so much. But I'm not going to be like her. Like ...some animal in heat" (135). Rather than warning adolescents not to have sex, these novels portray characters who establish their own prohibitions: awareness of inappropriate parental sexuality acting as aversion therapy. Moreover, Zoë's mother's attempts to justify her new relationship, "I was as happy as a teenager" (206), add insult to injury, flaunting adult *jouissance* within a discourse that seeks to repress adolescent sex.

Each of these examples also illustrates the way in which the discourse operates to uphold the concept of an idealised state of adulthood. Adult sexual mores, in accordance with Foucault's power/knowledge dynamic, are never openly expressed, yet the puritanical ethos that governs the representation of adolescent sexuality in these works suggests its strongly conservative nature: sex is condoned (for both adolescents and adults) only within an inherently middle-class, monogamous relationship, which is not spoken about. Such an ideal — one perhaps less and less likely to exist in reality towards the close of the century — is reinforced by the portrayal of sexual transgressions: adolescents who should not stray into the adult world and vice versa.

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<sup>1</sup> All the more off-putting in this case because Marco is also possibly gay.

### “It’s not easy, being gay”

If adult authors seek to control adolescent sexuality through its depiction in YA fiction, the complexities governing this power dynamic are even more apparent in the treatment of homosexuality, given its association for much of the twentieth century with abnormality. This reticence can be observed in commentaries such as Hebley’s entries in *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* (Robinson and Wattie 1998), which talk about Paula Boock’s “feisty female protagonists [exploring] friendships” (63) and William Taylor’s “sensitive exploration of the relationship between two adolescent boys” (529). Even though works published in the 1990s present positive role models for gay implied readers, they are doubly restricted, first by the discursive limitations already observed in relation to the portrayal of heterosexual relationships (Jamgochian 109), and second by the undercurrent of homophobia that seems to infiltrate sections of New Zealand society. For this reason, characters tend to be portrayed as talking about their sexuality rather than engaging in physical intimacy (Trites), a treatment of this “tricky” subject (Sharp C6) once again emphasising the desirability to defer “misappropriated” adult behaviour until some time in the future.

The first allusion to homosexuality within New Zealand children’s literature occurs in C.R. Allen’s 1936 *Bildungsroman*, *A Poor Scholar*. References are veiled, suggesting a fascinating, but undesirable life style, as typified by Gerard Burnaby, Ponto’s tutor, from whom his pupil is described as having “acquired without scathe some measure of what Burnaby had acquired at the expense of both health and holiness” (176). The cost to his “health and holiness” is never explained, but Burnaby is portrayed in a negative light from the beginning:

There was something flamboyantly [*sic*] anti-Sabbatical about Burnaby.... The odd thing about it was that Ponto felt vaguely attracted towards Mr Burnaby. If he were an ogre, he was such a sick ogre. If he were the devil, he was such a poor devil. (146)

This loaded language warns implied readers that Burnaby’s diabolical fascination functions as a test. Protected only by his innocence, Ponto must withstand temptation, as — for the first time in a novel intended for children —

the text casts aspersions on characters' sexual orientation. Burnaby, for example, quotes Oscar Wilde in a voice that "fluted" (146), has "full red lips" (143) and a limp handshake (163), and is considered to be "a 'rum bird,' ... a man about whom an indefinable cloud seemed to hover" (172). None of these descriptions is ever elucidated; however, it is noteworthy that Allen employs the word "queer" twice in quick succession on the same page (146) — albeit in reference to the actions of other characters in Burnaby's company — and twice more, referring to another encounter with Burnaby ("the queer Sunday") on pages 197 and 206. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes several meanings for "queer," the first (dating from 1508) being "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric, ...also of questionable character, suspicious, dubious," (*OED* queer adj. 1.a), and the second, first noted in 1922, "of a person (usually a man): homosexual" (1. b). Any of these definitions could apply, affirming, at the very least, a generalised sense of undesirability.

A more blatant allusion occurs when Ponto, in his first teaching position, encounters a pupil with a "certain cat-like gracefulness of bearing" (210), a "penchant for fancy millinery" (212), and "precise and rather effeminate handwriting" (275). The boy also

dressed for cricket much more efficiently than he played it ..., [with] Harold Marsh's knack of wearing the most ordinary clothes with a certain distinction, which in his case, ran almost to dapperness. (213)

While according with Allen's social agenda, in that such "dandified" snobs represent the old world order whereas Ponto represents the new, the connection with Ponto's friend Harold is also significant, as readers have already learnt of Burnaby's fears for his nephew:

Gerard's knowledge of the ways in which Harold might go wrong was encyclopædic, and he did not want Harold to go wrong. He would be prepared to exert himself to prevent his nephew from becoming the kind of person he knew himself to be. (150)

The omniscient narrative voice never explains precisely what kind of person this might be. As demonstrated in Edith Howes' *The Golden Forest*, couching moral implications in euphemisms doubly enforces adult power within a Foucauldian

sense, effectively withholding knowledge, whilst at the same time inducing implied readers to impose their own constraints in order to avoid the same fate. Apart from his ingenuous fascination with Burnaby's lifestyle, Ponto himself is never tempted, remaining an upstanding role model, who resists sexual distractions at every stage.<sup>1</sup>

Allen may allude to the potential dangers that befall aimless young men, but he never directly declares they are (homo)sexual in nature. The first overt reference to same-sex relations in children's literature occurred five years after the 1986 Homosexual Law Reform Act was passed. Even then, Paula Boock's *Out Walked Mel* (1991) depicts a relationship between girls rather than boys, possibly lessening the potential for controversy.<sup>2</sup> Seventeen-year-old Mel's reluctance to enter into a physical relationship with her boyfriend Benny is initially attributed to his lack of finesse. Only after Mel's best friend (Benny's sister) Wai is killed in a car accident is another reason presented:

I looked at Benny and realised that all I felt for him, I had felt for Wai — even how she looked and how it felt to touch her. There was no difference, except that it was easier to have a boyfriend than a girlfriend. (74)

Mel's words raise thoughts of bisexuality, although Wai's death once again serves as a convenient narrative device, meaning neither characters nor readers need come to terms with the full implications of Mel's epiphany. Nevertheless, the novel does make several references to homosexuality, quoting from Mary Renault's *The Last of the Wine*, which talks about "these two guys in love" (31), and revealing that Mel's deceased mother and her "friend" were also lovers: "I'd known it all along but had been too much of a prude to believe it. Now, when I

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<sup>1</sup> Ponto's first meeting with Dorothy (whom he later marries, outside the text), suggests momentary distraction from his goal of social improvement:

What did one do when a beautiful girl indicated a disposition to fall in love with one, and this under the surveillance not even of the bell-boy? Ponto had no precedent to guide him. There was the aggravating circumstance that her beauty was the swiftest intoxication he had ever known.

However, rather than act upon his feelings, he uses the opportunity to reaffirm his purpose:

‘I only suppose we're in love with life,’ he said. ‘I want to make the most of it, I know. Anything I get will be off my own bat. You have to administer your own good fortune; I have to win mine....’ (*A Poor Scholar* 232)

<sup>2</sup> Lesbianism has never been illegal in New Zealand.

thought about it, I found it didn't worry me at all" (31). Although sanctioning (adult) homosexuality outside the text, by leaving Mel's sexuality unresolved, the novel defers the topic of adolescent sexual experimentation once again.

William Taylor's *The Blue Lawn* (1994), the first novel to deal with a relationship between adolescent males, avoids the possibility of a homophobic reaction by not portraying characters as anything other than masculine. This calls into question its intended audience (homosexual, straight, or both?), but *The Blue Lawn* is no "coming out" novel. Fifteen-year-old David is described as a promising rugby player<sup>1</sup> and keen duck shooter, the archetypal Kiwi bloke in the making, and, although sixteen-year-old Theo is from central-European Jewish stock, whose wealth sets him apart from the other pupils, both boys are described as having had girlfriends in the past. Moreover, David, as befits a rugby player, is well built, especially where it counts ("bigger'n most guys my age and don't ask me which bits are bigger" [25]). Theo's appearance is more exotic, but his "olive skin[,] ...high cheek bones [and] "surprising light blue" eyes (11) can be read as evidence of foreignness rather than beauty, while his vices, fast cars, smoking and drinking, allay any suspicion that he is anything other than manly.

The emphasis on stereotypically masculine attributes operates to counter the prejudice that equates homosexuality with effeminacy. The text also invites readers to interrogate the stereotypical Kiwi bloke who displays neither emotion nor physical affection, as shown when David's father accuses his wife of "mollycoddling<sup>2</sup> the boy" (7). In this way, the context makes it clear that homosexuality is not something small town society is likely to accept, as do David's words to Theo: "Most of the guys I know ... they'd have our nuts off if they knew" (49). The violence of the reaction is reiterated when he imagines how the school guidance counsellor might also respond, were he to find out:

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<sup>1</sup> Tellingly, however, the novel never shows him on the field, and he quits the sport early on in the novel, citing 'burn-out', suggesting society is possibly not yet ready for a homosexual rugby star.

<sup>2</sup> 'Mollycoddle' means to "pamper; treat in an overindulgent or excessively protective way", and derives from the term, 'molly', the first *OED* entry of which, dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, refers to "an effeminate man or boy; a male homosexual" and the second "a girl, a woman" (*Oxford English Dictionary Online* 2004).

“I’ll lend you me hunting knife, Davy. Cut ‘em off, lad” (117). On the surface, friendship between two boys is quite harmless, enabling David to deflect any suspicion by telling his mother it is “Just one of the guys” (7) when Theo rings. This statement may be belied by overtly sexual descriptions such as Theo’s “soft breathing” and David’s “pulse throbbing in his neck” (6), as they talk on the phone, but the purely verbal nature of the relationship imposes its own limits. Physical contact between New Zealand males is rare outside the sports arena, the only other opportunity occurring in combat. Thus it is that the boys’ first meeting culminates in a fight, the ensuing description loaded with sexual allusions — “hot and ... flushing red,” and “emotion welled” (2), “groin,” “half-naked,” and “gasping” (3) — but the text stops short of allowing a changing room tussle to evolve into a homoerotic embrace.

Although the novel’s title, *The Blue Lawn*, an allusion to the thyme lawn the boys sow for Theo’s grandmother, may be interpreted as an analogous endorsement of homosexuality (if lawns can exist in types other than the norm, so, too, can sexual preferences), the narrative once again stresses the untimely nature of adolescent sexuality. The boys’ immaturity is confirmed by the fact that neither of them knows how to behave, as revealed by Theo’s words:

‘If I touched you right now... I wouldn’t know much what to do and, second, I wouldn’t know how to stop doing what it is I didn’t know what to do if I did get started.’ (50-1)

Following the pattern established by the representation of heterosexuality, these words serve to defer physical contact. Moreover, the emphasis on Theo’s uncertainty and discomfort, “I don’t want to live with the idea that I’m a queer” (71-72), his experimentation, going off with a girl<sup>1</sup> at David’s sixteenth birthday party, and his existential cry, “I’m struggling. Bloody struggling to find out who I am. I haven’t even started yet on *what* I am” (83) also demonstrate the workings of an adultist imperative that considers adolescents unready for sexual activity of any kind.

Where adolescent heterosexual behaviour tended to occur in the absence of adults, here their presence serves a dual function: endorsing homosexuality in

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<sup>1</sup> With all the connotations that implies, admitting he did not “only” take her for a ride (83).

theory, while reinforcing its inappropriateness (for adolescents) in practice. David's parents' opposition is confirmed when he finally confides in his older sister, who — although insisting that he should have told his parents first — immediately concedes, “Well, I guess that mightn't have worked” (117). While indicating her acceptance of David's life choice, Jan's response calls into question the possibility of ever telling his parents. The only other support comes from Theo's grandmother, Gretel, the most broad-minded adult in the novel (her adolescent experiences in Nazi concentration camps invoking the excesses intolerance can bring). The only character to witness both boys together, her tacit support is shown when she comes upon the two, “near-naked, fast asleep, together, holding, half-entwined” (102), draws the bedclothes over them and “very softly ... kissed the head of each” (103). This passage demonstrates the narrator's dilemma, having to convey a potentially controversial subject in qualified terms (“near-naked...half-entwined”). Nevertheless, a single gesture of support (invisible to the sleeping boys) does not translate into acceptance in the light of day, as Gretel also defers their relationship, suggesting it would be “better” for Theo to return to Auckland (104). David's defiant response, “We never did anything wrong and it's not wrong, it isn't” (104), has no effect on this outcome, summing up the adolescents' powerlessness in the face of adult authority.

This *fait accompli* operates within the story to give the boys “time out” to consider their options, but at the same time leaves the issue unresolved. Theo, “scared of what [he] might do [and] sure as fuck scared of what [David] might do” (111), disappears from the narrative, citing the need for more time to “see what it is we really are” (112). David also exhibits uncertainty when he seeks assurance from his sister:

‘Jan. You don't think I'm dirty, do you?’

‘Do you think you're dirty, Davy?’

‘No, I don't. I'm not.’

‘In the long run, Davy, that's all that counts.’ (117)

Jan's response is presented as affirmation, but its key phrase is “in the long run:” in other words, not yet. Even though endorsing homosexuality in theory, Taylor concedes the possible homophobia of his implied audience by creating

characters who do not publicly exhibit overt homosexual tendencies, and avoiding confrontation with those likely to object. *The Blue Lawn* contains no other teenage males; David has quit the local rugby team; the only “girlfriend” on the scene is David’s cousin; the physical expression of Theo and David’s feelings for each other never moves beyond hand-holding in private.

Moreover, although David insists they “won’t lose touch with each other,” and Gretel replies, “No, I think maybe you won’t and I am glad” (121), the novel ends with the boys apart. Their final conversation stresses the decision not to act on their feelings:

‘I don’t know whether I see you as a friend. As a brother. As a lover. I don’t know if what I feel is just because we got so close and spent so much time together... [Maybe] we do need a bit of time apart so we ...find out what it is we really are.’ (112)

This resolution accords with the novel’s focus on the “pain” (114) the relationship has occasioned, further reinforced by David’s definition of love:

‘Like there’s nothing else but that feeling and it goes on and on and it’s in your mind and things go wrong and don’t work out and there’s nothing, nothing you can do to make it feel better.’

He asks his sister, “Does it always have to hurt?” (116) three times on the same page, but neither he nor the reader receives an answer other than, “Why does anything like this, like that happen to any of us?” (117). Overall, while noteworthy for broaching the subject of homosexual attraction, *The Blue Lawn*’s depiction of the need for secrecy, estrangement from family, unresolved questions, and associated self-doubts can be seen as further evidence of the adultist tendency to postpone adolescent sexual experimentation in any form.

*The Blue Lawn* won the AIM Children’s Book Award in 1995 with little public reaction to its potentially controversial subject matter, possibly because its “sensitive” treatment (Hebley *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* 1998 529) reinforced the prevalent adultist attitude towards adolescent sexuality: deferral. On the other hand, Paula Boock’s *Dare, Truth or Promise* (1997), occasioned a very different reception in 1998, when it won the New Zealand Post Children’s Book Award. Public debate arose over whether it was appropriate for a “lesbian love tale” (Doyle 4) to receive a *children’s* book

award. This was followed — in the light of the Award’s recognition (the book having been in circulation for nearly a year with no negative response at all) — by a heated attack from the leader of the Christian Heritage Party, the Reverend Graham Capill, who called the book “warped” and potentially corrupting (Bennett 4). While this reaction, according to *Evening Post* reviewer Joe Bennett, demonstrates “a touching faith in the power of literature, [in that, implicit] in [Capill’s] words is the belief that if one reads about lesbianism, one is more likely to become lesbian” (4), it also overwhelmingly illustrates the adult expectation that children’s literature should not encourage apparent deviancy. Although emphasising the characters’ uncertainty for much of the novel, *Dare Truth or Promise* stands in direct contrast to the majority of depictions of homosexual couples, which end unhappily,<sup>1</sup> in that it ultimately validates Louie and Willa’s lesbian relationship. However, as Michael Cart observes, in relation to American YA fiction, in “Honoring their Stories, Too: Literature for Gay and Lesbian Teens”:

When a book features gay characters who...live on, nourished and supported by a loving relationship, the author may be the one who gets ‘punished’ by having his/her work castigated and censored.

(Cart 4)

Much of the negative reaction from outside the literary world to *Dare, Truth or Promise* can also be explained by the fact that it situates itself within the genre of romance fiction, thereby appropriating an established “heteronormative” (Jamgochian 109) genre as a means of normalising lesbian love: “Willa woke and looked at Louie asleep beside her... Willa wished she had some poetry...to describe her loveliness... This then, was what is was like to be in love, and to have it returned” (75). Yet, if one looks beyond the gender specifics of sexual orientation, the novel endorses Willa and Louie’s relationship on exactly the same grounds previously observed in Mahy’s and Duder’s novels: as committed partnership in conformity with a monogamous ideal.

Despite society’s apparent willingness to accept lesbian relationships more readily than homosexual ones, Willa and Louie are still portrayed as

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<sup>1</sup> David and Theo’s separation in *The Blue Lawn*, Wai’s death in *Out Walked Mel*, Jerome’s suicide in *Jerome*.

having to run the gauntlet of disapproval in the form of Louie's "up-tight" mother. The omniscient narrative voice (which alternates between Willa's and Louie's points-of-view) notes Susi's reaction at their first meeting, "*She knows, Willa thought, somehow she knows*" (69), and the dinner table conversation becomes — at Susi's behest — ever more pointed:

'I know,' said Susi brightly, 'Tell us about your boyfriend.'

'I don't have a boyfriend,' she answered as lightly as she could.

'Not at the moment,' Susi corrected her. ... 'Well,' Susi continued, 'tell us about your Ideal Man.' She lifted her glass to her lips and grinned at her husband as if she were being innocently provocative.

'I don't think I have an Ideal Man, either,' she answered very carefully. 'I think — I think people just happen, don't they. Love just happens. And then everything is changed forever.' Willa moved her glance to Louie, who sat stock still, her eyes locked onto Willa's.

'Indeed,' murmured Susi. (72-3)

Knowledge equates to power, a power the adult seeks. Focalisation highlights the adolescent's conviction about her own sexuality, but at the same time readers are aware of the necessity to gain adult acceptance as well. Here, the narrative voice critiques Susi's actions by drawing attention to their premeditated nature ("as if she were being innocently provocative"), which governs her behaviour throughout this episode. No reference has been made to Willa and Louie as a couple, yet Susi is described as making "a big deal of fixing up Louie's spare bed," then coming in early next morning, "ostensibly to offer tea or coffee" (73) in an attempt to "catch them out." Readers share Susi's focalisation when she finds "both girls sound asleep in their own beds. Something similar to but not quite the same as disappointment passed over her face" (75), as well as having witnessed that Willa and Louie did indeed "sleep together" together, but woke early, in acknowledgement of the unspoken rules at work.

The generational power play in this novel has already been examined, with the omniscient narrative voice making it clear that Louie cannot accept her sexuality without adult approval. This is reinforced just before Louie leaves for a family holiday to Bali specifically intended to separate the two girls:

‘I love you, Louie,’ [Willa] said, starting to cry though she’d promised herself not to.

‘I know.’ Louie’s voice sounded ready to snap in two. ‘I love you too,’ she said, at last, at last. ‘But that’s not the point, is it?’ (112)

The “point” remains unspecified within the text, but readers can infer that it represents Louie’s dilemma between fulfilling her own wishes, and those of her parents, as expressed later when she discusses her predicament with the priest:

‘When it comes down to it, Willa knows where she stands, on important things.

‘...Sometimes she just looks at me as if she’s — I don’t know — waiting. Waiting for me to get to where she is.’

‘And where’s that?’

‘Where you’re not beating yourself up about it all the time.’

‘Is that what you’re doing?’

‘My parents think it’s wrong, my friends can’t mention it, the doctor says it’s a stage, the Church thinks it’s a sin. Of course I’m beating myself up.’ (156-7)

The priest encourages Louie to make up her own mind, but he also raises “the question of hurting others” with the pointed remark, “What do your parents say?” (157).

All this seems to imply a hierarchy of approval that must be sought. Willa’s mother is supportive and Louie’s best friend, Mo, rises to the occasion, “Hell, Louie, don’t ask me. I mean, I think it’s ...fine — I think” (85). However, sanction by a bohemian solo mother and a fellow adolescent carries less weight than that of a middle class husband-and-wife. Even with the support of the priest (“in my view the issue is more a matter of love than of sexuality” [155]), Louie still needs her parents’ acceptance. Until then, Willa and Louie spend time in the wilderness, miserably avoiding each other, and both attend the school ball with male partners (in Louie’s case, to please her mother). Their relationship is only finally validated after the car crash in which Willa saves Louie’s life, when Tony and Susi acknowledge her presence at Louie’s bedside: “She was asking for you...” (174). Jamgochian, writing on queer adolescence, considers the novel says more about love than sexuality, refuting its potential as a “coming-out narrative” (120). Nevertheless, its emphasis on the need for adult

approval appears to challenge this view, as the girls are portrayed as “daring” to go out in public together for the first time (representing the riskiest action of the title’s word game) only after Louie’s parents reconcile themselves to Willa’s significance in their daughter’s life.

Boock’s treatment of lesbian love — as with the majority of other representations of teenage sexuality — remains limited to a discursive level. This focus, whereby characters talk about their relationship but do not act, can also be interpreted as enabling adults (such as Louie’s parents) to accept the girls as a couple without having to contemplate lesbianism itself, as shown by Susi’s choice of words, which allows the girls the freedom to “form whatever relationship [they] decide upon together” (178). Moreover, even though Willa and Louie are now together, Susi has the final words: “It’s not easy being gay” (180). *Dare Truth or Promise*, then, can be read less as an endorsement of homosexuality than of the traditionally monogamous ideal of true love.

William Taylor’s *Jerome* (1999) makes a fitting conclusion to this chapter, portraying homosexual characters of both genders, but adopting opposite approaches for each. Kate is depicted as having “come out” several years before the narrative begins, and is confident about her sexual orientation, whereas Marco and Jerome are what Jamgochian might term “proto-gay adolescents” (114), vulnerable to homophobia. The ambivalence surrounding the representation of male homosexuality in New Zealand children’s literature is reflected by the fact that *Jerome* is better known for its treatment of teenage suicide, yet the eponymous character’s death (in a shooting “accident” before the story begins) can be read as a consequence of his uncertainties about sexuality. In this, the novel explores two potentially controversial topics, although reviewers Anna Marsich and John McKenzie distinguish it from those works whose sole purpose seems to be “examining an issue” (44). Basing their approbation on Taylor’s authentic presentation of “the voice of the characters” (Marsich and McKenzie 47), they confirm the way in which adolescent narrators can be used to convey the adult authorial message.

The story takes the form of correspondence between Jerome’s best friends Marco and Kate (who is on a student exchange in America), and begins with Kate leaving her host family, because she has been harassed by their

boorish son, Bull, “half-drunk as usual, [with] something the size of a tent-pole poking out of his baggy shorts” (20). As well as reinforcing the disapproval of adolescent sexuality as purely physical already observed of young adult fiction in general,<sup>1</sup> this scenario provides a context within which attitudes to lesbianism can emerge, in the form of Marco’s reaction to Kate’s new host parents: “I don’t like to worry you Katie, but I have a feeling that these two women you’re going to could be queers — you know, lesbian thingies, gay tarts” (29). (Marco’s email address, “Bigballs@ibuzz.co.nz” (27), can be read as an assertion of his own sense of heterosexuality.) Kate’s reply confirms both his suspicions and their sexuality — “they are most certainly not ‘closet’ queers. They are a well-known and very successful couple” (31) — as a prelude to revealing her own sexuality: “Marco, I am gay. There, I’ve said it to you. I’m OUT!! To you and to the whole darn world” (35).

Kate’s gay pride is reinforced by the text’s emphasis on lesbianism as a non-threatening and conservative life choice:

This would have been an equally good place for me to live... if I had been as straight as you think you are! Sally and Jills don’t want me ... not in any kinky way you’ve thought out in your strange little mind. ... They are a perfectly normal and happy couple. (35)

This description reinforces the normalcy of middle-class monogamy already seen in previous representations of sexuality, contrasting Sally and Jills’ commitment to each other with abnormal heterosexual relationships, such as Bull’s dysfunctional, fundamentalist Christian family, and Marco “flattering” with a father who dates teenagers and takes his son clubbing.

Acting as spokesperson for the cause, Kate declares she did not “jump out of bed one morning” (62) and announce that she was gay, nor does she hate boys, but, by the same token, she avows, “I have never wanted to fuck a boy. Geddit? I have frequently wanted to fuck a girl” (63). The explicit language signifies her confidence, disproving the reaction of Kate’s older sister (her guardian, whom she told when she was fourteen), who initially felt “sad because she thought it would make my life so much harder” (42). Moreover,

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<sup>1</sup> This is enforced by Kate’s reaction: “[Bull] got my very long fingernails right in, on and around the only two sensitive bits of his ...body” (20)

Kate's sexuality is affirmed when she finds her own partner (although a hint of transgression remains in that her girlfriend is black).<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that Taylor portrays Kate as intending to stay in America. In this way, the novel can validate lesbianism in theory (through Kate's letters home), without presenting a direct challenge to New Zealand society's attitudes.

While the girls' families, the citizens of Minneapolis, and the Students Abroad Foundation all accept lesbians (and inter-racial partnerships), Taylor acknowledges the possibility of a homophobic backlash with Marco's insistence that "babes like you are not queers" (37). Less than reasoned, his response echoes the view already posited in *The Blue Lawn* and *Dare, Truth or Promise*: "All of this shit is in your imagination" (38), which Jamgochian terms the "'just-a-phase' theory" (115). Marco's view that all Kate needs is to meet some "quality [jock] with good-size proper balls" (40), typifies a recurring theme in homosexual fiction, the "unrealistic expectation that all one has to do is 'it' with a member of the opposite sex, and voilà! one will be healed, whole and heterosexual" (Cart 3). Taylor counters this with Kate's description of her American high school's star athlete: "broad shouldered, blond, great pecs ... His lover plays on the football team and has even better pecs!" (41). Refuting Marco's prejudice that homosexuals conform to an effeminate stereotype, this evidence affirms sexual orientation without necessarily being seen to endorse adolescent sexual activity.

Ambivalence is further revealed in reference to the time Marco and Jerome taunted a fellow school pupil for being a "poof" (26), an appraisal that is later called into question:

You'd never guess, man. Nathan Smartarse looks quite normal nowadays. He's grown about half a bloody metre and put on some

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<sup>1</sup> The revelation is presented as a further challenge to Marco's (and readers') sensibilities, in the following online chat session:

'She a blonde bimbo...?'

'You say the sweetest things. No. She is dark. Very dark.'

'Fuck! She a nigger?'

'MARCO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!'

'Sorry. Well? Is she?'

'Ann is black. She is African American.'

This exchange is offered as a prelude to his real question, "Like, how do you do it?" to which Katie replies, "None of your fuckin business" (*Jerome* 74).

weight and got rid of those dorky glasses and he looks just like a regular guy! ... Now he looks just like the sorta guy who could be a mate of mine — well nearly good enough. (34)

The narrator's surprise invites implied readers to recognise the irony, both of Marco's superficial re-evaluation, and his assumption that "whatever Jerome and me done to him musta helped, eh?" (34). At the same time, however, it problematises the issue of homosexuality, in that someone who looks gay (a negative attribute) is now revealed as being straight, gradually drawing implied readers' attention to the inference that Marco refuses to see: that Jerome was gay. Although Marsich and McKenzie question the narrative's credibility at this point, citing the fact that the text has always stressed that Marco and Jerome were like "twins[,] ... just the same, Jerome 'n me" (14), the revelation is portrayed as coming as even more of a shock to Marco than Kate's lesbianism: "Jerome fucking with a guy! I don't believe that!" (90). Nevertheless, readers must accept it as the truth. However, while the mention of "fucking" serves to convey the adolescent voice, nothing in the text suggests Jerome ever acted on his feelings. Marco's assumption confounds the Foucauldian distinction between sexuality and sex. Just because one has a particular sexual orientation (be it hetero- or homosexual) does not automatically imply one is sexually active.

Marco's vehement reaction leads to a final irony, one the text has already hinted at, once when Kate questioned whether Marco was "as straight" as he thought he was (35), and again in its insistence that homosexuals look perfectly normal. Now Kate reveals, "[Jerome] never was with a guy, Marco. Never. Not once. There was only one guy he ever wanted..." (90). Rather than endorsing homosexuality outright, however, this realisation, which Marsich refers to as "[Marco's] terrible shift and point of growth" (Marsich and McKenzie 46), remains unresolved. Readers learn that Kate encouraged Jerome to tell Marco, but his unexpected question, "*what did I think of gay guys?*" (92), elicited Marco's response: "I let him have it, [telling him] what I thought he wanted to know and we laughed and joked about chopping the nuts of any queer guy who ever ... A week later he was dead" (92 [ellipses in original]). This tragic ending serves a dual function, on the one hand condemning the homophobia that led to his hunting "accident" (13), while, on the other (as already seen in the treatment

of heterosexual relationships), killing off the adolescent before he can engage in premature sexual experimentation.

That someone can be both gay *and* a good guy is perhaps the novel's main message, but, again, this is not a "coming out" narrative, as Jerome's suicide attests. Moreover, while this abrupt ending manipulates readers' sensibilities, inviting them to both condemn and acknowledge homophobia at the same time, its attitude towards homosexuality remains indeterminate, as shown by Marco's epiphanic words to Kate:

Jesus, I was just so blind. Every sign that you spotted in you, as you grew up...every sign that Jerome must have spotted in him and that I guess he shared with you... fuck, they've been in me, too. Never wanted to go out with girls...never. Only ever pretended to kiss one. Sure, lookin' like I do, not hard to get one that looked good — and then, bugger me, never wanting to do anything when I did score. (94)

Once again, Marsich and McKenzie reject the apparent revelation that Marco may also be gay, on the grounds that, not only would such a characterisation contradict Kate's earlier affirmation that homosexuality does not develop overnight, but "three in a row [could be interpreted as] literary artifice gone mad" (46). Interpretation depends on how one reads Marco's words — as reluctant acknowledgement of latent homosexuality, or confirmation of (hetero)sexual immaturity — an ambiguity that Kate's response also leaves unresolved:

‘It might be that what you felt for Jerome stays at just that. Somewhere down the road there may be a girlfriend, someone ... shit,’ she laughs. ‘This is too much. I hope there's a whole heap of boyfriends if for no other reason than that no poor girl deserves to end up with you!’ (*Jerome* 95)

Marco may or may not be gay, a resolution deferred "somewhere down the road," in other words, well into the future, beyond the novel's parameters. Taylor ends by seeming to endorse homosexuality in theory, while directing attention away from its sexual connotations: "I'm sorry mate. Sorry we were both fuckwits, eh? ...Thanks, mate, for loving me. I loved you too, you know, even if I didn't know what that love was" (95). Marsich reads this uncertainty

as a refutation of homosexuality: “Does loving the look and so forth of a person really mean that you want to have a gay relationship with them? I think not” (Marsich and McKenzie 46). However, while this is undoubtedly a valid observation in general terms, this thesis contends that, given the complex characterisations of this novel, a strictly non-sexual interpretation such as this merely highlights adults’ inherent ambivalence towards adolescent sexuality, independent of sexual preference.

By the close of the twentieth century, New Zealand children’s fiction can endorse lesbian relationships arguably because society is more accepting, yet its treatment of homosexuality remains guarded. Few of the characters resolve their sexuality, often remaining at best uncertain, at worst dead. The focus on the power of language — ascribing Jerome’s death, for example, to the inability to “say his own truth” (Marsich and McKenzie 47) — emphasises the primarily discursive treatment of sexuality common to the genre. This observation is also supported by Jamgochian’s examination of the performative nature of the title of Boock’s *Dare Truth or Promise*, the word game whereby Willa and Louie explore their feelings for each other, and by Trites’ view that queer American YA fiction tends to deny “the corporeality of homosexuality” (114) by focussing on characters’ words rather than actions. In New Zealand novels, characters are denied even words, with only one — *Jerome*’s Kate — able to name herself as gay. When one considers the power associated with knowing one’s identity, the number of homosexual characters portrayed as uncertain, while reflecting the myth of adolescence as a time of general uncertainty, also reveals the discourse’s struggle to balance the impulse to affirm a vulnerable minority with its apparent overall imperative to delay the expression of sexuality for as long as possible.

Repression, by its very nature, evokes that which it seeks to suppress. Where Foucault distinguished between sex and sexuality, regarding the latter solely as a discursive construct, works for children acknowledge the power of adolescent sexuality in their insistence on characters’ misappropriation of an adult prerogative. References to “sex education” acknowledge adolescent curiosity, but fail to satisfy it, while accounts of sexual interaction tend to be restricted to a discursive level, where couples talk but do not act. In rare cases,

exceptional adolescent couples are permitted intimacy in anticipation of marriage, but those who presume to have casual sex invariably suffer the consequences. The portrayal of sexually active parents operates as a further deterrent, either reasserting rightful conjugal relations or displaying the worst excesses of “adolescent” irresponsibility. As a final prophylactic, a common trope depicts characters’ parents as having been sexually active teenagers themselves, and living to regret it, forced into unhappy marriages or solo parenthood as a result. Such behaviour not only affirms the adolescent myth, thereby justifying the call to refrain from sexual experimentation, it also, suggests, by inference, a proper, “adult” version of sexuality that is inherently middle-class in its monogamous restraint.

Representation of homosexuality operates within a similar ambit, although the drive to validate a minority is generally compromised by the discourse’s ambivalence towards adolescent sexuality in general, which means works often defer sexual expression by stressing characters’ uncertainty about their orientation. In this way, the depiction of adolescent sexuality, acknowledges its power but denies its pleasure, requiring characters and readers to “put this strong biological urge into cold storage” (Shand 50). Seen in the light of the Foucauldian power/knowledge dynamic that permits discussion of the forbidden, this paradox suggests a similarly repressed attitude towards adult sexuality as well.

## Chapter Six: “Ungrown-up grown-ups”

During the past one hundred years, the “floating signifier” that is “adolescence” has undergone a number of changes, from being regarded as a fixed interlude between school and marriage to an indeterminate state with no clear endpoint. Youth culture may have become an increasingly influential aspect of society, yet New Zealand children’s fiction, as shown by an examination of more than forty novels written between 1914 and 1999, tends to portray adolescence as a time of powerlessness, more closely allied with childhood than evincing and affirming adult potential. Behavioural theorists view adolescence as a time when youth may well challenge the adult hegemonic order as a necessary process in order to establish their own values. New Zealand novels, on the contrary, appear to regard independent thought as “not knowing one’s own mind.” By denying characters the autonomy traditionally considered a prerequisite for the transition to adulthood, novels not only represent a strongly adult-centric view of adolescence, they imply a view of adult-ness that is inherently conformist as well.

This can be seen as evidence of an “adultist” perspective, made possible by the nature of the genre itself. Within society, as Foucault observed, the influence members have over each other at every stage of interaction is a fluid process, with no one group automatically holding dominance. On the other hand, however absent they may seem within the text, authors hold total power over their characters. Children’s literature, in particular, has long been governed by a didactic imperative, dramatising social values in order to acculturate impressionable readers, the basis upon which the works written for and about adolescents examined in this thesis have been deliberately classified as *children’s* rather than ‘Young Adult’ fiction. However, while David Elkind notes in *Children and Adolescents* (1970) that “[w]hether it is *Emil and the Detectives*, or *Tom Sawyer* ... or *Alice in Wonderland*, in each story adults are outwitted and made to look like fools by children” (57), this thesis contends that adolescent characters are often *disempowered*, affirming a hegemonic authority within the texts that may, in fact, be less possible in reality.

Adolescence can be seen as a cultural construct, its definition intrinsically linked with adults' own sense of self. In the first decades of the century when Victorian family values still held firm, adolescence generally represented a brief interlude between child- and adulthood, during which young middle-class Pakeha New Zealanders dutifully prepared for the roles laid down for them by their parents. Adulthood had clearly defined parameters of diligence and sobriety, which governed the behaviour of both grown-ups and adolescents. However, by the mid 1950s, a number of factors, including increased affluence and leisure time, coupled with the advent of American media influences such as rock'n'roll, led to the growing visibility of a separate youth culture, occasioning a sense of moral panic among New Zealand adults, as formerly compliant children apparently metamorphosed into teenage rebels overnight. Suddenly, adolescence — and its synonym at the time, “juvenile delinquency” — came to represent all that was anathema to conservative society. As post-war teenagers became parents themselves, the tensions of the “generation gap” became accepted as the norm, but the ongoing myth of “the adolescent problem” continued to reinforce the notion of an imperfect state. By the end of the century, the emphasis was less on *becoming...*, than on *not being* an adult. This redefinition served both parties, but adults in particular, projecting their desire to limit the impact of any adolescent challenges to their hegemonic status, whilst constructing their own sense of being problem-free in opposition.

To this end, the twentieth-century representation of adolescence in New Zealand children's fiction continues to uphold a strongly moralistic ethos, which rewards obedience to authority, and punishes signs of autonomy. This attitude stands in contrast to much of the YA literature of the United States and Australia, which commentators often term “grit-lit” or “crossover” fiction (Beckingsale et al.), in recognition of such works' “darker” aspects, and the increasingly blurred boundaries between YA and adult fiction. Authors like America's Robert Cormier, and Australia's Sonya Hartnett and John Marsden present “edgy” novels (Beckingsale et al.) about violence, drug abuse and death, which appear to offer little hope for characters or the society in which they live. Although stark portrayals ultimately serve an equally didactic purpose (discouraging readers from emulating such behaviours), New Zealand's

literature is more overtly protective of its audience, seeking to safeguard adolescents (and society), by presenting less graphic cautionary tales.

Authorial control is maintained by the focalising narrative voice, which directs the audience to infer the correct way to behave. Such an approach operates in accordance with the notion that readers learn from vicarious experiences provided by literature, with a number of New Zealand authors presenting role models who exhibit admirable (adult) qualities such as responsibility, loyalty, integrity and perseverance. Their exemplary nature is confirmed by malleable younger narrators who echo adult values in their observation of older characters' behaviour, or when events are presented from the first person point-of-view of adolescent narrators such as Tessa Duder's Alex, arguably the most influential female in New Zealand children's literature. Similarly, desirable behaviour is demanded and endorsed, both by omniscient narrative voices and adult characters within the text itself. Phillis Garrard, for example, can have her protagonist's father jokingly refer to himself as "a sad example of a Spineless Modern Parent" (*Tales Out of School* 134), secure in the knowledge that his daughter displays the most traditional of values.

Readers are left in no doubt, however, that these exemplary characters are still regarded as *children*, rather than adults in the making. Adulthood remains an ideal future state, the "freedom of 'no mean city'" (Garrard *Tales Out of School* 119) that beckons from beyond the parameters of the novel. Any who *think* they are already adult are mistaken. A seventeen-year-old may dream of getting married, for example, but the fact that her love letter is eaten by a cow before reaching its intended audience reveals the untimeliness of such an ambition. Adolescent behaviour is often described in the earliest novels as "not knowing one's own mind," implying that adults do. Certainly, until they come around to their elders' point-of-view, characters remain in limbo. Authors stress adolescents' lack of maturity, at times even forgetting their youthful readers in the process, addressing their audience as their contemporaries. Such an unconscious slip of the pen reveals the adultist agenda: readers are expected to acknowledge the inherent immaturity of their fictional counterparts. Moreover, characters' recurrent inability to fulfil traditional rites of passage seems to suggest entrée into adulthood demands the very highest standards. In most cases,

the transition appears to demand further education, which has the effect of both prolonging adolescent dependency and affirming adult power over both process, and outcome.

In contrast to the depiction of obedient children striving to fulfil adult requirements, adolescents can also be portrayed as variously scatty, immature, irresponsible, indolent, misguided, or delinquent, characterisation that performs an equally didactic function by warning readers how *not* to behave. Granting the narratorial voice to an undesirable character could be seen to endorse his or her behaviour; instead authors yield control only to the most conformist of child narrators. Exaggerating the perceived threat of adolescent behaviour not only affirms adults' hegemonic power to chastise, but also shores up their own sense of rightness. In this way, the representation of adolescence can be modified to suit the adultist agenda. Where Alex's headstrong behaviour is championed as evidence of her feminism (Duder), for example, the non-conformist actions of a character with similar leadership qualities, such as John, in Peacocke's *The Cruise of the Crazy Jane*, are decried.

It is possible to identify a hierarchy of responses, depending on the seriousness of the delinquency. Trivial misdemeanours tend to be disparaged, with novels mocking the excesses of teenage fashion for example, and, by inference, its significance as an expression of independence, with descriptions such as "[his jerkin] appeared to have been knitted from sky-blue rope" (Mahy 1985 21). More serious defiance occasions stronger reactions: with being lost in the bush arguably a direct consequence of one teenager's refusal to babysit (de Roo 1977), while loitering, lounging and having one's hands in one's pockets are considered clear signs of depravity (Peacocke 1919; Harland 1965). The most serious adolescent rebellion (i.e. the misappropriation of adult behaviours), receives the harshest treatment. Almost without exception, drinking is associated with vomiting, drinking and driving result in accidents (usually causing injury or death), and unprotected sex leads to pregnancy, or worse.

Such accounts of adolescence, as opposed to child- and adulthood, tends to represent an undesirable state, with little sense of the romantic idealism originally connoted by G. Stanley Hall's "storm and stress" designation. Each depiction is countered, either by the narratorial voice itself, or more often — in

keeping with the inherently conformist nature of the works — by the offender’s reform. Thus, Peacocke’s delinquent schoolboy literally hangs “his head low down like a little boy in disgrace” (*The Cruise of the Crazy Jane* 133), and de Roo’s sulky teenager becomes “just a kid” (*Scrub Fire* 105) once more. Lisa Vasil, notable within this study for being the only teenaged author, ironically presents one of the most conservative portrayals of adolescent behaviour. To reinforce the didactic message, Vasil awards her protagonist the narrative voice, enabling Connie to deliver a running commentary on her wrongdoings, “I didn’t want to lie, but for the sake of being popular I would” (*Dark Secret* 26), before her rejection of adolescent values, “I didn’t want to be popular now” (40), in favour of conformity to those of adults. Parallels can be drawn with earlier portrayals of children who did not know their own minds, as reformed delinquents once more accept their place as powerless children.

Adult figures are conspicuously absent in the works portraying disobedience, suggesting that authors seem to consider that adolescents — without guidance — automatically misbehave. Vasil’s characterisation illustrates one of the narrative devices employed by authors for bringing about reform, the Foucauldian “panoptic gaze,” a focalising technique that enables potentially deviant characters to step back and observe the inappropriateness of their behaviours — from a singularly adult perspective. The calculated rebellion implicit in Alex’s “widgie” costume, “jeans, and a skimpy boat-necked blouse,” for example, is completely undermined by the addendum, “[I shouted] goodbye from the porch so I didn’t have Mum saying I couldn’t go to a party looking like that” (*Songs For Alex* 57). Mum does not have to if the adolescent does it for her. De Roo’s Michelle fulfils a similar role, projecting adult opinion in her self-characterisation as, “she had to admit it, a sullen, critical teenager” (*Scrub Fire* 10). Once again, no adult character needs say a thing, the adolescent’s own expression of disapprobation sufficient to bring her into line.

While the relationship between adult and adolescent governs this entire study, the depiction of adult authority, particularly that of solo parents, warrants attention in its own right. Obedient children do not need authority figures, in that the adult point-of-view is implicit within the narrative voice, just as it is in works that depict disobedient adolescents. Therefore, works that directly portray

adult and adolescent interaction have the effect of making the adult point-of-view overt. As Trites points out, adult authors construct the representation of adults within the text (55ff), just as they construct that of adolescents. Empathy with adults is established in a variety of ways, with one of the most obvious being to name them as characters in their own right. Children may still call their parents “Mum” and “Dad,” but as soon as the omniscient narrative voice introduces them, for example, as Kate and Stephen (Mahy *The Changeover*), Jay and Ron and Nanci and Meredith (Marshall), Susi and Tony (Boock *Dare Truth or Promise*), and Stella (de Goldi *Sanctuary*), implied readers can be expected to have a vested interest in their well-being. This shift in focus, which becomes more obvious in novels written in the final decades of the twentieth century, constitutes a redefinition of the “generation gap” that affirms the importance of adults in adolescents’ lives in a way that may be less possible in reality, given the increase in broken homes.

Such representations challenge liberal parenting theories that seem to grant adolescents undue power, although the authority of two-parent families remains more assured than that of a solo parent. In Mahy’s *The Catalogue of the Universe* and *The Tricksters*, adolescents may vie for advantage, but ultimately the two-parent unit prevails, whereas Marshall’s portrayal of a solo mother deferring to her daughter’s unreasonable demands suggests an unnatural role reversal, inviting readers to shift allegiance from the adolescent to the adult in the process. Generally, however, portrayals of single-parent families operate to the adult’s advantage, with adolescents adapting their behaviour accordingly to become more responsible. Often this entails deputising for the absent parent, or acting as caregiver. However, undertaking adult duties does not signify equal status: William Taylor alludes to the proper relationship with fifteen-year old Marco’s plaint, “Dad says him and me are flatmates. I don’t want a sodding flatmate. I want a sodding father!” (1999 23). Moreover, the prevalence of solo parents who form new partnerships reveals a strong imperative to restore their hegemonic status. In the words of David Hill’s protagonist, “It’ll be neat to get told off by two parents again” (1992 119).

The depiction of undesirably “adolescent” behaviour on the part of the parents, not only operates to reinscribe what an undesirable state adolescence is,

and — by inference — what adulthood ought to be, it also enables novels to exonerate adults' failings, a representation that stands in marked contrast to their treatment of teenage misdemeanours. Adults are portrayed as behaving irresponsibly in a number of ways — abandoning their children, staying out late, forgetting birthdays, taking a new partner — yet without exception the adolescent is required to forgive: ““You're older now,”” says one father. ““Don't expect your mother to be perfect”” (Marshall 184-5). The irony here is that, in order to excuse adults from behaving like adolescents, these texts require adolescents to behave like ersatz adults.

Empowering adolescents, this study has demonstrated, occurs only when it suits the adultist purpose. This is revealed most markedly by the treatment of abuse, which often depict strong adolescent victims withstanding the harmful actions of pathetic adults. The novels by no means condone perpetrators' actions, but, unlike representative British and American treatments of the same subject, they fail to call them to account within a public arena. Some works offer an *apologia*, such as Sorry's forbearance in the face of his foster father's brutality, ““I think life got to be like war for him”” (Mahy 1984 116), while others seem to imply that, as long as the abuse ceases, no lasting harm has been done. Nevertheless, such portrayals of less-than-perfect adults towards the end of the century can perhaps be attributed to the increasing lack of definition associated with “being adult” in society in general.

Sexuality, arguably the most contentious aspect of adolescence, remains the one over which adults, in books as in society, seek to retain the greatest control. Once again, this, in a sense, has less to do with adolescence than with adults' own attitudes towards sex and sexuality. New Zealand children's fiction seems to operate under what Foucault termed the “repression” dynamic (*History* 6), which stresses the forbidden nature of sexuality (“Don't!”) while drawing attention to it at the same time. As revealed throughout this study, the representation of adolescence only condones adult qualities, with intimate relationships reserved for soul mates, whose mature commitment to each other suggests a middle-class monogamy reminiscent of New Zealand society's generally conservative ethos.

On the other hand, characters who act “like adolescents,” irresponsibly engaging in casual and unprotected sex (teenagers and adults both), are given cause to regret their actions. Where Foucault considers sexuality a site of both power and pleasure, the representation of sex within works written for adolescents tends to stress neither. Control over the topic can be seen in the high occurrence of unplanned pregnancies for female characters, and instances of performance anxiety for males, which operate as a strong deterrent, further reinforced by the number of characters who meet untimely ends shortly after engaging in sexual experimentation. The clear message is one of deferral: sex, first pointed out as early as 1916 by Edith Howes, is an adult prerogative, preferably reserved for reproduction within marriage.

The treatment of homosexuality provides a fitting finale to this study, in that it clearly illustrates the adultist imperative at work. With the exception of C.R. Allen’s novel from the 1930s, which depicts a “flambuoyantly [sic] anti-Sabbatical” (146) character as a warning of how not to lead one’s life, works have sought to validate a vulnerable minority within New Zealand society. However, the fundamental principle requiring adolescents to “sit on their sex urge ... pretending it does not exist...for about ten years” (Shand 50), as well the lack of a clearly-defined audience (gay, straight, or both?) tends to impede this objective. Not surprisingly, similar conditions to those governing the treatment of adolescent heterosexuality apply. The only sanctioned homosexual relationships are between committed couples. That these are exclusively female suggests a tolerance towards lesbianism that is less apparent in the depictions of homosexuality. Adolescent males tend to remain indecisive about their orientation, an outcome that compromises the discourse’s aim to affirm homosexuality *per se* in order to satisfy its paramount requirement: delaying sexual activity until adulthood.

Far from portraying adolescents challenging the existing social order as part of the developmental process of establishing their own set of values, with few exceptions novels tend to censure evidence of independent thought and action, rewarding obedience to adult mores instead. This suggests that becoming an adult in New Zealand also entails learning to conform to society’s rules. Certainly, the constant focus on the imperfect nature of adolescence invites

comparisons with an idealised sense of adult-ness in much the same way as Said's Orientalist's views of the "Other." Viewed through the focalising lens of the narrative voice, the childish whims of young lovers are measured against the sober realities of mature commitment; the frivolous ambitions of teenage daydreamers evoke a contrasting sense of adult purpose; the anti-social behaviour of juvenile delinquents calls to mind the righteous conformity of their elders; the impetuosity of headstrong youth recall the temperate wisdom of experience. Each of these characterisations is a stereotype, yet, having been created, acquires meaning of its own, revealing an inseparability already implicit within the etymological relationship between *adolescens* and *adultus*: the one cannot be considered without reference to the other. Seen within the context of Foucault's power dynamic, adults appear to constitute "some sort of focus for everything [adolescents] do" (Taylor 1992 97), with twentieth-century New Zealand Young Adult fiction, in accordance with a predominantly protective ethos, upholding adults' power over youth for the good of society as a whole.

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