

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

**‘I had imagined myself into being’
Storytelling Girls in Children’s Fiction
from the Beginning and End of the
Twentieth Century**

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the University of Hull

by

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September 2010

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy

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This thesis is a text-based study of storytelling girls in children's fiction from the beginning and end of the twentieth century, providing close readings of three texts from each of these periods. Books in Part One are drawn from the canon of classic girls' stories: Ethel Turner's *Seven Little Australians* (1894), Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911) and L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908); those in Part Two are more experimental contemporary texts: Marlene Nourbese Philip's *Harriet's Daughter* (1988) and *The Other Side of Silence* (1995) and *The Tricksters* (1986) by Margaret Mahy. All the books are by women writers and all feature unconventional, imaginative girl protagonists who foreground, in their creative interactions with their community and environment, issues of language and voice.

I take a broadly feminist approach in this thesis to explore how these texts represent the young female voices of their protagonists becoming the means by which they express and define their identity. As both female and children, the girls in these books are doubly marginalized within a predominantly male, adult culture. While there have been radical changes of attitudes and opportunities in the social positioning of women over the century, in both sets of novels the protagonists struggle against a pattern of confining and silencing narratives. I argue that storytelling is used as both a metaphor and a device to unsettle repressive master discourses, develop alternative voices and imagine identities which exceed the limits of traditional narrative conventions. The inclusion of texts from both ends of the century demonstrates the persistence of particular narrative shapes and structures which restrict the possibilities of the female subject, but also reveals a continuity of strategies to circumvent or elude such prescribed stories, and invent and articulate more flexible, multiple and interconnected selves.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Valerie Sanders, whose guidance, insight and unstinting support have been invaluable to me in the preparation of this thesis.

I also wish to thank the Department of English at the University of Hull and particularly Ruth Hawden for her help and encouragement and Professor Ann Heilmann for her comments and advice on reading parts of this manuscript.

I am grateful to the University of Hull for funding the Graduate Teaching Assistant post through which this PhD was undertaken.

I also wish to acknowledge the contribution of my family who have been a constant source of support and practical help in undertaking and completing this endeavour and I thank them for their generosity of time and spirit.

Finally, I especially want to thank my husband, Howard, and my daughters, Esther and Elspeth, who have inspired and sustained me throughout, and who have, in so many ways, made this possible.

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Dedicated to
Howard, Esther and Elspeth with love
For all the stories we share

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis explores the figure of the storytelling girl in children's fiction from the turn of the twentieth century to its end. Girls, particularly, are often prodigious storytellers in children's literature and my concern here is with the kinds of storytelling the young female protagonists engage in and how stories become a vehicle through which they experiment with and develop their own voice. In novels by Ethel Turner, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Lucy Maud Montgomery, Marlene Nourbese Philip and Margaret Mahy I will consider how, from the doubly marginalized and silenced position of the female child, girls use their narrative skills to define and control their burgeoning identities as they progress towards adulthood. This process is, however, located within a network of other stories which inspire and shape their telling and with which they enter into dialogue as they weave their own tapestry of tales. Although all the girls considered here demonstrate enormous creative energy, these novels are not strictly, I think, novels of artistic development or apprenticeship, but stories about the creation and articulation of a female selfhood which requires both imagination and linguistic dexterity to voice itself, even, it seems, in the late twentieth century.

1.1 *Stories and Narrative*

In J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911) the plot turns on the compelling and seductive power of stories: Peter is repeatedly tempted away from the myriad adventures of Neverland to listen to the stories told in the Darlings' nursery; Wendy's possession of a hoard of tales is both what captures Peter's much-desired attention and the ticket that gains her entry to the magical realm of Neverland while the fabric of Neverland itself is woven from stories. Both text and characters are preoccupied with the telling of tales, with the worlds stories create and how they make things happen: from her first

encounter with Peter, Wendy decidedly positions herself as a storyteller. Alarmed that he is about to leave once she has told him the ending to Cinderella¹, she calls him back with the promise of more tales:

‘Don’t go, Peter,’ she entreated, ‘I know such lots of stories.’

Those were her precise words, so there can be no denying that it was she who first tempted him.

He came back with a greedy look in his eyes now which ought to have alarmed her, but did not.

‘Oh, the stories I could tell the boys!’ she cried, and then Peter gripped her arm and began to draw her towards the window. (Barrie 2008: 96)

As the ever-problematic narrator makes clear, this is a captivating, potentially dangerous, claim, but once Wendy is installed at her Neverland hearthside the yarns she spins are less frequently drawn from this promised store of ready-made tales, and are more often those she makes up herself, about herself. From the game of mother and father in the nursery, her role-playing with Peter and the idealized homecoming she paints for the Lost Boys, to the remembered tales of her childhood adventures which she shares with her own daughter, Wendy is adept at narrating her own story. In contrast, Peter forgets his adventures the moment they are over and, unable to re-tell his own story, he seems compelled to re-experience the same episodes without moving his narrative forward. In some ways it seems that in *Peter and Wendy* the separate traditions of boys’ fiction and girls’ fiction, which developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, meet in an uneasy and profoundly ambiguous juxtaposition. While Peter, the boy hero who battles the villainous pirates in boys’ adventure story style, has achieved iconic status, it is Wendy’s narratives of home and motherhood which are, finally, more enthralling, luring the Lost Boys back from the seemingly limitless possibility and freedom of Neverland. Despite the apparent imaginative fullness of Neverland, Peter and the Lost Boys seem unable to construct any meaningful story from their episodic, formulaic, forgettable, almost interchangeable experiences whereas Wendy fabricates a rich mythology around the home which is coherent, emotionally satisfying and part of a broader narrative connecting the past, present and future. In this respect, Wendy’s stories are as much a threat to the carefree adventures of Neverland as Captain Hook and his pirates, as both, in quite different ways, represent growing-up. Wendy’s narratives imagine change, a

¹It seems significant that the story for which Peter has returned is Cinderella, a fairy-tale, but a romantic one, principally concerned with the domestic sphere, family relationships and marriage which are, of course, all missing from the adventure strewn island of Neverland.

future, development (as well as recalling the past), which are the very things that Peter's eternal youth rages against. But Wendy's storytelling is ultimately more powerful than Peter's empty escapades, and functions to expand and enhance her identity while Peter's remains forever frozen and incomplete.

Peter and Wendy encapsulates the essence of the tension and anxiety, delight and belief in and about stories which recurs throughout children's literature and criticism of it. I begin with this text, one of the most enduring and recognisable (and complex) of children's classics, firstly because it illustrates a general self-consciousness about storytelling in children's fiction, and secondly because it dramatizes gender differences in how stories are told and used, particularly connecting the activity of storytelling with the development of female identity. *Peter and Wendy* both foregrounds the problematic relationships between adult author, narrator, text and child reader (an issue which Jacqueline Rose has examined in depth in her influential study *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* 1984) and plays, self-referentially, with how stories and imaginative worlds are constructed and represented. The narrator makes a conspicuous show of selecting which adventures to convey and threatens to intervene in the action by telling Mrs Darling of her children's impending return, both of which devices pretend at the independent life of the story while simultaneously displaying the author's control of the narrative. This difficult narrator's dominant presence throughout the text focuses attention on the process of telling the story, a concern shared, as Deborah Thacker argues, with other children's classics *The Wind in the Willows* and *Winnie-the-Pooh*: 'These books are, I would suggest, self-consciously *about* writing for children, rather than merely stories for children.' (Thacker and Webb 2002: 78) Within the narrative stories are a desirable currency which precipitate as well as record adventures in Neverland. Storytelling is also an essentially feminine activity and Wendy's agency is predominantly expressed and mediated through her narrative skills. Her superior command of language, evident initially and significantly in the confusion over the kiss, shapes the children's imaginative lives on the island as powerfully as Peter's dashing exploits. From the start, it is an art associated with motherhood and domesticity and treated ambivalently within the book, but it is, as I have suggested, also the medium through which Wendy navigates her route to adulthood. Although here her destination is a fairly conventional one, Wendy can be seen to be actively constructing her identity through narrative. Both of these concerns, the self-reflexivity about the power of stories and storytelling and the gender bias towards girl storytellers, are reflected in children's literature more broadly and in the texts in this study in particular.

An interest in the status and dynamics of storytelling is found throughout children's literature.² Writing for children is often conspicuously aware of its readers and its own textuality and intertextuality. Whatever other ideological, didactic or psychological function a children's book fulfils, narrative is usually a central feature and concern of the text. As Peter Hunt observes: 'Children's books centre on narrative, in a sense they are *about* narrative.' (Hunt 1991: 118) This seems to be the case on a number of levels. Not only do books written for children often tend to be narrative driven, but the abundance of allusions to other texts and references to the activities of reading, writing, telling and acting stories suggest an interest in how stories make meaning for children and how that can be used both within and outside the text. As a genre, children's literature seems to be constantly in dialogue with itself, both in terms of the frequent references to other books for young people, and in its own processes of creation by the adult writer and reception by the child reader.

This is in part a function of the power imbalance between the adult writer and the anticipated child audience and is apparent in the large number of ambiguous, problematic, intrusive and controlling narrators in the children's literary canon. Barbara Wall identifies the difficulty in finding a voice with which to speak to children on the page in her study *The Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction* (1991), a problem which has changed both in substance and response over the history of writing specifically for children, but which persists as a central tension of the genre. The multitude of complex narrative voices also speak of an anxiety about how the story acts on the child and about how tales which are overtly fictional, fantastical and nonsensical, and are apparently flippant and insubstantial, are also profoundly real, significant and meaningful. Hence Charles Kingsley offers the famously paradoxical advice to readers of *The Water Babies* (1863): 'But always remember, as I told you at first, that this is all a fairy tale, and only fun and pretense; and, therefore, you are not to believe a word of it, even if it is true.' (Kingsley 2008: 190) While appearing to dismiss as trivial his 'fairy tale for a landbaby', Kingsley simultaneously elevates its status, reinstating the value of the story. Similarly, the narrator in A.A. Milne's *Winnie-The-Pooh* (1926) re-creates the listening Christopher Robin's imaginative life and play by telling adventures which conflate and confuse the real and the fictional, memory and story. The ensuing narratives both construct and sustain the child's world. This slippage is visible in the stories themselves. In *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928) Pooh composes a song in honour of Piglet, chronicling his bravery in escaping from Owl's fallen house to bring help. After

² To discuss children's literature with any degree of generality is, I am aware, problematic. It is a broad and diverse field comprising as many different genres and sub-genres as adult fiction and I do not wish to imply any easily categorized homogeneity, so when I refer to children's literature as a body of work I aim to suggest recurring themes and preoccupations rather than defining features.

the recitation, Piglet's question and Pooh's response suggest a recognition of the power of a well-told tale:

‘Did I really do all that?’ he said at last.

‘Well,’ said Pooh, ‘in poetry – in a piece of poetry – well, you *did* it, Piglet, because the poetry says you did. And that's how people know.’
(Milne 1994: 232)

Despite the apparent smallness, the seeming whimsicality, of Hundred Acre Wood, the text affirms its own significance and the centrality of stories in constructing experience.³

The notion that stories are ‘how people know’, in all the various senses that implies, has much scholarly support across a range of disciplines. The idea that narrative is integral both to humans’ interpretation of the world and to the construction of identity is explored in the fields of psychology, history, philosophy, cultural studies and literary theory. Telling stories is often seen to be a fundamental human activity. As Paul Copley remarks: ‘Human beings, especially after the development of the verbal faculty, have constantly told stories, presented events and squeezed aspects of the world into narrative form. ... Wherever there are humans there appear to be stories.’ (Copley 2001: 2) Barbara Hardy argues that narrative is a central aspect of human thought, what she calls a ‘primary act of mind’ (Hardy 1977: 12), and Margaret Mahy speculates that stories are such an essential human activity that they may be coded into our instincts: ‘Since all the important processes of our lives (like eating and reproducing) are reinforced with powerful pleasure principles, perhaps we are constructed to look for pleasure in stories – to *desire* them, because we need to know about them and to be able to use them.’ (Mahy 2000: 35) The origins of narrative, both within the individual and within human society generally, are the subject of considerable research and debate, but, despite the apparent universality of storytelling, narrative performs multiple functions and is employed in diverse ways. The importance of stories in structuring, ordering and making sense of the raw material and happenings of the real world is, however, widely accepted. In representing experience and transforming it into recognisable codes (among which language is, of course, included), stories bestow shape and significance. Narrative intervenes not only in the retelling of past events but also in the expectations, desires and choices which direct future action. The centrality of narrative in mediating

³The problem here, for critics such as Rose, is that while such texts present the magical imaginative worlds of child's play, they are, inescapably, always constructed and controlled by the adult writer. Although a children's book may seem to represent the child's experience, perspective, creativity and imagination for both the protagonist and the reader, these all reflect the adult's desires, needs and ideologies so that, Rose argues, the child, in any real sense, is excluded: ‘There is no child behind the category ‘children's fiction’, other than the one the category itself sets in place, the one which it needs to believe is there for its own purposes.’ (Rose 1993: 10)

an individual's relationship to the world and to others is reflected in its key role in conceptions of personal identity and selfhood.

The importance of stories to the creation of a sense of self encompasses the intimate memories, autobiographies and fantasies of the individual, and the broader social narratives of history, nation, culture and myth which locate and shape that individual. Much contemporary thinking argues that this process of self-narration is an ongoing project and that an individual's sense of identity may be conceived differently in various life-stages or circumstances. However, although this model accepts the fluidity of identity in general, children's identities are often represented as particularly flexible and more conspicuously under-construction than adult selfhood. The implication here is that adult identities are, at least relatively, more stable and coherent and the journey towards this state is frequently dramatized in children's fiction. Alison Waller notes that adolescent literature particularly is concerned with the protagonist's progress to a more self-assured and self-aware adult persona: 'Young adult texts (and most adult coming-of-age novels) have a comparable structure, showing the maturation and development of a young person into a coherent identity with a sure sense of situation and status.' (Waller 2005: 27) Waller cites Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy as an example of this structure in a fantasy novel, in which the supple flexibility and variability of Lyra's daemon represents her immature identity which becomes fixed in a single form, her 'true self' (Waller 2005: 27), as she approaches adulthood. Part of the process of growing up, it is suggested, is securing a defined sense of self. This is not a final or fixed project however. While the enthusiastic storytelling of the girl protagonists in the novels studied here can be seen as an act of self-creation and often re-creation as they mature, their identities at the end of the books are not necessarily conclusive, or concluded.

The empowering possibilities of self-narration do not, however, operate in isolation. Notions of identity are always in dialogue not only with other people but also with the social and cultural discourses and ideologies of which stories are inevitably a part, and constructing the self in narrative terms means engaging with the multiplicity of other texts and stories which inspire, speak to and are imposed upon the individual. Children's books are especially influential in this process. Maria Tatar argues that childhood reading is marked by a particular intensity. In the appendix to her work *Enchanted Hunters: The Power of Stories in Childhood* (2009), some eighty-seven adult writers attest to the vision-altering effect of stories on the young imagination. Many of these testimonies amply support Tatar's argument that stories are as important to the development of the child's identity as real world experiences: 'Absorbed early in life, words and stories powerfully affect the formation of identity. ... The books we read when we are young get under our skin in countless ways that do not register in

obvious ways. They can affect us as much as real-life experiences.’ (Tatar 2009: 22) The idea that stories can have a powerful effect on the reader is, of course, well accepted, particularly if those readers are deemed to be impressionable or susceptible to suggestion, like children and, in the not so distant past, women. The appropriation of children’s books for explicitly didactic and educative purposes throughout the history of children’s literature, and the concomitant suppression or mistrust of particular styles and subject matter demonstrate an awareness of the influence the story wields. Kimberley Reynolds also argues that children’s early encounters with books are particularly formative, tracing the link between reading, language and identity: ‘Young readers are serving an apprenticeship – are acquiring linguistic knowledge through trying out different constellations of words which writers have used to articulate experience. In the process, they become acquainted with a variety of specialised discourses which help them evaluate and differentiate their thoughts – and especially their thoughts about themselves.’ (Reynolds 1990: 38) As Reynolds demonstrates in her book *Girls Only? Gender and Popular Children’s Fiction in Britain 1880-1910*, children’s stories can have a powerful effect on the young reader’s perception of what it is possible to say and what it is possible to be.

1.2 *The Storytelling Girl*

So far I have suggested that stories are profoundly implicated in the processes of making meaning and assembling an individual’s sense of identity and that children’s literature is often acutely self-conscious of its role in these tasks. But why, if narrative is such a pervasive and basic, rather than specifically gendered, human activity, are girl storytellers so particularly prevalent in children’s literature? Although it is certainly not a role adopted exclusively by girls in children’s books, the storytelling girl recurs again and again and has become a recognisable type among literary characters. Why are girls especially so strongly associated with storytelling?

One response is to see it as part of an established female storytelling tradition within Western culture generally. In her analysis of the history and iconography of the fairy tale, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (1994), Marina Warner traces the diverse threads of women tale tellers from the classical figures of sibyls and sirens, through the restorative influence of St Anne, the seductive exoticism of the Queen of Sheba and the anonymous gossips, midwives, wise women and nurses who have contributed to the archetypal image of Mother Goose, to the literary fabulists of seventeenth century French salons and modern feminist revisions of the tales. This long and irrepressible tradition places women at the heart of the storytelling process.

The proliferation of storytelling girls in children's fiction may also have its roots in the different spheres and opportunities available to boys and girls (both as fictional characters and readers) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when children's literature flourished. Reflecting the highly structured and codified conceptions of masculinity and femininity in the Victorian period, the children's literature market provided separate fiction for boys and girls, producing imperialist adventure narratives for boys and supplying girls with domestic tales of moral improvement. Reynolds' study of these distinctly gendered genres and the ways that such texts construct masculinity and femininity for the child reader demonstrates the radically opposing roles assigned to children of different sexes in these texts: 'Fictional boys endeavoured to do: to explore, challenge and master. Girls in books aspired to ethereal benignity.' (Reynolds 1990: 50-51) Stories for boys encouraged them to define their identities in terms of deeds and actions. Although boys were trained to use language authoritatively in the public sphere, Reynolds argues that they were '... discouraged [from] linguistic experimentation which might undermine a coherent sense of the masculine self.' (Reynolds 1990: 61-2) Girls, on the other hand, not only tended to read more and from a greater range of books than boys, their education also encouraged an interest in literature and the creative arts. Although this produced girls who were more verbally accomplished than their male counterparts, Reynolds suggests it may, paradoxically, have emphasized their alienation within the dominant, public discourses of masculine power: 'Thus it can be said that girls' early linguistic abilities and literary experiences may make them verbally skilful while heightening their sense of what they cannot say.' (Reynolds 1990: 45-6) The tension between the linguistic and imaginative capacity of girls and their difficulty in finding a voice with which to speak and be heard is apparent throughout the texts studied here. Even in the novels written at the end of the twentieth century, the question of how to speak, when to do so means engaging with discourses and narrative forms which exclude or marginalize female experience, remains a central issue. Yet despite these anxieties and obstructions, the heightened verbal and narrative skill of girls suggests that, denied access to a life of action, they turn to words and stories to elaborate their sense of selfhood.

In this context the activities of reading and telling stories might easily be perceived as a substitute for adventures, a vicarious attempt to engage with a world from which, historically, women and children have been removed and protected. Tatar demonstrates how the metaphors used to describe a love of books are frequently suggestive of excessive interiority and escapism and quotes Robert Louis Stevenson's reservations about the place of reading: 'Books are good enough in their own way, but they are a mighty bloodless substitute for life. It seems a pity to sit, like the Lady of Shalott, peering into a mirror, with your back turned on all the bustle and glamour of reality.' (Stevenson

1924: 52 quoted in Tatar 2009: 25) In this view, stories provide only secondary experience, and, like the tellingly female figure Stevenson invokes in his simile, participants in this shadow-play are passive, limited in their vision and detached from the world. I have, however, already suggested the centrality of narrative in making sense of the ‘primary’ world and the powerful effect stories have on human perceptions, expectations and desires. Peter Pan’s frequent visits to the Darlings’ window, despite his event-packed Neverland life, imply that stories are not a poor substitute for adventures, but real and meaningful experiences in their own right.

Although, particularly in the earlier books in this study, the horizons of the protagonists are socially constrained by their gender, stories are not presented as secondary, escapist nor, indeed, entirely distinct from real life (sometimes they are disconcertingly real). Far from the passivity imagined by Stevenson, narrative provides for the girls in these texts a form of agency. In her analysis of ‘Female Ingenuity’, a coded letter published in *Atkinson’s Casket* magazine in 1832 purportedly written, under conditions of censorship, by a recently married woman to her female friend, Susan S. Lanser argues that the act of speaking constitutes a vital imperative of the plot in this text: ‘Communication, understanding, being understood, becomes not only the objective of the narration but the act that can transform (some aspect of) the narrated world. In a universe where waiting, inaction, reception, predominate, and action is only minimally possible, the narrative act itself becomes a source of possibility.’ (Lanser 1997: 688) The storytelling of the girls considered in this thesis performs a similarly active task. Stories, in these texts, are not merely vessels of secondary experience, they are agents and catalysts. Stories make things happen, they effect change, both of perspective and in action; they reinvent the real world, and, in doing so, reveal how it is already a product of other more dominant and normalized narratives and discourses. While the storytelling habit may reflect the limited opportunities for adventures available to girls throughout much of Western history, the persistence of the practice into the late twentieth century is suggestive both of a continuing struggle against the dominant structures of patriarchy and its usefulness as a strategy for defining and representing female identity. Stories offer not a secondary form of experience and expression, but an alternative one.

1.3 *The Texts*

In the texts in this study stories and storytelling are a vehicle for investigating and manipulating the relationship between the self and the world, and, for the girl characters they become a means of formulating and articulating identities. The focus on

language and narrative highlights how identity is formed in dialogue with and/or opposition to cultural discourses and interactions with the family and community, and is thus constructed rather than innate or natural. The books considered here are taken from opposite ends of the twentieth century, a century which saw significant changes in attitudes towards both children and women, but, nevertheless, they share a focus on imaginative storytelling as the means by which the young female protagonists actively create their own identities beyond those which have been prescribed for them or narrated by someone else. This thesis considers to what extent and in what ways the process of identity development has changed for the girls in these books and why storytelling remains a potent tool and metaphor at the end of the twentieth century when girls would seem to have broader social opportunities. Both the beginning and end of the century are periods of uncertainty and re-evaluation, following, in both cases, a wave of feminist activity and negotiating radical shifts in the organization of the family. Additionally, both periods display a preoccupation with and anxiety about the meaning and experience of childhood. The fragility of old certainties is emphasized by the colonial or post-colonial context which also links all of these books. Although this thesis does not attempt a sustained post-colonial reading of these texts⁴, the selection of material reflects how issues of cultural identity are intertwined with those of personal and gendered identity as all of these fictional girls develop a voice which speaks not only of their maturing female selfhood but also of their relationship to the master narratives of the colonial centre. While this is not the focus of my analysis, the post/colonial positioning does operate for each text as an additional level of removal or dislocation from the dominant and pervasive narrative images and patterns with which all the books grapple, and so challenges, from another point of view, the perceived universality of such models. Despite their historical and geographical differences, these diverse texts are connected by an interest in the limits of traditional narrative conventions and how these boundaries might be tested, stretched or breached.

The three books in Part One of this thesis, *Seven Little Australians* (1894) by Ethel Turner, *The Secret Garden* (1911) by Frances Hodgson Burnett and *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) by Lucy Maud Montgomery, are from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a period widely regarded as the first golden age of children's literature⁵. The fertility and vibrancy of children's publishing at this time is indicative of a broader cultural enthusiasm for and investment in childhood which had developed

⁴ All of these texts richly repay such an approach and there are several post-colonial readings of *The Secret Garden*, notably by Phillips 1993, Kutzer 2000 and Singh 2004. Mahy's work has also received analysis from this critical perspective in the work of Hebley 2005, Feingold 2005, and Lovell-Smith 2008.

⁵ Peter Hunt takes the publication of Kingsley's *The Water Babies* in 1863 as the starting point of the golden age, which then stretches to the start of the First World War in 1914 (Hunt 1994: 59)

and intensified throughout the Victorian era. Childhood became sentimentalized as an idealized time of innocence and imagination and was hence the subject of much symbolism and nostalgia in the fiction of the period. Jackie Wullschläger observes that this reconceptualization of childhood had two important strands:

The first was a dawning sense of childhood as a special state, as not just a period of training for adulthood but a stage of life of value in its own right. With this, the child came to be seen as a symbol, in a prosperous, progressive society, of hope and optimism. The second was a vision of children as good, innocent and in some way connected with spirituality and imagination: an idea inherited from the Romantics, but transformed by Victorian morality and popularised and sentimentalised. (Wullschläger 2001: 12-13)

This view of childhood is abundantly evident in the three books in this section which, despite some self-conscious attempts to declare their national distinctiveness, are still deeply indebted to the British tradition. While the image is largely parodied in *Seven Little Australians*, it is central to the presentation of Mary and Anne in *The Secret Garden* and *Anne of Green Gables*, who are both positioned as the redemptive Romantic child, regenerating the withered and stunted adult world in their respective stories. The popularity and prevalence of such an idealized image of childhood is, as numerous critics have argued, more eloquent about adult insecurities and desires than children's lives and the fantasies of the period express, as Wullschläger says: '... the regressive desire for a pre-industrial, rural world and the identification of the child with purity, a pre-sexual life, moral simplicity.' (Wullschläger 2001: 17) Wullschläger's subjects in *Inventing Wonderland* are, however, the influential, British, male authors acclaimed by the canon, and while women writers for children of the same period certainly employed comparable imagery, their books perhaps suggest less of a retreat from the changing world of the new century than a difficulty in finding a way forward.

This period witnessed enormous changes in both the organization and attitudes of society, as Reynolds explains: 'The *fin de siècle* was characterized by its self-consciousness, including its consciousness of living through an age of profound change and transition. The future no longer seemed knowable and predictable, and many of the assumptions which had underpinned British culture (for instance, Christianity, patriarchy, and British imperialism) were being radically challenged.' (Reynolds 1994: 16) In the settler colonies of Australia and Canada there were also gradual steps towards independence: Australia became an independent dominion in 1901 and Canada's separate provinces began to unite into a confederation from 1867 before becoming an independent Commonwealth nation in 1931. Among these shifts in Britain and its colonies, the changing

position of women is particularly relevant with regard to girls' fiction. Although the debate about women's rights stretches back throughout the previous century, Barbara Caine argues that the issues gained a more public profile in the 1880s and 1890s which increased in the early twentieth century with the extension of the suffrage movement (Caine 1997: 131). Both Australia and Canada also saw active suffrage campaigns at this time. Although much of the fiction for girls of this period does not enter into this political debate directly (except, as Cadogan and Craig, and Reynolds suggest, in the form of the popular press's conservative re-statement of traditional values⁶), Shirley Foster and Judy Simons argue that the women writers of some of the best-known books for girls do respond to the changing perceptions of femininity, even if that response is tentative and conflicted: 'Although in most cases the familiar behavioural codes of feminine self-effacement and domesticity are in the end reinforced, there are more suggestive 'gaps' in the discourse in many of these texts which allow at least glimpses of alternative possibilities.' (Foster and Simons 1995: 7) In their study of classic girls' stories, which includes North American as well as British novels, they suggest an engagement with the changes and possibilities of the period which, although 'muted', 'can be seen to be at least disturbing the prevailing ideologies of their societies' (Foster and Simons 1995: 25), a position which deviates from and offsets the wistful nostalgia which Wullschläger finds characteristic of the British, male children's writers of the era.

As Foster and Simons point out, any challenge to the dominant hierarchy and values in these early twentieth-century texts is more often implied or covert and centres on issues of representation, language and narrative shape rather than direct confrontation with the established order. However, *Seven Little Australians*, the earliest book in this study, is, in some ways, the most self-consciously iconoclastic of the texts examined in this section. It includes an unrepentantly rebellious heroine, Judy, and explicitly questions the generic conventions for representing childhood and family life, while claiming a distinctively Australian national identity for the Woolcot children. But it also seems to be the text which is most constrained by the very models which it so consistently parodies, and despite the ironic narrative voice and the refusal to reform the central character to better fit approved standards of feminine behaviour, the text seems unable to find a language for representing Judy's voice, and her stories are masked, deferred or merely reported by the adult narrator.

Although not entirely liberated from traditional models, Burnett's *The Secret Garden* and Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* both present protagonists who are more

⁶ See Cadogan and Craig 1976: 79-80 and Reynolds 1990: 98-99.

vocally powerful and self-defining than in *Seven Little Australians*.⁷ Both girls use stories to reposition themselves from alienated, displaced, essentially absent figures at the start of the texts, into meaningful, effective and influential members of the community by the end. They not only transform themselves but also refashion an initially hostile environment, reconstructing both the physical landscape and other people through the force of their imaginative vision. Ironically, however, these considerable verbal and narrative skills seem to be expended on the task of rehabilitating these unconventional girls into more acceptable models of girlhood. Even though the opportunities available to these girl characters are circumscribed as they approach adulthood by the prevailing social structures and still limited gender roles of the period, both texts make powerful statements about the possibility of self-authorship. The richness of both texts is also signalled by the considerable critical attention that each has received, particularly from feminist critics who have been keen to point out the creative agency of the girl protagonists which only serves to highlight the unsatisfactory endings of their stories. Foster and Simons provide an excellent analysis of both texts as well as their context within the tradition of juvenile girls' fiction. Elizabeth Lennox Keyser's essay "'Quite Contrary": Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*' (1983) also offers valuable insights into the tension between the surface narrative of *The Secret Garden*, in which Mary submits to Colin's increasing dominance in the story and the garden, and the more covert celebration of Mary's contrariness which persists despite her gradual disappearance. Criticism of *Anne of Green Gables* also focuses on the compelling presentation of the central character: Mary Rubio (1976) examines the transformative force of Anne's imagination, and Catherine Sheldrick Ross (1979), and Julia McQuillan and Julie Pfeiffer (2001) effectively demonstrate how Anne's self-dramatizing reveals the constructedness of gender roles. Written at a time of increasing conflict and confusion about established gender roles, *The Secret Garden* and *Anne of Green Gables* question and unsettle the narrative models which determine the possibilities of girls and women, but also reclaim and revalue a traditionally feminine aesthetic based on the imagination, orality and community.

These three texts are not only classics within their own countries, and, in the case of *Seven Little Australians* and *Anne of Green Gables*, landmarks in the development of an independent national children's literature, but they have also crossed national boundaries to become part of a broader canon of girls' fiction. All address the task of

⁷ Both Burnett and Montgomery have written books which present storytelling characters more explicitly; in Burnett's *The Little Princess* (1905) Sara Crewe is a consummate storyteller but, although she uses stories very effectively to sustain herself, she does not invent herself in quite the same way as Mary in *The Secret Garden*. L. M. Montgomery's *Emily of New Moon* series (1923, 1925 and 1927) follows Emily Starr Byrd in her ambition to become a writer and while there is a great deal of interest here and writing is central to Emily's conception of herself, there is also a strong emphasis on her authorship as a professional vocation, which is not the focus of this thesis.

presenting young female identity, self-consciously taking as a starting point the models of girlhood constructed by the British and American literary tradition, not only in the form of juvenile books for girls but also with reference to Romantic poetry, gothic novels, *Bildungsromane*, and fairy-tales, and respond to the images of femininity that these supply and demand. Revisionist readings of the texts, such as those undertaken by Foster and Simons, examine the relationship between these surface patterns and the coded subtexts which unsettle their apparent authority, revealing telling gaps, silences and, as Lissa Paul also argues, images of entrapment which are similar to the metaphors and devices used in nineteenth-century women's writing (Paul 1990: 150). The continuity between the techniques employed by nineteenth-century women writers for adults and those taken up by early twentieth-century women writers for children reflects the shared subordinate status of women and children in patriarchal society at the turn of the century, but it is perhaps more surprising to find that similar images and strategies resurface at the end of the twentieth century. However, explorations of adolescent female identity, its relationship to the dominant narrative traditions and the search for a language and voice with which to express it remain central to some post-colonial, post-feminist texts from the last decades of the twentieth century.

Questions of gender identity and instances of storytelling girls do not, of course, completely disappear from the intervening years of the middle of the century, but they do not seem to present themselves with the same urgency and seriousness in the major trends of children's literature during this time. At the popular end of the market, the school story for girls flourished between the wars, but the focus on groups of girls rather than a single protagonist, the emphasis on organized games and physical activities and the jovial insistence on the pleasures of girlhood within a secure environment rather than on the process and problems of growing up (see Cadogan and Craig 1976: 111-124 and 170) mean that quests for identity or an examination of the relationship between the self and the world are not the main concerns of this genre. Family adventure stories, such as those written by Arthur Ransome or Enid Blyton, are also action based rather than introspective and while there are certainly imaginative girls (like Titty in *Swallows and Amazons* 1930) and rebellious tomboys (like George in *The Famous Five* series 1942-63), these are not primarily books about forming or defining female selfhood. Neither was this a particularly rich period for Australian, Canadian or New Zealand children's literature. Australian children's fiction progressed most consistently, developing its own identity and idiom, but Roderick McGillis contends that there were few 'quality' children's books produced in Canada before 1975 (after which there was a great deal more of significance), and Betty Gilderale points to the difficulty of developing a national tradition of children's literature in a small country like New Zealand which struggled to support local publishing (Stone, McGillis and Gilderdale 1995: 322-351). In this

context, books from Britain and America remained common and powerfully influential. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s Britain experienced a second golden age in children's literature and although this produced books with sensitive, complex protagonists both Hunt and Reynolds observe that time is often the focus in these texts as the narratives explore the gap between the past and a present altered by war and social change (Hunt 1994: 136-7 and Reynolds 1994: 36-40). By the end of the twentieth century children's books were again trying to come to terms with an uncertain and changing social and political world.

The context in which children's literature was produced had changed dramatically by the last decades of the twentieth century. During the 1970s Britain experienced a second golden age in children's literature and internationally there was a prodigious expansion in the publishing and marketing of children's books and the development of a new category of Young Adult fiction, perhaps partly in response to the growth of teenage culture since the end of the war as the period of childhood became extended by a rising school leaving age (Hunt 2009: 79-81 and Cunningham 2006: 220). There was also an escalation in scholarship about children's literature as it gained recognition from the academy as a subject worthy of study. Connections were made between children's literature and other writing by marginalized subjects or groups, such as women's writing and post-colonial literature and critics argued for a dialogue between these theories⁸. Both feminist and post-colonial theory had become important sites for interrogating the dominant traditions and hierarchies of Western culture (in ways which have less commonly been attributed to children's literature as Deborah Thacker (2000) argues). After the Women's Liberation campaigns of the 1970s, feminism became a less cohesive movement, partly due to a popular perception that most of the important battles had been won and equality largely achieved (a view fiercely contested by many), and partly because of the diversity of feminist standpoints and projects which has led to a recognition that it may be more meaningful to speak of feminisms than a unified feminist cause. Post-colonial theory is a similarly wide-ranging and hybrid discipline and the increasing significance of these critical perspectives during the 1980s and 1990s reflects a broad distrust of totalizing and unifying discourses. Against this background there is a renewed focus on identity development in children's literature, as Tony Watkins and Zea Sutherland observe: 'The question of 'identity' became a crucial one during the period: confusion over national identity, sexual identity, and ethnic identity was often focused on what were perceived as the 'problems' of growing up, particularly during the period of adolescence, and how these were to be represented in literature.' (Watkins and Sutherland 1995: 302) The texts in Part Two demonstrate how identity, particularly

⁸ See Nodelman 1988 and 1992, Paul 1990, 1998 and 2004, and McGillis 2000.

gendered identity, is again a fraught and contested issue at the end of the twentieth century. Despite the radically increased social opportunities available to girls of this period, *Harriet's Daughter*, *The Other Side of Silence*, and *The Tricksters* all suggest that defining and representing female selfhood continues to involve writing back against remarkably persistent narrative structures, shapes and images which retain stereotypically restrictive notions and models of femininity.

Part Two of this thesis focuses on three contemporary children's books: *Harriet's Daughter* (1988) by the Trinidadian-Canadian writer Marlene Nourbese Philip, and *The Other Side of Silence* (1995) and *The Tricksters* (1986) both by New Zealander Margaret Mahy. Philip is probably better known for her adult poetry, drama and prose in which she explores the poetics of black women's writing. Mahy is a prolific children's author whose work spans the age range included in this category, from picture books to Young Adult novels. Both are highly self-conscious writers, alert to the literary and critical contexts in which they write and the books considered here are sophisticated texts for slightly older readers. As such they are more directly and identifiably feminist and transgressive in the narrative strategies they employ. However, despite more stable social backgrounds than Judy, Mary and Anne, and comparatively less restrictive gender roles, the modern protagonists of these texts demonstrate a similar sense of alienation and confusion about their identities and, like their early twentieth-century counterparts, struggle to find a voice and language with which to articulate their gendered sense of self. Images of entrapment resurface: Margaret in *Harriet's Daughter* enacts her desire to escape in the Underground Railroad game and her sense of kinship with Harriet Tubman, silent Hero is locked in the tower of the gothic Credence House in *The Other Side of Silence*, and in *The Tricksters*, Harry catches glimpses of her repressed enchantress self in the tiny mirror which hangs in her attic bedroom. These girls are caught in dangerously seductive tales of ideal families, romance, and heroic individualism which sometimes threaten to overwhelm them, but stories also provide the medium through which they can interrogate and invent possible selves beyond the limits of a particular genre or form. Margaret weaves together multiple voices and narrative threads to construct for herself a richly textured identity which cannot easily be contained in or by any totalizing discourse. In *The Other Side of Silence*, a text which continually confounds normal narrative rules and expectations, the protagonist, Hero, narrates her own silence, retelling the story of when she was an elective mute, and in doing so creates a voice outside the dominant (still masculine) linguistic order. Finally, Harry is forced to re-examine her own relation to and use of stories by the extraordinary events which take place at the family holiday home over Christmas, as the text explores the potentially dangerous power of authorship. Harry is the only protagonist with declared literary ambitions, but although she has a pen in her hand as the novel closes, her narrative

experiments throughout the text seem more about authoring her identity than training her for this vocation. The longer chapters in Part Two reflect the complexity of the texts and also that, as more recent works, there have been relatively fewer critical examinations of them. Little work has been done specific to *Harriet's Daughter*, although Philip's own interviews and essays have been illuminating in my study of the text. Mahy's work has received more critical attention, particularly *The Tricksters*, and a dedicated study of Mahy's fiction, *Marvellous Codes: The Fiction of Margaret Mahy* (2005) edited by Elizabeth Hale and Sarah Fiona Winter contains some thought-provoking and inspiring essays. Christine Wilkie-Stibbs's reading of Mahy in her book *The Feminine Subject in Children's Literature* (2002) has also provided many insights.

1.4 *Critical Contexts*

As a device and a metaphor, storytelling has the potential to disturb the authority of master narratives and (re)tell a different tale. But storytelling is not necessarily a subversive activity. In *Peter and Wendy*, for instance, Wendy deploys her narrative skills to project herself into the role of idealized motherhood, so that even though storytelling allows her some power and agency in the shaping of Neverland, these are largely directed towards reinforcing and making desirable a conventional model of femininity. It is therefore important to consider how transgressive the storytelling in these texts is. I have already noted that the early twentieth-century texts appear to have relatively conservative endings which effectively silence, or at least quieten, the protagonists, suggesting a reluctance to allow the girls to remain vocal in adulthood. Even the later texts present some ambivalent images of halted games and burned manuscripts. Yet, all of the texts also celebrate and validate the young female voice, imagination and creativity, and present girlhood as a time of value and possibility. This thesis examines to what extent the narrative and linguistic exuberance of the girls is presented in order to be reformed and how far it works to unsettle the dominant order and transform notions of female identity.

In this context, it is crucial to question what kinds of identity storytelling allows the girls/texts to formulate and articulate. Explorations of female identity in literary texts, criticism and theory have suggested that in contrast to the traditional, Western, masculine model of identity as self-contained, coherent and individualist, female selfhood is frequently represented (and experienced) as more inclusive, fluid and relational. This issue is the subject of much feminist scholarship across a range of disciplines. Influentially, Nancy Chodorow interrogates Freud's emphasis on oedipal conflicts in the acquisition of gender identity in her book *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), arguing instead

for the centrality of the mother-child relationship to the formation of gender difference, as mothers are the primary carers of children in our culture. Chodorow asserts that as boys define themselves in opposition to their mothers they isolate themselves from this primary connection by developing sharply defined boundaries to their identity, whereas girls, who retain a strong identification with their mothers, develop a more fluid and empathetic sense of self:

From the retention of preoedipal attachments to their mother, growing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible and permeable ego boundaries. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate. (Chodorow 1978: 169)

Historically, the clearly delineated individualism associated with masculinity has been privileged in Western capitalist societies. In a literary context, as elsewhere, it has been legitimized as a suitable subject for representation and inquiry; the novel, after all, has its English beginnings with Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the archetypal representation of the individual in opposition to the world. Susan Stanford Friedman, with reference to the work of Georges Gusdorf, notes the traditional assumption that a culture of individualism is an essential precondition for the development of autobiography as a genre: 'For Gusdorf, the consciousness of self upon which autobiography is premised is the sense of "isolated being," a belief in the self as a discrete, finite "unit" of society. Man must be an island unto himself. Then, and only then, is autobiography possible.' (Friedman 1988: 36) Friedman remarks on how this theory appears to exclude the experience of many women and minority groups. Drawing on the work of Chodorow, Sheila Rowbotham and theorists of black and minority culture, she demonstrates how autobiographies by writers from these marginalized groups need to be understood as emanating from a different conception of self, one that is not exclusively focussed on the individual:

First, the emphasis on individualism does not take into account the importance of a culturally imposed group identity for women and minorities. Second, the emphasis on separateness ignores the differences in socialization in the construction of male and female gender identity. From both an ideological and psychological perspective, in other words, individualistic paradigms of the self ignore the role of collective and relational identities in the individuation process of women and minorities. (Friedman 1988: 34-35)

This argument suggests that narrative constructions of identity which are based on individualism and unity are less well suited to describe and voice feminine selfhood. This thesis explores how effectively the texts use stories to construct identities for their young female protagonists that are more plural, relational and flexible in texture and form. It can also be suggested that in order to articulate this different sense of self, the storytelling within the texts constitutes a distinctly feminine voice and language. Throughout the books studied here there is a consistent emphasis on orality and oral forms, on dialogue rather than singular fixed meaning and on an intertextual dynamic and play of meaning between multiple stories, registers and voices. The following chapters will consider whether these strategies represent an alternative feminine discourse deployed by the fictional characters and within the texts themselves.

However, representing the voices and creativity of girls in children's fiction presents various problems which reflect their double marginalization as both children and female, both categories which have been defined in opposition to the privileged signs of adulthood and masculinity. As Lissa Paul suggests in her essay 'Enigma Variations: What Feminist Theory Knows About Children's Literature' (1987), there are persuasive arguments for a dialogue between children's literature and feminist critical theory. For instance, women have been particularly prolific writers of children's fiction as numerous critics have pointed out⁹ and consequently there is some direct overlap of interests. These women writers are also often writing about girlhood and the process of becoming a woman in adult society with all that that entails. Both Nodelman (1988: 31-34) and Wilkie-Stibbs (2004: 352-361) also suggest that children's literature is a 'feminine' or 'feminised' form in its focus on personal and familial values, an emphasis which reflects a shared confinement to the domestic sphere as Paul observes: 'Because women and children generally have to stay at home without the affairs of state to worry about, their stories tend to focus on the contents of their traps, the minute and mundane features of everyday life around which their lives revolve: household effects, food, clothes, sewing, interior decorating, and the nuances of social relationships.' (Paul 1990: 151) Paul and Wilkie-Stibbs both remark on the difference between these private and domestic tales and the epic, global, public adventures of masculine fiction, an opposition which, historically, has contributed to a view of both women's writing and children's literature as lesser forms.

Both women and children occupy a position of otherness in relation to the dominant adult patriarchal order and so, in literary terms, to the structures of language and representation, to notions of authorship and to the narrative patterns which privilege

⁹ See Nodelman 1988, Briggs 1989, Foster and Simons 1995, Wilkie-Stibbs 2004, Sebag-Montefiore 2008

masculinity and male experience. Paul points to this mutual concern: ‘So one of the primary problems feminist critics and children’s literature critics have is how to recognize, define, and accord value to otherness.’ (Paul 1990: 155) This is further complicated because the Other is not a single or fixed position, but incorporates a range of absences from or oppositions to the primary signifiers of the dominant culture, and writing otherness often involves negotiating the problems of articulating voices which may have been silenced from multiple discursive angles: adults writing for and about children, women writing within a phallogentric language, and post-colonial subjects reclaiming a space beyond imperial ideology. However, representing and attributing value to otherness is no easy matter as Molly Hite observes:

On the one hand, the woman writer is often working explicitly from the recognition that received notions of plot, character, sequence, and even the grammatical structures in which these notions are received presume a dichotomy of same/other that institutes and preserves sexual difference within a binary schema of dominant and muted values. On the other hand, her attempts to overthrow or evade the terms of her inherited tradition are liable to be co-opted by these same terms, so that resistance is reinscribed as the failure inherent in the failure of the very concept of feminine literary endeavour. (Hite 1992: 7)

Deviations from the established codes and patterns of the masculine literary tradition are not only difficult to write, they might also be difficult to read for an audience whose expectations and desires have been constructed within the masculine narrative economy. Attempts to represent otherness by women writers and feminist theorists have included a calculated writing back against the authorized forms of the literary canon, subverting and rewriting genres and/or specific texts, and radical linguistic and formal experiments as in the modernist fiction of Virginia Woolf and Hélène Cixous’s concept of *écriture féminine*. Neither of these tactics translates straightforwardly into writing for children.

Writing or reading back against a particular genre or text requires a certain familiarity with its codes and conventions in order to make strategic deviations and unsettle expectations. However, children’s literature is often in the process of teaching and normalizing these very patterns and plots. When Hunt says, in the quotation above, that children’s literature is ‘*about* narrative’, he is referring to its role in introducing and reinforcing the narrative conventions of a particular culture which make texts intelligible: ‘Understanding a text requires two skills: understanding what the language signifies – that is, what it refers to – and understanding the rules of the game – that is, how the text works.’ (Hunt 1991: 72) Ideological values are not only frequently taught within

the content of a children's book, in the moral of the tale, but are inherently embedded within the structure of the narrative which normalizes certain story shapes, relations and endings which relate to the values of the dominant culture. It might seem that children's literature therefore offers a prime opportunity to teach different codes from those of the prevailing hierarchy, but, like all texts, children's books are part of an intertextual network which relies on other texts to create meanings and which operates through a shared system of allusions and expectations, and from which it cannot be simply extricated. As developing readers, children are also less skilled and experienced textually and are often assumed to be less sophisticated in their approach to and interactions with texts (although this is a treacherous generalization which does not account for the variety or difference of children's responses), and so difficult and experimental writing, of the kind often associated with attempts to articulate difference, has traditionally been considered unsuitable for a child audience. Although this view has been challenged in the late twentieth century by both critics and writers such as Aidan Chambers and Alan Garner, and by a more popular familiarity with postmodern devices such as metafiction, the question of accessibility is still central to defining literature for children. This is not to suggest that writing for children is necessarily ideologically or formally conservative, but, that in attempting to unsettle the authority of established narrative conventions, children's books are often negotiating a double task: that of delivering narrative fulfilment while simultaneously interrogating its processes. In this thesis, I examine how the texts respond to these challenges by operating on multiple levels. All offer a strong, accessible, recognisable narrative thread presented in a broadly realist mode, but also create a dialogue with the stories within the text and the storytelling of the girl protagonists which employs romantic, fantastic and fairy-tale discourses to create alternative narrative possibilities and highlight how the central 'realistic' narrative also conforms to generic conventions.

Questioning the authority of a particular genre and of narrative forms in general is an important strategy for feminist writers and critics who seek to revise stereotypical images of women and of their possibilities as they are prescribed and represented in patriarchal literature. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have argued influentially that the masculine model of authorial paternity and control not only excludes women from the creative process but also assumes the authority to define women within texts:

Since both patriarchy and its texts subordinate and imprison women, before women can even attempt that pen which is so rigorously kept from them they must escape those male texts which, defining them as "Cyphers," deny them the autonomy to formulate alternatives to the authority that has imprisoned them and kept them from attempting the pen. (Gilbert and Gubar 1980: 13)

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, in her analysis of twentieth-century women writers who have subverted narrative conventions by ‘writing beyond the ending’ that is commonly assigned to women, also demonstrates how traditional plots have provided only limited options for female protagonists:

To compose a work is to negotiate with these questions: What stories can be told? How can plots be resolved? What is felt to be narratable by both literary and social conventions? Indeed, these are issues very acute to certain feminist critics and women writers, with their senses of the untold story, the other side of the well-known tale, the elements of women’s existence that have never been revealed. (DuPlessis 1985: 3)

As DuPlessis suggests, challenging the authority of the patriarchal plot to speak for women is a crucial aspect to women writers’ struggle to tell their own story. However, such an act of self-definition is problematic in books written for children where the dynamics of the relationship between author and audience are different from those in peer texts, as Foster and Simons explain: ‘... women writing for children are not in precisely the same category as women writing for women, if only because the former are constructing a voice which is self-consciously regressive and which assumes an audience which is inevitably ‘other’, whereas the latter could be said to implement a shared author/audience discourse.’ (Foster and Simons: 1995: xii) Whereas the writing of other marginalized groups, such as women’s writing or post-colonial literature, is often engaged in creating a ‘literature of their own’, to borrow a phrase from Elaine Showalter, children’s literature is predominantly written by adults, so that even as the young protagonists of children’s books are shown to develop their own voice, they are still spoken for by the adult author. In the following chapters I will explore how the texts considered here offer strategies for handling narrative that does not consign the reader of tales to the role of passive receiver but encourages participation that transforms into an act of storytelling and begins to destabilize the traditionally rigid relations between the author, text and reader.

My approach in this thesis is firmly text-based and each chapter provides a close reading of one of the texts. I proceed from a broadly feminist framework which contends that women have been excluded from and alienated within the dominant discourse of language and power in which femininity is defined in opposition to the privileged sign of masculinity. In this context I am interested in the instances and tactics whereby these female authored texts disrupt, destabilize and deconstruct the authority and coherence of the master narratives of the Western literary tradition. Sandra M. Gilbert’s and Susan Gubar’s seminal critical work, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), which analyses

this patriarchal annexing of creativity and narrative agency, has been influential in this regard, not least because images of enclosure, locked doors and attic spaces recur throughout these texts. Exploring the possibility of an alternative feminine discourse in the storytelling of the girls in these books Marina Warner's *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (1994) and Alice Walker's 'In Search of My Mother's Garden' (1984) have both provided invaluable models of women's art as an oral, domestic, communal activity which thrives as a subversive culture outside the traditional hierarchy. I am also concerned with the particular conditions and dynamics at play in the construction of these texts as children's books and draw on the work of children's literature criticism and theory to address questions of audience and accessibility. I read as an adult in the twenty first century and approach these books as literary texts, aware that this may/will produce different meanings from those available to or created by a child reader or a contemporaneous audience. I am, however, interested in the strategies by which the texts make complex ideas intelligible to a young audience and how the later books especially construct an active reading stance within the texts. The work of Peter Hunt, Jacqueline Rose, Kimberley Reynolds and Lissa Paul particularly has been invaluable in negotiating the complex relationship between the children's book and the child reader.

'I had imagined myself into being': the quotation in the title of this thesis is taken from Margaret Mahy's *The Other Side of Silence*. As Hero climbs through the branches of the trees surrounding Credence House in the early morning, she creates for herself an alternative identity woven from the books of her childhood reading and beyond the control of the adult world:

Miss Credence lived in a different space from the marvellous child I became every morning, dancing between sky and garden. The ground, and everything that went on directly below me, might belong to her, but I was ... I had imagined myself into being ... a spirit of leaves and air. (Mahy 1997: 4)

It is an act of self-creation which is shared by all the young female protagonists in this study. There is an emphasis, in this phrase and throughout the texts, on identity as an imaginative project. The references to intertexts and other people's stories acknowledge a context of cultural discourses, but by stressing the role of the imagination in the construction of selfhood, these texts attribute agency to the girls (and the readers). Storytelling allows the girls here to locate themselves in relation to other narratives, to experiment with the roles they offer and to occupy multiple subject positions. The use of the word 'being' in the quotation is also suggestive of a fruitful ambivalence: being is contingent, present tense, potentially followed by another word; it allows for the

prospect of change. Again, throughout the books in this study, identity is conceived of as flexible. The powerful sense of possibility within this phrase is perhaps elusive, for some of the girls more so than others, but the suggestion that identity is a creative process rather than simply a biological inevitability, or a social designation, or even a fixed point, is encoded in all of these texts.

Part One

Chapter 2

‘Hard to write’ – *Seven Little Australians* by Ethel Turner

2.1 *Narrative Conformity and Deviance*

Seven Little Australians is clearly constructed around a family story model, popular in juvenile fiction throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. While books for boys sold tales of imperial adventure, girls’ fiction focused on the domestic sphere and the moral development of the characters. For the female characters these tales often culminated in early death or virtuous renunciation of worldly ambitions. Although Turner’s novel does contain a death scene and some promises of reform the overt textuality and intertextuality of the narrative suggest, however, an ironic treatment of these staples of the genre. The family story, as a genre, offers more realism in its presentation of family life than the Evangelical tract literature and the sentimental romances from which it develops, although these influences remain evident, but religion, conformity and restraint, particularly in girls’ behaviour, continue to be the primary concerns and incentives. While Charlotte Yonge (1823-1901) and Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), both of whom are directly referred to in *Seven Little Australians*, present young female characters who are seen to struggle to curb their independent instincts and intellectual ambitions in order to fit the feminine ideal, the ideal itself is nevertheless maintained. *Seven Little Australians* is knowingly indebted to this model and throughout the text there is a tension between its adherence to both the pattern and values of the form and its challenge to the assumptions and restrictions of this British and American tradition in an Australian context. Of its influences Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868) is the most closely echoed and Turner was hailed by her publishers as the ‘Australian Louisa Alcott’ (Tucker and Gamble 2001: 14). The family name itself, Woolcot, recalls this literary

predecessor and the characters of both Meg and Judy are paralleled with Meg and Jo March. These allusions act as markers to situate the text within a particular tradition and imply a pattern which allows readers to formulate expectations. But once established these expectations are repeatedly subverted within the novel to question their relevance and usefulness within an Australian cultural context. Significantly *Seven Little Australians* lacks the stability and moral certainty provided in *Little Women* by idealized parents and religion, as both Niall (1982: 64) and Hunt (2001: 214) observe. The values proposed by the text rely less on authoritarian standards handed down from above than from a shared code of loyalty and comradeship amongst the children and so the novel is, initially at least, less explicitly didactic than its models.

The novel opens with an assertion of difference:

Before you fairly start this story I should like to give you a word of warning.

If you imagine you are going to read of model children, with perhaps a naughtily inclined one to point a moral, you had better lay down the book immediately and betake yourself to *Sandford and Merton*, or similar juvenile works. Not one of the seven is really good, for the very excellent reason that Australian children never are. (Turner 1994: 1)

Here the text makes an early claim to a distinct national identity, a culturally specific Australian childhood which is placed in opposition to a universal (European) paradigm. The novel immediately engages with another text, Thomas Day's *The History of Sandford and Merton*, the first volume of which was published in 1783, to challenge both the values and, significantly, the narrative certainties of the European tradition. Day's didactic story of moral development represents a European view of childhood which stems from Rousseau and remained popular throughout the nineteenth century, but this tale's relevance is questioned in a new cultural context in which 'a model child is... an unknown quantity.' (Turner 1994:1) The narrative's resistance to English moral standards is embedded in the irony with which the narrative voice celebrates this perceived deviance; the 'miasmas of naughtiness' (1) which beset the Australian child, far from being reprehensible, are seen to be the result of a climate of 'sunny brilliancy' (1), and the source of an energetic, independent and decidedly Australian character. But perhaps more significantly, the rejection of *Sandford and Merton* announces a departure not simply from the moral proprieties of the European child, but from that child as it is constructed by a text. Despite the reference to *Sandford and Merton*, and a variety of other Western texts throughout the novel, the narrative voice acknowledges that these provide only a limited insight into the lived experience of even English children: 'In England, and America, and Africa, and Asia, the little folks may be paragons of virtue,

I know little about them.’ (Turner 1994: 1) The model child, like those in ‘this story’ (1), is a creation of the adult writer. As well as insisting on the suitability of Australian children as fictional subjects, the novel demands a reassessment of the means and models by which those children’s experience is represented. The story throughout *Seven Little Australians* is self-consciously constructed as a text, beginning with a direct address to the reader and ending with the laying down of a pen. This self-reflexivity, combined with the multiple allusions to other books, repeatedly demonstrates the influence and effect of other narratives, both on its own design and on the minds of the characters.

However, it is important not to overstate the metafictional ambitions of the novel¹ and recognize that alongside the declarations of difference, this first chapter also locates the text within the conventions and boundaries of the genre. The narratorial intrusions which on the one hand destabilize the transparency of the text by emphasizing its constructedness, also reflect a common practice in nineteenth century juvenile fiction which secures the narrator’s authority in the relationship with the implied reader. Hunt observes that children’s literature is often defined by the way in which it is seen to direct the reader towards a single, readily accessible understanding of the text. He goes on to argue that the use of a controlling authorial or narrative voice to compensate for the inexperienced reader’s limited access to the multiple textual strategies that are used to create meaning, frequently results in a closing down of the interpretative possibilities of a narrative. The effect of this is a text which ‘tells rather than shows, explicates rather than demonstrates’ (Hunt 1991: 85). This mode assumes, or as Hunt more radically argues, requires a passive reading stance: ‘The audience is created by the writer much more directly than with a peer-text, in the sense that the text does more than display its codes, grammar and contracts; it suggests what the reader must be or become to optimize the reading of the text.’ (Hunt 1991: 84) While this tendency can be found across a wide range of writing styles for children, it is particularly apparent in the intrusive and authoritative narrative voices of the family stories on which *Seven Little Australians* is based.

The opening of *Little Women*, the closest of Turner’s literary models, includes narratorial interruptions which overtly anticipate and/or create the expectations of the implied reader:

¹ Patricia Waugh argues that this kind of narratorial interjection and guidance, common in novels in the nineteenth century, does not operate in a metafictional way as it attempts to draw the reader into the ‘reality’ of the fictive world rather than expose its artificiality: ‘Although the intrusive commentary of nineteenth-century fiction may at times be metalingual (referring to fictional codes themselves), it functions mainly to aid the readerly concretization of the world of the book by forming a bridge between the historical and the fictional worlds.’ (Waugh 2002: 247) Here the allusions to and parallels with other texts do work to reveal the frame through which the story is told while the text simultaneously and paradoxically seems to make a claim for its realism. This kind of ambivalence is characteristic of the novel.

As young readers like to know ‘how people look,’ we will take this moment to give them a little sketch of the four sisters, who sat knitting away in the twilight, while the December snow fell quietly without, and the fire crackled cheerfully within. (Alcott 2008: 7)

The description that follows of the March sisters’ physical appearance also does much to define their characters despite the paragraph’s closing claim that ‘[w]hat the characters of the four sisters were we will leave to be found out.’ (Alcott 1994: 6) The initial account of the Woolcot children in *Seven Little Australians* similarly makes a direct address to the assumed needs of the reader:

Let me tell you about my seven select spirits. They are having nursery tea at the present with a minimum of comfort and a maximum of noise, so if you can bear a deafening babel of voices and an unmusical clitter-clatter of crockery I will take you inside the room and introduce them to you. (Turner 1994: 2)

The tone of this introduction is markedly different from that of *Little Women*. While Alcott’s scene depicts cosy industry and the sanctity and centrality of home, secure from the hostile world without, Turner’s domestic interior is crowded, haphazard and uncomfortable. It is, however, difficult to discern whether this irregular representation of what was primarily a female space suggests a liberating contrast to the docility of acceptable feminine behaviour, or a claustrophobic atmosphere which stifles the female voice. Ironically, in the description that follows, despite the emphasis on the vocal excesses of the Woolcot children, the characters themselves are silent. The narrator has achieved that which their father, with the help of a separate room and a felt lined door, could not: ‘Captain Woolcot, the father, in addition to this division, had had thick felt put over the swing door upstairs, but the noise used to float down to the dining room in a cheerful, unconcerned manner despite it.’ (Turner 1994: 2-3) Before the characters are demonstrated through the representation of their own voices they are succinctly determined by the narrator’s voice. Both *Little Women* and *Seven Little Australians* use physical attributes as signifiers for particular character traits, operating within an understood code of the genre. For example, both Jo and Judy have troublesome hair, like other unruly girls in nineteenth-century fiction, such as Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and their refusal, or inability, to dress their hair

in an appropriate style signals a rejection of or resistance to conventional femininity². The texts also include direct statements about the children which guide the reader's response. Indeed, the chapter title in *Seven Little Australians*, 'Chiefly Descriptive', indicates the narrative method used in this opening. But while the comparison with *Little Women* here signals the way in which the text conforms to the genre, this same comparison also reveals its points of departure in the novel as a whole.

This first chapter exposes the conflicting forces at work in the novel. The text insists on the difference and validity of Australian childhood and the need for an alternative kind of story to represent it, but depends on established traditions as a reference point by which this difference can be understood. The allusion to *The History of Sandford and Merton* is both a rejection of a culturally inappropriate text and a recognition of the values against which the novel defines itself. As Brenda Niall points out in her study of Ethel Turner in *Seven Little Billabongs: The World of Ethel Turner and Mary Grant Bruce*: 'She would not have denied, however, that she was writing within an established mode; and the rejection in *Seven Little Australians* of Victorian clichés of character and situation depended for much of its effect on an audience ready to enjoy some reversals of their expectations.' (Niall 1982: 61) Consequently *Seven Little Australians* is tied to the same conventions it seeks to reject. This means that the text is limited to subverting a traditional form rather than creating a new, independent narrative mode. However, the novel is more than simply a parody of the family story and the deviations and disruptions in form and expectations work to reveal the boundaries and limitations of the genre.

2.2 *Narrative Deviance - Judy*

Judy is the focus of many of these deviations. There are close comparisons made between the two eldest sisters of this novel and those in *Little Women*. From the first descriptions of them, Meg and Judy Woolcot echo Meg and Jo March:

Margaret, the eldest of the four, was sixteen, and very pretty, being plump and fair, with large eyes, plenty of soft brown hair, a sweet mouth, and white hands, of which she was rather vain. Fifteen-year-old Jo was very

² Hair retains its symbolic value in other texts in this study: Mary's general lack of conventional appeal includes repeated references to her thin hair and Anne's red hair is the source of much anguish for her and a sign of her difference in the Avonlea community. In the later books too Margaret's braids signify her commitment to her black identity and so elicit disapproval from her family who are keen to conform to the standards of white Canada. Hair is less important in *The Other Side of Silence*, but resurfaces as a symbol in *The Tricksters*, to some extent, where Harry's long copper-coloured hair is transformed from her hiding place to a fiery halo surrounding her enchantress face.

tall, thin and brown, and reminded one of a colt; for she never seemed to know what to with her long limbs, which were very much in the way. She had a decided mouth, a comical nose, and sharp gray eyes, which appeared to see everything, and were by turns fierce, funny, or thoughtful. Her long, thick hair was her one beauty; but it was usually bundled into a net, to be out of her way. (Alcott 2008: 8)

Judy, I think, was never seen to walk, and seldom looked picturesque. If she did not dash madly to the place she wished to get, she would progress by a series of jumps, bounds and odd little skips. She was very thin, as people generally are who have quicksilver instead of blood in their veins. She had a small, eager, freckled face, with very bright dark eyes, a small, determined mouth, and a mane of untidy, curly dark hair which was the trial of her life.

Meg was the eldest of the family, and had a long, fair plait that Bunty used to delight in pulling, a sweet, rather dreamy face, and a powdering of pretty freckles that occasioned her much tribulation of spirit. (Turner 1994: 5-6)

The debt here is obvious and knowing: both Megs are pretty but a little vain and both Jo and Judy are distinguished by the energy of their limbs, the intelligence in their eyes, the wilfulness in their mouths and unruliness of their hair. Brenda Niall lists the ways in which elements of Meg Woolcot's story, as well as her appearance, mirror her literary counterpart but goes on to observe that despite the clear connection between Jo and Judy as rebellious heroines, the presentation of Judy represents a departure from the pattern established in *Little Women* and other similar texts (Niall 1982: 63-5). While Jo March retains much of her rebellious energy throughout the novels, rather than follow the more traditional model of complete repentance, its excesses are controlled by nurturing parents, Beth's virtuous influence and, later, an older husband, and it is eventually directed in useful employment, guiding children to adulthood. Judy, however, remains completely unreformed throughout *Seven Little Australians*. There is no evidence that her inflamed lung, the convalescence from which might easily have also involved a moral recovery, produces any quietening of her spirit; the horse that Judy selects at Yarrahappini suggests her rebelliousness is unquenched: 'Judy picked a black, with reddish, restless eyes, but Mr Hassal refused, because it had an uncertain temper, so she had to be content with a brown with a soft, satiny nose.' (Turner 1994: 135) The unconventional persistence of Judy's wildness is particularly marked because of the closeness of the comparison to a model text. The text self-consciously creates expectations which it then defies. This in itself creates a narrative problem which provides the context for Judy's untimely death.

Judy's fatal accident is a mixture of conventional Victorian death scene and subversive deviations in tone and substance. The pathos with which the scene is played is reminiscent of a multitude of fictional deaths in nineteenth century domestic fiction. The sunset, the heart-rending anguish of her siblings left alone to watch their sister die and Pip's eleventh hour return for Judy's final moment are combined to produce a calculated emotional response which is explicitly forecast and reinforced by narrative intrusions: 'And then – ah God! It is so hard to write. My pen has had only happy writing to do so far, and now!' (Turner 1994: 165) The use of emotive language to suggest the writer's distress prepares and directs the reader's responses before the accident has even occurred, exploiting the full sentimental effect of the episode. Turner's diary entry of 1893 in which she records that she 'killed Judy to slow music' (quoted in Niall 1982: 63), suggests the influence of Victorian sentimentality on the scene. But although the inclusion of Judy's tragic demise reflects the tastes and requirements of a particular audience, there are significant differences in how the scene works in the narrative as a whole. As a traditional ingredient of the domestic story, deathbeds frequently provided virtuous heroines with the opportunity to display their piety and wisdom in self-sacrifice, often as a lesson to a more wilful sister. In *Seven Little Australians* Judy is the wilful sister and while her death is an act of sacrifice to save her brother, this is not linked with any moral development. The tone is desperate rather than resigned and religion, which has been conspicuously absent as an influence in the children's lives throughout most of the novel, appears to be a rather inadequate comfort. The easy colloquial style of the narrative breaks down into short gasping paragraphs and fragmented sentences:

They had heard it – all the others – heard the wild cry and then the horrible thud. How their knees shook! What blanched faces they had as they rushed towards the sound! They lifted it off the little bodies – the long, silvered trunk with the gum dead and dried in streaks upon it. Judy was face downwards, her arms spread out. (Turner 1994: 166)

This traumatic syntax is at odds with the style and tone of the rest of the narrative and while sentiment is produced in the details, as I have suggested above, the halting prose and the sense of the inadequacy of language create a more uncomfortable and disturbing textual experience. These are important revisions of a stock feature of the family story but it is perhaps more significant to explore the fact that Judy dies at all.

In itself, Judy's death overturns traditional and narrative expectations. The centrality of her character to both the story and the tone of the novel makes her final departure from the text unpredictable and shocking. Both Niall and Richard Rossiter recognize the potential difficulty in presenting an adult Judy, particularly within a genre, and

indeed society, that does not have a place for her unrepentant wildness. Judy's defiant behaviour, Rossiter suggests, makes her 'too dangerous a figure to follow into adulthood' (Rossiter 1996: 67). He argues that she is sacrificed in the novel to maintain the power of masculine authority represented in her rescue of the boy child, 'the General'. Rossiter sees Turner as too bound by the restrictive female roles of her time to develop Judy's rebellious energy beyond the more socially acceptable limits of childhood:

Ethel Turner may be seen to share the views and values of many of her peers: there is no place for the rebellious, highly individualized character in the Australia of this period. Unconventional behaviour may have its attractions, or at least be excused, if the characters are young children, but it is not easy to condone in an adult – even a very young one – unless that character is quite peripheral to the novel's concerns. For Judy to be on the periphery in any sequel would be out of character; for her to be transformed into a 'goody goody two-shoes' would be equally unconvincing. (Rossiter 1996: 64)

In this reading Judy's transgressive potential is silenced while Meg's more traditional feminine qualities survive. While this is certainly one of the effects of Judy's premature end it is also possible to see her departure from the novel as working in a similar way to Mary's disappearance in *The Secret Garden*: as an escape from narrative conventions which would limit the development of her character. Niall's analysis of *Seven Little Australians* seems to support this position by reading the novel in the context of its literary models:

Jo survives, precariously, through *Little Women*, but is adult, responsible and almost unrecognizable in *Good Wives*. Ethel Turner was acute enough to see the dangers of letting Judy grow up; the decision to kill her at thirteen was the only sensible one. If she had thought of the problems of a sequel without Judy, Ethel Turner might have been tempted to let the falling tree come down less heavily; certainly there are many literary precedents for survival on a couch from such an accident for as many years as it takes to reach moral perfection.... Judy Woolcot was lucky, and so were Ethel Turner's readers. (Niall 1982: 65)

Judy is in conflict with the narrative form throughout. Although she is initially linked with other rebel figures in the genre, she repeatedly tests the boundaries of this character type until it seems that the narrative mode cannot contain her persistent defiance of

convention. Judy's death, in some ways, represents the limits of the form to which the novel is committed; to fully develop Judy's story perhaps requires a different kind of narrative.

Judy's final moments are spent struggling to find appropriate words to define her experience. The clichés and platitudes which Meg offers from the hymn book do not seem adequate to account for the bold and self-determining life that they attempt to encompass:

Then she opened her lips:

'Come unto Me, ye weary,

and I will give you rest,

Oh, bl –'

'I'm not weary, I don't *want* to rest,' Judy said, in a fretful tone.

Again Meg tried:

'My God, my Father, while I stray

Far from my home on life's rough way,

Oh, teach me from my heart to say –

Thy will be done!'

'That's for old people,' said the little tired voice. 'He won't expect *me* to say it.' (Turner 1994: 171)

Judy rejects these traditional comforts because they do not relate to her and is uncompromising and defiantly individual to the last. But this search for an appropriate idiom amongst a collection of established phrases and forms seems also to represent the text's difficulty in finding a suitable language to tell Judy as a character. The scene is characterized by problems with speech and language; most of the Woolcot children are rendered speechless by the accident, apart from occasional familiar pleas and exclamations. Meg particularly is unable to form any words. Judy is, reportedly, the most eloquent and typically the most idiosyncratic: 'Outside the bullocks stood motionless against the sky – Judy said they looked like stuffed ones having their portrait taken.' (Turner 1994: 169) This almost surreal observation suggests the singularity of Judy's perspective although much of what she has to say is only briefly alluded to: 'She was very quiet now, though she had been talking – talking of all sorts of things.' (Turner 1994: 168) Here, as elsewhere in the novel, Judy's actual voice is absent. In this context the narrative voice's admission: 'It is so hard to write' (Turner 1994: 165) seems to imply more than just the emotional strain of the moment and reflect that textual attempts to convey Judy are frequently problematic or deferred and are characterized by mimicry, delirium and absence.

Judy is often presented as using a variety of affected voices. After the initial descriptions of her as ‘the worst of the seven’ (Turner 1994: 5), Judy’s first words in the text are surprisingly and deceptively virtuous: “‘We’re only children – let us be thankful for this nice thick bread and this abundance of melting butter,” said Judy, in a good little tone.’ (Turner 1994: 9) As the first chapter makes clear that neither the narrator nor Judy values the kind of prim obedience suggested by ‘good little tone’, this last phrase implies that Judy’s words should not be taken at face value and suggests her antagonism to conventionality without actually speaking it. This becomes one of the key strategies for presenting her deviance throughout the novel. Judy repeatedly speaks through voices which are not directly or unproblematically her own. As the children await news of their punishment after embarrassingly pleading for roast fowl in front of their father’s guest, nearly all of Judy’s direct speech consists of mock melodrama and cleverly deployed mis/quotations:

‘Well, Judy, you go and sew up those rents, and put some buttons on your frock.’ Esther spoke with unusual determination.

Judy’s eyes snapped and sparkled.

‘ “Is that a dagger that I see before me, the handle to my hand? Come, let me grasp it,”’ she said saucily, snatching one of the pins from Esther’s dress, fastening her own with it, and dropping a curtsey. (Turner 1994: 15)

When Jo quotes the same line from *Macbeth* in *Little Women*, she is fantasizing about the possibility of acting the part within the safe confines of one of the March girls’ productions, but Judy incorporates this kind of role play into most of her interactions making her difficult to pin down or define. Later in the same chapter Judy employs an exaggerated ‘Irish brogue’ (21) to counter her father’s objections to her unusual but duplicitous attempt at goodness:

‘Stop immediately, Helen! Why ever can’t you go and play quietly with your doll, and not do things like this?’ said her father irascibly.

‘An’ I was afther doin’ it just to pleasure him,’ she said, apparently to the dandelions. (Turner 1994: 20)

The Captain’s plea for her to play with her doll is a thinly veiled request for more conventional feminine behaviour from his daughter, but here, as with Esther’s instruction to conform to more normal standards of female dress, Judy does not respond directly, but adopts a comic mask to deflect the confrontation. This subversive slipperiness both

baffles and troubles the adults, and to some degree allows Judy to evade the deterministic effect of their authority; her shifting identity cannot be trammelled into an acceptable model of girlhood. The difficulty in defining and so confining Judy is also suggested by her multiple names: she is christened Helen and so called by her father, while her family name is more commonly Judy. The appropriateness of this connection to the anarchic puppet from Punch and Judy is corroborated by its use by the narrator and it is telling that this name itself is suggestive of the theatricality and play acting which seem to characterize her interactions. Pip, in particular, also calls her Fizz. These names speak of different roles and relations and signal the conflicts and tensions which act on the development of her identity, but they also provide alternative selves to those prescribed by society and, implicitly, the patriarchal order represented here by Captain Woolcot. But this same elusiveness is also limiting. In a practical sense it is difficult to translate this comical game-playing into adult behaviour but, more fundamentally, these various masks seem to be an act of deferral on the part of the text, a means of side-stepping the potential ramifications of Judy's transgressions. Judy's facades, as much as they work to facilitate her misdeeds, are also diversions from the problems of presenting an unrestrained female character.

The text's inability adequately to contain or articulate Judy's unconventionality is most strikingly apparent in her absences from the text. While her early death might be seen as a consequence of the difficulty in developing Judy into adulthood, her earlier withdrawal from the narrative, when she is sent to boarding school, is also suggestive of the problems of giving voice to this character. Judy's exile from the family comes at the climax of a series of increasingly audacious pranks, but while in each of these her mischievousness and ingenuity are relished, they remain little more than a collection of comic vignettes in which Judy is drawn with broad strokes. The source of Judy's rebelliousness is not explored in any depth, and in much less detail than the motivation behind Meg's misadventures in later chapters. The narrative voice particularly remarks on Judy's resourcefulness and quick-wittedness – 'Without a doubt she was the worst of the seven, probably because she was the cleverest. Her brilliant inventive powers plunged them all into ceaseless scrapes,' (Turner 1994: 5) – and part of her originality as a young female character is that her creativity is expressed primarily in deeds, but the text does not convey any strong sense of Judy's imaginative life. Judy may disregard social convention but she does not re-imagine her environment or her narrative as the other girls in this study do. Indeed, storytelling here is associated euphemistically with lying as Bunty's cowardly and much scorned dishonesty is repeatedly referred to as 'telling stories' and set in contrast to Judy's fierce truthfulness. However, while she may be shown to resist the social restrictions of her gender, the absence of Judy's voice

and imaginative reworking of her own story mean that she does not effectively transcend these cultural limits or create an alternative role for herself.

There are occasional, oblique references throughout the novel to the constraints and expectations which will meet Judy as she matures and which she seems to be striving against, but these are usually presented ironically, or for comic effect. Interestingly the most explicit engagement with Judy's uncertain future is conveyed through her perplexed father:

He remembered her own mother had often said she trembled for Judy's future. That restless fire of hers that shone out of her dancing eyes, and glowed scarlet on her cheeks in excitement, and lent amazing energy and activity to her young, lithe body, would either make a noble, daring, brilliant woman of her, or else she would be shipwrecked on rocks the others would never come to, and it would flame up higher and higher and consume her.

'Be careful of Judy' had been almost the last words of her anxious mother when, in the light that comes when the world's is going out, she had seen with terrible clearness the stones and briars in the way of that particular pair of small, eager feet.

And she had died, and Judy was stumbling right amongst them now, and her father could not 'be careful' of her because he absolutely did not know how. (Turner 1994: 21-22)

The narrative here seems to reflect the contradictions of the novel's treatment of Judy. The individuality and energy which make Judy such an attractive and central character is also presented as dangerous and unchecked. Although these thoughts are communicated through the Captain, who generally does not command much authority either with his children or the wryly knowing narrative voice, they are given significance and weight by the references to Judy's dead mother. Despite all the apparent celebration of the Australian child's lively naughtiness there is a repeated regret at the absence of maternal guidance of the kind that is central to novels like *Little Women*, and the stability and moral centre which that provides.³ Judy's spirited independence is threatening because it is unrestrained. It is unclear whether this absent mother's guidance would have

³ In *The Secret Garden*, Mary's development is also initially endangered by the lack of a nurturing mother.

nurtured and protected Judy's 'restless fire' or preached conformity as a means of self-preservation, but it is evident that the Captain simply does not know what to do with his daughter. But the same might also be said of the text.⁴

Sending Judy away not only demonstrates the Captain's exasperation and ineffectual parenting but also removes Judy from a narrative which she is already stretching to its limits. Ironically, however, these textual absences, which might at first appear to be designed to subdue or silence Judy, are perhaps also the spaces in which her rebellious potential is free from the constraints of the narrative form. Judy's most daring adventure happens off-stage; she escapes the authority of school, parents and the narrative in her seventy-seven mile odyssey from school to home.⁵ Judy relates very little of this excursion and rather than providing her with an opportunity to shape her experience in the retelling, her adventure results instead in delirium. The text seems able to represent this reckless break from the social order only through garbled and confused ramblings. In this, her most intrepid exploit, Judy again exceeds the bounds of the comic, domestic, family story, and her trek through the wilderness and her ravings in the hayloft are more reminiscent of a Victorian tragic melodrama, like *Jane Eyre*, which also features an aberrant woman hidden in the attic and a heroine who wanders the countryside starving and lost. Both in terms of what Judy says in her confusion, and in the style and tone, neither Judy nor the text seems sure about her place, and while a mask of mischief and bravado more usually makes Judy the vibrant centre of the story, this delirium, like the broken speech at her death scene, suggests an undercurrent of anxiety about the implications of this character. Nevertheless, these textual gaps do create spaces for Judy's escape from social convention, even if they fall short of imagining what that might entail, and so allow her to remain an unquelled spirit. Her death, although final in a literal sense, avoids the kind of closing down of Judy's subversive narrative that adulthood would seem to demand. Despite her death Judy's character retains the potential of the 'noble, daring, brilliant woman' (Turner 1994: 22) without the risk of being 'shipwrecked' or 'consumed' by a society, or narrative, that does not know what to do with her.

⁴ Maureen Nimon makes a similar point when, quoting 'her father could not "be careful" of her because he absolutely did not know how', she remarks, 'Neither, it would seem did Turner.' (Nimon 1987: 19)

⁵ The untold stories of Judy's life at school are revisited in a later book *Judy and Punch* (1928).

2.3 *Narrative Conformity - Meg*

While Judy ultimately seems to escape narrative prescriptions, Meg struggles to locate herself within the various narrative models available to young women at this time. As Brenda Niall notes, the similarities between Meg Woolcot and Meg March are more consistent than between Judy and Jo (Niall 1982: 63). Both Megs remain within more traditionally feminine spheres of experience and their adventures centre on domestic responsibilities and fledging relationships with the opposite sex. As such, Meg's narrative path is already trodden in that it conforms, much more closely than Judy's, to the expectations of the genre. Throughout the novel Meg functions more conventionally within acceptable female roles, demonstrating the perceived follies and virtues of her sex in a series of episodes which create the older, more demure figure at the end of the book. It is not Judy's death alone that transforms Meg, and the kind of moral didacticism which is conspicuously absent from the accounts of Judy's scrapes, is evident in the descriptions of Meg's tight-lacing and precocious flirting. She then goes on to fulfil another popular Victorian literary stereotype, becoming a redemptive figure and moral touchstone for the troubled Mr. Gillet, a role which he explicitly asks her to embrace. In this scene, as earlier in her encounter with Alan Courtney, Meg is given moral direction by an older man, in the absence of a guiding motherly presence, becoming then for him an ideal of feminine virtue. In isolation, Meg's story strays hardly at all from the models of domestic fiction to which *Seven Little Australians* is a response, although it seems that this is a knowing conformity on the part of the text, and Meg's preoccupation with books suggests that she, as a character, is consciously trying to position herself in the context of these narratives.

The early chapters of *Seven Little Australians* find Meg frequently absorbed in reading tales of elegant young women with whom her own circumstances are very much at odds. References to these stories usually include the contrast in Meg's situation, she reads at the table surrounded by her rowdy siblings or dressed in tatty 'unbecoming' (15) clothes, contrasts which, the text subtly suggests, affect her self-image. When Esther complains about the poor state of Meg's wardrobe she retreats to, but is also unsettled by, her book:

Meg coloured a little. 'I know, Esther, and I'd like to be nicely dressed as well as anyone, but it really isn't worth mending these old things.'

She picked up her book about the elegant girls who were disturbing her serenity and went over to the armchair with it. (Turner 1994: 15)

The influence of fictional narratives on Meg's sense of identity is perhaps also connected here to Esther's inadequacies as a mother figure. Throughout the novel, Esther's inability to provide either maternal guidance or an appropriate role model for her step-daughter leads Meg to seek direction from other narratives that offer models for her maturing identity. The sense that Meg is in the process of constructing her identity is suggested from the very first description of her, which hints at literary activities: 'It was generally believed in the family that she wrote poetry and stories, and even kept a diary, but no one had seen a vestige of her papers, she kept them so carefully locked up in her old tin hat-box.' (Turner 1994: 6) The secrecy with which this writing is guarded suggests it is deeply personal and it can be linked to the development of Meg's identity as she hovers between childhood and adulthood. However, when Meg's diary is mentioned again, briefly, it has become the repository of romantic fantasies and 'a truly appalling quantity of verses' (60) which imitate the style and desires of the novels and journals given to her by Aldith. The secrets which she keeps hidden in her room are no longer based on her own authorship but on reproducing herself in the image of these books and magazines. Although her worldly friend, Aldith, is an important influence on Meg's vulnerable sense of self and fear of her scorn a motivating factor in her more imprudent actions, her imagination is inspired and fueled by the literature that she consumes. Aldith is not really a role model, but the elegant girls and romantic heroines of the novels Aldith lends her are, and both the comedy and pain of these scenes derive from the disparity between the romantic image and the circumstances of suburban adolescence.⁶ Although these scenes demonstrate an awareness of the powerful influence of fiction, perhaps particularly on a young mind, an influence on which the didacticism of so much of the genre depends, Meg's own narrative remains tied to the social and moral expectations for maturing heroines. Her dependence on and aspirations towards these conventional models may be treated ironically within the novel but largely because they are seen as inappropriate models, as Meg's story itself repeats more acceptable literary versions of girlhood found in the more 'wholesome fare' (48) produced by Yonge and Alcott. For all the apparent rejection of these models of family fiction, they remain the standards, of morals and propriety, to which the text, finally, adheres.

Seven Little Australians is a mixture of conformity to the pattern and values of the family story genre, calculated deviations from this established model and, in other instances, places where the text and its form are stretched or fractured, creating unexpected narrative turns or absences. Meg's story provides the recognisable strand, echoing the flaws and improvements of her literary counterparts. The allusions to her

⁶ Anne, in *Anne of Green Gables*, also acutely feels this gap between the world of romance, which she finds both in novels and in the England envisioned in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1859), and the everyday world of Prince Edward Island.

reading habits, while they demonstrate the effect of stories on the development of her self-image, are also part of the general self-referentiality of the genre. Judy occupies a more complex and ambiguous position in relation to generic conventions: she is, in many ways, a more daring and rebellious figure than her predecessors, but she also a curiously more limited character. In *Jo March* the conflicts of her gender, her imaginative life and her relation to her environment are often expressed in and worked out through her storytelling and writing. Judy's revolt against convention most often takes the form of mischievous adventures, which she is active in initiating and performing, but which, in themselves, remain isolated episodes. Because the text does not provide her with a voice, or represent her imaginative life, neither Judy nor the text is able to connect or shape these escapades into a meaningful narrative of identity, and so it becomes difficult to imagine Judy's future story. Where Judy is concerned, both the form and language of the novel break down. *Seven Little Australians* demonstrates the limitations of the family story genre, but also, by its absence, the importance of a voice for rebellious girls. In the texts that follow in this study, the development of voice and the capacity to manipulate language are central to the representation of the girls' identities, so while they may be less radical in their unconventionality, they are more able to effect change in their own stories.

Chapter 3

‘Let us talk and talk’ – *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Although Meg and Judy in *Seven Little Australians* are both shaped by other stories (both as fictional characters within the narrative and in their textual construction), neither effectively develops an independent storytelling voice which finds expression within the text. The girl protagonists in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s later children’s novels, however, use storytelling actively, not only to express and define their identities, but also to effect material changes in their circumstances. While the girls still respond to external stories and are influenced by generic conventions, storytelling, in these novels, is presented as a compelling and empowering activity which allows them to manipulate adverse conditions and enthrall others, and bestows upon the teller both status and an alternative kind of authority. The almost magical potential of stories is most explicitly presented in *The Little Princess*, where of all Sara Crewe’s remarkable and saintly attributes, it is her talent as a storyteller that is most prized:

Of course the greatest power Sara possessed and the one which gained her even more followers than her luxuries and the fact that she was ‘the show pupil’, the power that Lavinia and certain other girls were most envious of, and at the same time most fascinated by in spite of themselves, was her power of telling stories and of making everything she talked about seem like a story¹, whether it was one or not. (Burnett 2002: 35)

¹ This double aspect to Sara’s storytelling, in which she is able to narrate everyday experience to give it the shape and sense of satisfaction that a story provides, as well as construct alternative fantasy worlds, foreshadows the concerns of the Margaret Mahy novels discussed in later chapters in which the

Significantly here storytelling is equated with power: repeatedly in this sentence Sara's skill with words and narrative is described not as a gift or a talent, but as a source of power. Indeed, within the novel, Sara's stories have the capacity to calm the tempestuous, teach the dim-witted, give hope to the downtrodden and inspire friendship from those who have the ability to make her fantasies a reality. But the stories also give Sara inner strength, not only by imaginatively transforming her situation into a fairytale, but also by being a means of narrating her identity in such a way as to help her bear her troubles. In pretending to be a princess Sara creates a particular self-image which has attached to it certain narrative expectations. This ability to define herself imaginatively allows her to resist Miss Minchin's attempts to strip her of her identity and reduce her to voicelessness. Mary Sebag-Montefiore argues that in this respect Sara's story revises the conventions of the literary texts which it self-consciously echoes, most particularly *Jane Eyre*:

Sara, orphaned like Jane Eyre, is a marginalized victim who conquers adversity through self-belief. But unlike Jane who found madness in the attic, Sara's attic, equally a place for the outcast, is recast as a place where imagination is the saviour of sanity and self-help triumphs over malignity. Jane Eyre was an angry child who, as an adult, learnt to control her rebellion, while critics suggest that the first Mrs Rochester, raving in the garret, is her mirror-image. Sara, unlike both Mrs Rochesters, transforms her anger into imaginative power; she is a fairy-tale and Romantic heroine.
(Sebag-Montefiore 2008: 84)

Sara wields this imaginative power to extraordinary effect in the novel, but while she uses stories skilfully to sustain her self-image in precarious circumstances, she is, from the beginning, an articulate and self-aware figure whose identity, although tested, is intact and defined from the outset. There is little real confusion about who Sara might be or become, despite the temporary instability of her social position. In similarly alien and hostile circumstances, however, Mary Lennox, the protagonist of Burnett's most enduring and influential children's book, *The Secret Garden*, embarks on a quest for a self that barely exists as the novel opens, and employs storytelling not so much as a way to maintain a threatened identity, but as a means of self-creation.

Mary Lennox undergoes a transformation on many levels as *The Secret Garden* progresses: she changes from plain and thin to pretty and fat, from sour and disagreeable to optimistic and friendly, from selfish to selfless and from a contrary colonial outsider

imaginative girl protagonists learn to apply their considerable narrative skills to real life rather than reserving them for their private fantasies.

to a conventional English girl. Central to this metamorphosis is Mary's movement from silence to self-definition. Mary's gradual assimilation to her surroundings and the language and relationships that accompany them converges with her growing sense of self-awareness and her ability to tell her own story rather than have others speak for her. This transition is not, however, as straightforwardly positive as it may first appear and is instead fraught with conflicts and contradictions (perhaps particularly for the modern feminist reader.) Mary, like the other protagonists in this study, undertakes a journey from a position of difference, of the outsider or misfit, to one of integration, self-awareness and acceptance. But for Mary, at least, this is a problematic and ambivalent transformation. The process of Mary's metamorphosis involves the development of a voice and entails an empowering act of self narrativization and self-creation, but the result of this is a return to silence and obscurity. As Mary becomes a more conventional heroine, she increasingly conforms to a traditional feminine paradigm of quiet selflessness. As Lissa Paul observes: '... Burnett ends the story in accordance with the social and economic truths and values of her particular time and place.' (Paul 1990: 159-60) It is a conclusion that, Paul argues, creates an integral contradiction in Mary's development: 'For Mary, growing up, outgrowing, her early childhood deprivation means learning to be a follower not a leader, learning that winning selfhood means losing self.' (Paul 1990: 159) Mary's silence at the close of the text is, however, different from the silence which engulfs her at the beginning of the book and potentially allows for a more subversive reading of the end of Mary's narrative.

3.1 Voicelessness

Famously, the first sentence of *The Secret Garden* provides a clear definition of the child to be found in the ensuing pages: 'When Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle everybody said she was the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen.' (Burnett 2006: 3) What seems significant here, other than the determinedly unconventional introduction to the heroine, is the emphasis on the external perspective. Mary is defined by what 'everybody said', and continues to be so throughout the early chapters. The adult characters pronounce her plain and unattractive, both within and outside her hearing, and even the Crawford children impose their own name on Mary with their derisive chant:

... the crosser Mary got, the more they sang "Mistress Mary Quite Contrary"; and after that as long as she stayed with them they called her "Mistress Mary Quite Contrary" when they spoke of her to each other, and often when they spoke to her. (Burnett 2006: 7-8)

The narrative voice itself contributes to and authorizes this description of Mary with its repetitive assertion that she is ‘sour’ and ‘disagreeable’. Mary is constructed by other people’s voices; she is described, and so prescribed, from the outside. Mary is spoken for rather than being allowed to speak, much as Judy is throughout much of *Seven Little Australians*. Yet, as Elizabeth Lennox Keyser points out, it is the experience of many readers that Mary is not as unlikable as the narrative voice insists:

If Mary’s contrariness consisted of mere sullenness, we might agree with the narrator and adult characters’ assessment of her. But there is, as I have suggested, a more positive side to her contrariness, which is supported by other characters in the book as well. (Keyser 1983: 4)

Keyser’s argument goes on to demonstrate that most of Mary’s achievements in the novel are based on her contrariness, which is the source of her determination and resilience and leads to her resurrection of both the garden and Colin. Yet while the positive effects of these characteristics are acknowledged within the text, the narrative voice persistently labels the qualities themselves as negative attributes, effectively erasing the positive aspects of Mary’s character from the early part of the story; it is not that Mary is without individuality and dynamism, it is that this is given shape in the words of other people. Her character is defined negatively in relation to adult expectations based in her mother’s prettiness, conventional manners and idealized images of little girls and literary heroines. These same adult voices have a dominance and authority which initially silences Mary.

This relationship between adult and child in the text is paradigmatic of the tensions that many critics argue are inherent to children’s literature. Jacqueline Rose (1993), Jack Zipes (2002) and Perry Nodelman (1992) all note the absence of the child, in any real sense, from a literature that is written, published and purchased by adults, with few exceptions. As Rose comments in her influential study, *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction*: ‘Children’s fiction sets up the child as an outsider to its own process.’ (Rose 1993: 2) In this way of reading children’s literature the child within the text is a function of the adult writer’s desire to teach, study, fix or prescribe a particular notion of childhood. It is a practice that Nodelman has compared with orientalism as it is described by Edward Said, as an act of appropriating a whole field of experience. Borrowing from Said, Nodelman examines the tactics used in representing childhood from the position of the outsider, among which is the assumed authority of the adult to speak for the child with the effect of silencing her (Nodelman 1992: 30). The first chapter of *The Secret Garden* enacts this process, as Mary is literally made silent and invisible in her own home and society as well as by the adult authorial/narrative

voice. The imperative behind her upbringing by the Indian servants is that she is kept hidden, quiet and out of sight, from her shallow, selfish mother and uninterested father, becoming ‘... the child no one ever saw!’ (Burnett 2006: 6) Her very existence, in social terms, is tenuous, as Mr Crawford remarks after the death of Mr and Mrs Lennox: ‘ “It is very sad, now that the poor beautiful thing is gone, to remember that many people never even knew that she had a child at all.” ’ (Burnett 2006: 8) From this position of voicelessness, if Mary is to be defined at all it is by what ‘everybody said’.

While Mary’s position in her household, and in India generally, secures her silence, the narrative of these early chapters also contextualizes the comments and opinions of those adults who find her disagreeable. Mary’s hostility, distrustfulness and lack of warmth are seen to be a result of a childhood deprived of parental love; among the aspects of Mary’s character that are deemed unlikable is that she holds herself ‘stiffly’ (8), is ‘self-absorbed’ (7), and ‘not an affectionate child’ (5). The narrative voice, while reserving the authority to label these manifestations of neglect, acknowledges Mary’s isolation and detachment from her sense of self:

Other children seemed to belong to their fathers and mothers, but she had never seemed to really be anyone’s little girl. She had had servants, and food and clothes, but no one had taken any notice of her. She did not know that this was because she was a disagreeable child; but then, of course, she did not know that she was disagreeable. She often thought that other people were, but she did not know that she was so herself. (Burnett 2006: 9)

Mary is profoundly alienated from herself: she is only aware of external markers of her identity - the servants, food and clothes – which locate her according to class and, in India, race, but provide no sense of belonging or personal selfhood. It seems that Mary’s silence in the early part of the text is not only determined by the narrative voice which speaks for her or imposed by the indifferent adults who speak over her, but also proceeds from this alienation as Mary does not know of what or from where to speak, nor, indeed, does she have a language with which to express herself. Her only understanding of her identity is predicated on hierarchical relationships and consequently the only voice she has access to takes the form of imperialist commands and abuse to the native Indian servants, who are more voiceless than herself. Mary has had no opportunity to develop a language with which she can interact with others and explore her own experiences and feelings. When Mrs Medlock asks her what she already knows of her uncle, this

commonplace question reveals the linguistic deprivation that has accompanied Mary's emotional neglect²:

'I suppose I may as well tell you something about where you are going to,' she said. 'Do you know anything about your uncle?'

'No,' said Mary.

'Never heard your father or mother talk about him?'

'No,' said Mary, frowning. She frowned because she remembered that her father and mother had never talked to her about anything in particular. Certainly they had never told her things. (Burnett 2006: 10)

Mary, who is never spoken to, is inarticulate herself. Her frustration only finds an outlet in muttered insults and incoherent rage. Her lack of words isolates her, as she begins to realize when she thinks about meeting her uncle and recognizes that 'she should only stand and stare at him and say nothing' (Burnett 2006: 23) because, she goes on to consider, she has no talent for talking: ' "People never like me and I never like people," she thought. "And I can never talk as the Crawford children could. They were always talking and laughing and making noises." ' (Burnett 2006: 23) Mary's disagreeableness is tied to her linguistic insufficiency and her alienation from language also affects her imaginative capacity to such an extent that she seems unable to engage in even her own narrative. She is only mildly curious about her fate after her parents' death, she rejects Basil's attempts to tell her about her new home, and she refuses to cast herself in an active role in any story about her future. When Mrs Medlock tries to enlighten her about her new home, Mary's response reflects her sense of disempowerment and detachment:

'Well,' said Mrs Medlock. 'What do you think of it?'

'Nothing,' she answered, 'I know nothing about such places.'

That made Mrs Medlock laugh a short sort of laugh.

'Eh!' she said. 'but you are like an old woman. Don't you care?'

'It doesn't matter,' said Mary, 'whether I care or not.' (Burnett 2006: 11)

Mary astutely perceives that her narrative is determined from without. Nevertheless, Mary's new environment and her contact with the talkative Yorkshire servants begin to

² This connection between emotional isolation and voicelessness is also seen in Mahy's *The Other Side of Silence* in the figure of Rinda Credence who has been confined in a tower all her life and never learned to speak. In both cases, not being spoken to leads to an alienation from language that is linked to a loss of self.

stir both her imagination and her powers of speech. While Mary's rehabilitation into a happier and more acceptable child can be measured in numerous ways, and is loaded with social, political and symbolic significance, her transformation might also be seen in terms of the development of her voice and thus her ability to speak and narrate her own identity. From the voicelessness and erasure of her early Indian childhood, Mary cultivates a powerful voice of her own, which, in contrast to the ease with which others pronounce upon her at the beginning of the novel, confounds those adults whom she actively chooses to exclude from her secrets. Stories, those that are told to Mary as well as those she begins to tell herself, are integral to this change.

3.2 Gothic Silence and Fairy-Tale Chatter

When Mary comes to Yorkshire she seems to enter a different kind of story. Although later India becomes a rich imaginative resource for Mary, this is not accessible to her in India itself. The climate of India and the circumstances of imperial rule are presented as having a lethargic effect on Mary's imagination so that she is tired of her Ayah's tales and dull to the richness of her cultural experience: 'In India she had always felt hot and too languid to care much about anything.' (Burnett 2006: 29) Of course, having lived there all her life, India is familiar to Mary, having none of the exotic appeal of the new that it does to other characters and that Yorkshire might have to her; but India is also irretrievably 'other' to Mary and within the text generally. There is an orientalist tendency to see India as raw material for a creativity fostered in England. Mary's Indian experiences must be shaped by her English imagination before they become meaningful to her or others. Yorkshire, conversely, operates as a rich intertextual space where different kinds of story collide and compete to awaken Mary's imagination. As many critics have observed, *The Secret Garden* combines varied genres within its narrative, a feature which, Daphne Kutzer notes, may account for the novel's enduring success: '*The Secret Garden* has received more critical attention than *A Little Princess*, not only because of the power of its central metaphor, but because it succeeds at being many things at once: a pastoral; a story of Mary's psychological development, and Colin's as well; a commentary on Gothic narrative conventions; a romance.' (Kutzer 2000: 56) Foster and Simons add to this list the stylistic methods of the domestic story and the magical fantasy of the fairy tale (Foster and Simons 1995: 176), and the influence of the Brontës on the text is widely acknowledged.³ Mary actively negotiates these various story forms as she encounters them in the text. The strangeness of the manor, the moor

³ See Thwaite 1994: 220-1; Inglis 1981: 112; Phillips 1993: 171; Foster and Simons 1995: 177-8 and Krugavoy Silver 1997.

and the garden to this girl brought up in India means that Mary increasingly questions and revises the narrative expectations they present.

The physical and material changes in Mary's circumstances, her relocation from Imperial India to the Yorkshire moors, demand an enormous process of acculturation. Mary is sent 'home' to an environment that is entirely foreign to her. As Jean Webb points out, this sense of disorientation is represented in Mary's linguistic confusion when, for instance, she does not know what a moor is: 'This is a strange world where Mary cannot decipher the information fed to her senses. . . . Intuition will not suffice, for Mary has to learn the language of this unfamiliar landscape.' (Thacker and Webb 2002: 93) Mary's new environment requires a new vocabulary. She also struggles to understand the local Yorkshire dialect, telling Martha, ' "I don't understand your language" ' (Burnett 2006: 17). Given this linguistic gap Mary can only understand her new surroundings in terms of stories and, indeed, Misselthwaite and its occupants are presented to her as gothic stereotypes:

It sounded like something in a book and it did not make Mary feel cheerful. A house with a hundred rooms, nearly all shut up and with their doors locked – a house on the edge of a moor – whatsoever a moor was – sounded dreary. A man with a crooked back who shut himself up also! She stared out of the window and with her lips pinched together, and it seemed quite natural that the rain should have begun to pour down in gray slanting lines and splash and stream down the window-panes. (Burnett 2006: 12)

As Foster and Simons observe, this menacing and dismal atmosphere reflects Mary's own social and psychological predicament: 'The hostile settings of Gothic narrative, which also reappear in *Jane Eyre*, carry symbolic resonance, frequently projecting a subliminal landscape of forbidding intensity which echoes the protagonist's alienated condition.' (Foster and Simons 1995: 177) But the gloomy and foreboding gothic imagery, as it is grimly described by Mrs Medlock, also works on Mary's imagination to deepen her sense of contrariness. The generic conventions through which the moor and manor are presented to Mary construct her response to them. It is telling that when Mary, briefly, perceives life at Misselthwaite as a different kind of story, the French fairy tale *Riquet à la Houppe*, she is moved to uncharacteristic compassion, suggesting that the more restorative shape of the fairy tale narrative may have a recuperative effect on Mary's imagination. Reading Misselthwaite as a gothic story, however, encodes Mary's experience of the environment in terms of secrecy, isolation, anxiety and, significantly, silence. Telling Mary about life at Misselthwaite, Mrs Medlock informs her: ' "And you mustn't expect that there will be people to talk to you." ' (Burnett 2006: 12) Initially it

seems that the gothic setting of Misselthwaite may inhibit and deform Mary's emotional and imaginative development as acutely as her colonial upbringing in India has done.

However, Mary discovers an alternative strain of stories at Misselthwaite. Martha's tales of her busy cottage home, full of activity, mutual support and motherly wisdom, are in contrast to Mary's own experience of privileged loneliness and the closed up interior of the manor. These stories present a heavily sentimentalized picture of working-class rustic life but, symbolically, they function to counter the oppressive, stultifying silence and secrecy of the gothic mansion with their Romantic emphasis on the uplifting effect of Nature and an only slightly qualified pastoral idyll: ' "There's twelve of us an' my father only gets sixteen shilling a week. I can tell you my mother's put to it to get porridge for 'em all. They tumble about on th' moor an' play there all day, and mother says th' air of th' moor fattens 'em." '(Burnett 2006: 19) The difference between these genres is not, however, confined to their thematic preoccupations and the style of Martha's storytelling also has an important effect on Mary. Webb contrasts Mrs Medlock's refusal to explain what a moor is to Mary with Martha's lively and passionate defence of its beauty: 'Martha's enthusiastic description of the moor is filled with energy and sensual experience, offering a wholesome and stimulating image to Mary,' (Thacker and Webb 2002: 94). Whereas in the gothic mode language is used, or deferred, to conceal or to confuse, the language of Martha's pastoral is abundant and richly expressive:

'Just you wait till you see th' gold-coloured gorse blossoms an' th' blossoms o' th' broom, an' th' heather flowerin', all purple bells, an' ' hundreds o' butterflies flutterin' an' bees hummin' an' skylarks soarin' up an' singin'. You'll want to get out on it at sunrise an' live out on it all day like Dickon does.' (Burnett 2006: 37)

These images, brimming with activity and colour, tumble into each other, providing Mary with a vivid experience not only of nature's marvellous profusion but also of linguistic exuberance and vitality. Significantly, these new sensual and linguistic ideas are delivered to Mary orally. Mary, who was never spoken to in India, and who was given no expectation that she would find any conversation at the gloomy manor, encounters in Martha someone who talks to her continually and freely. The text repeatedly emphasizes Martha's propensity to talk, not simply by reporting what she says but by drawing attention to the activity itself, referring frequently to 'Martha's readiness to talk' (19) and 'Martha's familiar talk' (32) and how 'Martha chattered away' (29) and 'Martha liked to talk' (30). Not only does Martha herself talk liberally, but her stories are also full of people talking, particularly her mother and Dickon. In her tales of the moorland cottage, Martha often relays whole conversations and prefaces much of her homespun

rural wisdom with the words ‘Mother says’. Talking is integral to the strong, loving relationships of the Sowerby cottage, as Martha’s tales of home demonstrate, and to an engagement with the wider world, but these spoken stories themselves also work to build a relationship between Mary and Martha, and although Mary is initially a passive, even resentful, listener, she gradually gleans from these conversations both a new emotional perspective and verbal confidence. The development of these linguistic abilities is crucial to her transformation.

3.3 A New Voice

It is only gradually, however, that Mary acquires the power of speech, and her initial linguistic experiments are prompted by an unusual interlocutor, the robin. As has been suggested, Mary, in the early part of *The Secret Garden*, is alienated from her sense of self; she does not understand her actions and cannot articulate her feelings. The authoritative narrative voice assigns aspects of her disagreeable behaviour to the circumstances of her neglected childhood but with the qualification that Mary herself is unaware of the connection. But as Ben Weatherstaff tells the story of the robin’s abandonment when his family flew the roost, Mary is inspired to articulate the new sense of self-awareness that has been growing since her arrival in Yorkshire:

‘Where did the rest of the brood fly to?’ she asked.

‘There’s no knowin’. The old ones turn ’em out o’ their nest an’ make ’em fly, an’ they’re scattered before you know it. This one was a knowin’ one an’ he knew he was lonely.’

Mistress Mary went a step nearer to the robin and looked at him very hard.

‘I’m lonely,’ she said.

She had not known before that this was one of the things that made her feel sour and cross. She seemed to find it out when the robin looked at her and she looked at the robin. (Burnett 2006: 25)

While this incident suggests the emotional benefits of empathy and the regenerative effect of nature, it also marks the beginning of Mary’s ability to shape her own experience with words. For Mary to name and define herself in this way represents a kind of authority utterly different from her tyrannical commands to her Indian servants, but one which allows her actively to place herself within a narrative that produces meaning and control. This new sense of self and voice, however nascent, allows Mary to begin to

connect meaningfully with the world around her. Directly after this realisation, Mary forms her first friendship, with the robin, and again voice and speech play a vital role:

Suddenly a clear rippling little sound broke out near her and she turned round. She was standing a few feet from a young apple-tree and the robin had flown onto one of its branches and had burst out into a scrap of a song. Ben Weatherstaff laughed outright.

‘What did he do that for?’ asked Mary.

‘He’s made up his mind to make friends with thee,’ replied Ben. ‘Dang me if he hasn’t took a fancy to thee.’

‘To me?’ said Mary, and she moved towards the little tree softly and looked up.

‘Would you make friends with me?’ she said to the robin just as if she were speaking to a person. ‘Would you?’ And she did not say it either in her hard little voice or in her imperious Indian voice, but in a tone so soft and eager and coaxing that Ben Weatherstaff was as surprised as she had been when she heard him whistle.

‘Why,’ he cried out, ‘tha’ said that as nice an’ human as if tha’ was a real child instead of a sharp old woman. Tha’ said it almost like Dickon talks to his wild things on th’ moor.’ (Burnett 2006: 26)

The robin’s expression of friendship takes the form of a song; it is a vocal invitation, and Mary responds in kind. Mary not only discovers new emotions in conversing with the Robin, she develops a new voice. This is not a voice deployed to maintain her distance and difference from everyone whom she has held in disdain in her isolated and unhappy life and which expresses only her own will, it is a voice which responds to a dialogue with empathy and imagination. This new, budding eloquence allows her to shape her story more effectively than her ‘imperious Indian voice’ because it is responsive and dynamic, rather than stiff and unyielding, and these same imaginative qualities allow her access, through her relationship with the robin, to a new world: the secret garden.

Mary’s imagination is stirred by these new stories – of the robin, of the Sowerby cottage and the moor, and of Dickon – and the emotions they precipitate. She begins to like people, even those she has never met, because these narratives stimulate an imaginative empathy which has been lacking from her silent life in India, and also allow her to interpret her new and alien surroundings positively. The stories present Yorkshire as a potentially magical setting and recall a romantic fairy-tale tradition which prioritizes the power of speech and voice as an agent of transformation. Awakened to this possibility,

Mary begins to reciprocate with stories of her own. When Mary offers to supply Martha with exotic tales of India with which to regale the Sowerby children she demonstrates that she is becoming alert both to the cultural changes that her displacement has entailed and to the needs of others. She is able to convert the now distant India, which had always been a source of apathy and ill temper for her, into a fantastical landscape, anticipating what will most excite the interest of Martha's family:

'I'll tell you a great deal more before your next day out,' she said, 'so that you will have more to talk about. I dare say they would like to hear about riding on elephants and camels, and the officers going on tiger hunts.'

'My word!' cried delighted Martha. 'It would set 'em clean off their heads. Would tha' really do that, Miss? It would be the same as a wild beast show like we heard they had in York once.'

'India is quite different from Yorkshire,' Mary said slowly, as she thought the matter over. 'I never thought of that. ...' (Burnett 2006: 42)

This gift of stories also suggests the value which is placed on stories in the text. They develop a kind of currency which is both an exchange for the multitude of nourishing narratives of family life which Martha, and by extension all those at the moorland cottage, have provided, and a source of power for Mary. Stories provide Mary, the formerly charmless child, with a desirable commodity: one she can trade, transform, withhold and control.

In retelling her life in India, Mary is learning to make a narrative of her experiences, to translate her past into words that have shape, meaning and appeal. However, when Mary encounters the story fragment about a locked garden, she is inspired to engage in actively constructing an ongoing story to meet her own needs. Martha's tantalizing scrap of the story about the mysterious garden, from which she immediately seems to retreat, is ostensibly part of Misselthwaite's other, gothic narrative of secrecy, but Mary's quest to find the garden and her re-imagination of the space as a magical kingdom revise the gothic form to create her own fairy-tale.

3.4 Self-fulfilling Stories

The story of the garden gives a focus to Mary's wanderings and inspires her curiosity, impelling her to collect and patch together the broken, partial pieces of narrative elicited from the reticent adults and her own explorations. The mystery also requires her to

project beyond what she is told by others and begin to create a story herself from the clues that she finds:

All she thought about the key was that if it was the key to the closed garden, and she could find out where the door was, she could perhaps open it and see what was inside the walls, and what had happened to the old rose-trees. It was because it had been shut up so long that she wanted to see it. It seemed as if it must be different from other places and that something strange must have happened to it during ten years. (Burnett 2006: 40-1)

This sense of otherness and difference is confirmed when Mary does gain access to the garden, led to both the key and the hidden door by an animal guide in fairy-tale fashion. Although the descriptions of the garden are presented by the third person narrator, they are largely focalized through Mary to suggest her perspective and perceptions:

There were neither leaves nor roses on them now and Mary did not know whether they were dead or alive, but their thin gray or brown branches and sprays looked like a sort of hazy mantle spreading over everything, walls, and trees, and even brown grass, where they had fallen from their fastenings and run along the ground. It was this hazy tangle from tree to tree which made it look so mysterious. (Burnett 2006: 46)

Mary visualizes the wintry, overgrown tangle of roses as a strange but splendid landscape, suggesting her creative capacity to perceive beauty in what might otherwise be seen as a ruined and derelict garden, just as she is increasingly able to appreciate India from an alternative viewpoint. Here, however, she responds not only to what is already present in the garden, but also to what might be, what she can imagine: she imagines what roses might grow in a garden that is not quite dead (47); she imagines that the little points sticking up from the earth '*might* be crocuses or snowdrops or daffodils' (47); and she imagines the garden fully restored, brimming with life and colour: 'Sometimes she stopped digging to look at the garden and try to imagine what it would look like when it was covered with thousands of lovely things in bloom.' (Burnett 2006: 54) Mary is no longer confined to making stories from the past, she is also becoming adept at fashioning a narrative of the future, and, acting on these imaginative possibilities, she is able to actualize them. Her stories become self-fulfilling.

Because it has been so long neglected and isolated the garden has become a lacuna within the narrative of Misselthwaite and so is available for Mary to inscribe with her own creativity. It is already a feminine space, as it belonged to Lilies Craven, and Mary

assumes ownership of the garden as her own space, both physically and imaginatively⁴. She names it for herself – ‘The Secret Garden was what Mary called it when she was thinking of it’ (Burnett 2006: 52) – and it is telling that this is also the name assigned to the story as a whole. Even before she enters the actual space of the garden she designates it as a place controlled by her own invention: ‘... if she liked it she could go into it every day and shut the door behind her, and she could make up some play of her own and play it quite alone, because nobody would ever know where she was The thought of that pleased her very much.’ (Burnett 2006: 41) The garden provides Mary with an authority and freedom which she is denied in the adult world of the house. Here, her voice predominates (initially, at least):

‘How still it is!’ she whispered. ‘How still!’

Then she waited a moment and listened at the stillness. The robin, who had flown from his tree-top, was still as all the rest. He did not even flutter his wings; he sat without stirring, and looked at Mary.

‘No wonder it is still,’ she whispered again. ‘I am the first person who has spoken in here for ten years.’ (Burnett 2006: 46)

Mary has already started to use her voice to identify her growing sense of self-awareness, gaining understanding of herself through language, but in creating the secret garden as her imaginative realm she begins a process of not simply recognizing, but actively remaking her identity. This transformation begins in the solitude of the garden but it develops in dialogue with others.

Although at first Mary desires to keep the garden an entirely private space, in many ways it becomes a more powerful story as she begins to tell it and share it with others. She cultivates a controlled narrative in which she can obliquely talk about her garden while still protecting her secret, as she linguistically nudges Martha and Ben Weatherstaff for help and horticultural advice. An empowered voice, the text implies, is equally about being able to reserve speech, and Mary, after some dangerous slips of excited indiscretion, becomes skilled at manipulating her words to elicit a response from her listeners without relinquishing control of her story. It is most particularly in her conversations with Colin that Mary hones her narrative abilities, deflecting his impulse to command the servants to open up the garden by recreating for Colin the mystery and suspense which fuelled her own imagination, although this time embellished with details from her own experience:

⁴ Several critics have noted how Mary’s appropriation of the garden mirrors a colonial encounter. See Kutzer 2000: 58-9 and Singh 2004: 126-7.

‘I’ll tell you what I *think* it would be like, if we could go into it,’ she said. ‘It has been shut up so long things have grown into a tangle perhaps.’

He lay quite still and listened while she went on talking about the roses which *might* have clambered from tree to tree and hung down - about the many birds which *might* have built their nests there because it was so safe. And then she told him about the robin and Ben Weatherstaff, and there was so much to tell about the robin and it was so easy and safe to talk about it that she ceased to be afraid. (Burnett 2006: 79)

Mary creates a vivid word picture which both constructs the garden in an image of her making and demonstrates her taking control of her story in the house as well, as she uses her tale to subdue and entertain Colin.

As Mary becomes a more confident and knowing storyteller, she can manipulate tales of the garden and of India both to her own ends and to initiate Colin’s recovery. Mary’s stories are fascinating to a boy who has hardly ever left his room, and Mary’s role as storyteller realigns the power balance between the cousins. Colin, as a boy and heir to Misselthwaite Manor, occupies a higher place in the social order of the house, but, as Foster and Simons observe, Mary’s ability to re-create the outside world for Colin with her vivid tales gives her power beyond her traditional hierarchical position: ‘Mary is an enchantress whose control over language captivates her audience and endows her with status.’ (Foster and Simons 1995: 178) Combined with her contrariness, this puts her in position to demand Colin’s courtesy, secure his confidence and dispel his neuroses. Mary uses her increasing skill with language to perform in Colin a transformation which echoes her own. Colin, like Mary at the beginning of the novel, is determined by the words of the adults around him. The physical symptoms of his illness enact the whisperings of the doctors, nurses and servants so that he becomes what others say he is, an invalid who is not expected to live:

‘Do you think you won’t live?’ she asked, partly because she was curious and partly in hope of making him forget the garden.

‘I don’t suppose I shall,’ he answered as indifferently as he had spoken before. ‘Ever since I remember anything I have heard people say I shan’t. At first they thought I was too little to understand, and now they think I don’t hear. But I do. ...’ (Burnett 2006: 77)

Mary becomes an active agent in encouraging Colin to defy these expectations – ‘“If they wished I would,” she said, “I wouldn’t. ...”’ (Burnett 2006: 86) – and define

himself in his own terms, something which he has certainly mastered authoritatively, and perhaps at Mary's expense, by the end of the novel. But, as with Mary, it is the secret garden which most inspires Colin to shed his externally determined invalid persona and engage with the world. More so for Colin than Mary, it is the story of the garden which revives him. Mary's curiosity is combined with determined activity in her search for the garden, but all that Colin knows of the garden, until he is taken there, is mediated through Mary's words. Mary's success at creating enticing descriptions of buds, birds and rose trees interwoven with a compelling narrative of secrecy and magic is by no means artless. Her storytelling is controlled and directed, producing immediate physical effects in Colin while protecting and sustaining her own emotional and imaginative needs. Mary's telling of the garden is, in many ways, as much part of her own and Colin's regeneration as the physical space of the garden itself. The garden is as important as an imaginative space as a real one and Mary, as its narrator, is empowered to create and define it in her own terms.

The act of telling is central to *The Secret Garden*. There is a sustained emphasis on the power of the spoken word, with both negative and positive effects, and Mary's power as a storyteller is aligned with an oral tradition that is inclusive, pliable and dynamic. Mary's stories are an organic patchwork of memories, anecdotes, fictionalized reports of things she has seen and information from a range of sources. Before Mary's arrival, Colin's only knowledge of the world is gained from 'splendid books' (76), from the solitary activity of reading a written text. In contrast, the stories that Mary creates are part of a dialogue, drawn from experiences and conversations and responsive to the needs of the listener:

'See here,' she said. 'Don't let us talk about dying; I don't like it. Let us talk about living. Let us talk and talk about Dickon. And then we will look at your pictures.'

It was the best thing she could have said. To talk about Dickon meant to talk about the moor and about the cottage and the fourteen people who lived in it ... And it was all so alive that Mary talked more than she had ever talked before – and Colin both talked and listened as he had never done either before. (Burnett 2006: 86-7)

Mary's stories, like the chanted spells the children use to call forth the magic, attest to the transformative power of speech, and, like the incantations, have a magical effect on both teller and listener. This focus on orality and speech recalls the female tradition of fairy-tales. As I suggested earlier, Mary remakes the gothic story of Misselthwaite in the pattern of a fairy-tale, both in terms of the plot and the narrative. Her adventure

echoes the tale of 'Sleeping Beauty' but with Mary cast not as the passive princess but as the rescuing hero who finds her way through the tangled leaves of the ivy to resuscitate the languishing Colin by relating her own exploits. The text highlights these revisions ironically, as Mary scoffs at the idea of becoming a dormant captive in such an animate and inspiring space (although it is an irony which later turns back on itself when Mary is apparently left silently enclosed in the garden while Colin marches triumphantly back to the house with his father): 'The few books she had read and liked had been fairy-story books, and she had read of secret gardens in some of the stories. Sometimes people went to sleep in them for a hundred years, which she had thought must be rather stupid. She had no intention of going to sleep, and, in fact, she was becoming wider awake every day which passed at Misselthwaite.' (Burnett 2006: 53) When Mary is constructing the story of her garden she is an active agent in her own tale, occupying a position both as a participant and as the teller, as Foster and Simons observe:

The intertextuality which is a self-conscious feature of the novel also places the text firmly within a tradition of female story-telling, with the girl heroine negotiating between the roles of protagonist and narrator. The importance of fiction as a transformational activity is thus endorsed by Mary's role as a female author prototype. A story-teller of consummate ability, she can be seen to subsume the role of the woman writer, her creative imagination enabling her to construct a private world unconfined by the claustrophobic conditions of the male-dominated Misselthwaite Manor. (Foster and Simons 1995: 178)

When she tells Colin what it would be like to discover the secret garden, refashioning her experience as a fiction, she is covertly narrating her own story, perhaps suggesting the strategies required by female authors working in an unreceptive and oppressive patriarchal culture. The story is a disguise for her agency⁵:

Mary's words almost tumbled over one another.

'You see – you see,' she panted, 'if no one knows but ourselves – if there was a door, hidden somewhere under the ivy – if there was – and we could find it; and if we could slip though it together and shut it behind us, and no one knew any one was inside and we called it our garden and pretended that – that we were missel thrushes and it was our nest, and if we played there almost every day and planted seeds and made it come alive – ' (Burnett 2006: 78)

⁵ Sebag-Montefiore (2008) also argues that the text operates as a disguise through which to express female sexuality encoded in Mary's passionate and sensual response to the imagery of nature and fertility in the garden.

Mary's obvious excitement possibly signals not just her fear that Colin will appropriate her garden, but also her discovery of a form in which she can talk about experiences and emotions which are either absent from or forbidden in the patriarchal space of the manor house.

Mary's use of fairy-tale narrative techniques suggests her alignment with an alternative, female tradition which privileges the oral and the fantastical⁶. She adopts a voice outside the normal limits of authorized masculine discourse: she converses with birds, favours the talk of servants and rustics and practises speaking in a Yorkshire dialect. Mary connects the broad Yorkshire speech with the native Indian languages she has encountered in a colonial context and, as Foster and Simons argue, like these it becomes a kind of counter discourse which is dismissed or excluded by the dominant linguistic culture: 'This division neatly encodes the relegation of servants and women to the realm of the linguistic other, with its own discrete discourse that eludes the rigidities of the symbolic order.' (Foster and Simons 1995: 182) Mary excels in her manipulation of this alternative language, just as she flourishes in the garden, but as the text progresses both Mary and her narrative strategies are increasingly marginalized as a different kind of discourse gains power within the text.

3.5 A Return to Silence?

Although Colin is amused by playing at the Yorkshire dialect, his voice falls more typically within the realms of masculine discourse. While Mary subscribes in her storytelling to an organic magic which she remembers from her Ayah's stories and which she believes is embodied in Dickon, the wood fairy and animal charmer, a magic which is invoked with words, tales, spells and incantations, Colin determines to gain mastery over the Magic by employing a traditionally masculine, rationalist, scientific approach to make it submit to his control. Increasingly, as Colin gains access to the physical space of the garden, Mary's role as narrator of the imaginative space is undermined. The subtle creative inclusivity of Mary's voice is overwritten by the dominant monologue of Colin's one-sided lectures and sermons as she recedes from the narrative drive of the last third of the novel. The final account of the secret garden is given by Colin to a seated audience which includes his father, and is '... poured forth in headlong boy fashion' (172), a description which suggests a direct, linear and self-contained narrative style. Mary's voice is usurped and she seems again displaced and silent at the end of the text. Much of

⁶ The close link between Mary's storytelling and her gardening suggests a connection between these creative activities which anticipates Alice Walker's argument that women's artistry has often been expressed in the domestic crafts which comprise much of women's work. (Walker 1984: 231-43)

the criticism about *The Secret Garden* has noted this apparent return to the patriarchal order, with the closing image of the triumphant union of father, son and house, after the text's sustained focus on the feminized space of the garden and the regenerative power of maternal, nurturing values. Mary's place at the end of *The Secret Garden* is ambiguous. While it seems clear where Colin's future lies, there is no such narrative certainty with regard to Mary. She seems to be returned to the periphery of the dominant narrative, the traditional place for girls and women in this period, especially as much of Mary's rehabilitation has entailed becoming a more conventional and acceptable embodiment of girlhood. Yet Peter Hunt argues that Mary's disappearance from the text might not represent exile to the margins:

It is sometimes complained that at the end of *The Secret Garden* Mary does not appear, her position being usurped by the [sic] Colin. Yet I think it can be persuasively argued that we have here an ambivalent text. Mary has grown sufficiently that she does not need to be there; Colin's story produces the closure, while hers is the *Bildungsroman*. (Hunt 1991: 129)

In this reading Mary escapes narrative closure; she eludes having her story beyond the text defined and fixed. While she is over-determined by the authoritative adult voices at the beginning of the novel, Mary is left un-determined as the text closes, in a narrative space which could suggest possibility rather than exclusion.

This counter-narrative cannot easily be resolved in terms of plot, but instead operates below the surface of the story to resist or defer conventional readings and expectations. Just as Judy's death in *Seven Little Australians* obviates the generic requirements to reform the wild girl, so Mary's disappearance from the end of *The Secret Garden* avoids returning her to the patriarchally inscribed boundaries of the house and to a narrative which implies a conventional future. Instead, her relative absence from the narrative, if not strictly from the scenes, of the last part of the novel allows for the preservation of her earlier dynamic and defiant self in the imagination of the reader. Despite the widely acknowledged refocusing of the narrative towards Colin's story in the later chapters, several critics remark on the persistence of Mary as the emotional centre of the text. The novel seems to offer a covert but conflicted celebration of Mary's outspokenness and rebelliousness, as Keyser argues persuasively in her essay ' "Quite Contrary": Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*', but struggles to imagine how these qualities might be translated into a happy adulthood for Mary:

It is as though Burnett so generously endowed Mary at the expense of Colin and his father that she had to compensate for it by stressing Mary's disagreeable traits and exaggerating Colin's charm. And in the final chapter Colin's

ascendancy suggests that if he becomes a “mon,” as Ben predicts, then Mary will have to become a woman – quiet, passive, subordinate, and self-effacing. Huck at the end of *Huckleberry Finn* cannot escape civilization; Mary cannot escape the role that the civilization has assigned her. (Keyser 1983: 10)

Displacing Mary from the final scene stalls this moment.

Yet it is also significant that Hunt notes the function of Colin’s story in fulfilling expectations of narrative closure. The combined endings of Colin and Mary’s personal narratives create a double effect which speaks to the complex positioning of children’s fiction in ideological and cultural terms. Stories for children are inextricably implicated in teaching the child reader the narrative patterns and conventions by which other narratives can be understood. As inexperienced readers, Hunt argues, children are in the process of developing the ‘text-skills’ (Hunt 1991:132) which allow more experienced, adult readers to attribute significance and interpret the events in a story. These text-skills are based on a familiarity with accepted narrative structures which allow the reader to predict and organize the material of the text and so make the story intelligible. The stories that children encounter, then, provide the reference points for their expectations of other narratives. Drawing on the work of Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes and Jonathan Culler, Christine Wilkie identifies this as a process of intertextuality that works to reinforce dominant cultural codes:

Through this process of *vraisemblance* we are able to identify, for example, the set of literary norms and salient features of a work by which to locate genre, and also to anticipate what we might expect to find in fictional worlds. Through *vraisemblance* the child reader has unconsciously to learn that the worlds in literature are representations and constructions which refer to other texts that have been absorbed into the culture and are now regarded as ‘natural’. (Wilkie 1999: 131-2)

Quite apart from any didacticism in the content of the story, children’s fiction determines the basis of the child reader’s narrative expectations, the shapes and patterns through which meaning is constructed and cohesion obtained. At the level of narrative itself children’s fiction conforms to the structures imposed by the adult writer and to the values those inherently imply. Functioning in this way writing for children seems ideologically conservative, working, as it does, to reaffirm narrative patterns which establish cultural norms. And yet, *The Secret Garden*, along with many other children’s texts, performs a double task, both supplying the conventional codes through which the story can be deciphered, and revealing alternative, less contained, narrative possibilities. As Hunt

says, closure is achieved by Colin's plot, leaving Mary's story to expose its limitations and exclusions. While Colin's narrative echoes his own 'headlong boy fashion' (172) tale of the garden's regeneration, moving directly and predictably towards the resolution of the final triptych, Mary's multi-stranded story intersects and subverts numerous other narratives before it is displaced outside the conventions and beyond the expectations of conventional discourse.

In *The Secret Garden* the development of selfhood is directly linked to the development of a voice. Mary's growth towards self-awareness and self-determination is predicated on her ability to define herself through language. But the text also demonstrates that it is not simply that Mary speaks that is important, but how she speaks, and the play of genre and register in the novel emphasizes how the mode of telling shapes the kind of story that is told. Mary's combination of magical fairy-tale and interactive conversation suggests a particularly feminine form of storytelling which is echoed in all the texts studied here as she employs language to place herself within a network of relations and narratives. In the next chapter, the already verbally skilled Anne employs similar techniques to transform not only herself but also her environment.

Chapter 4

‘Let me tell you what I imagine about myself’ – *Anne of Green Gables* by L. M. Montgomery

In L. M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*, Anne, like Mary in *The Secret Garden*, arrives into a new environment in which she is initially unwanted and out of place. However, while Mary’s lack of self-awareness represents her almost total alienation from a sense of identity, Anne’s already agile imagination provides a resource from which she is able to construct some sense of self. But despite Anne’s skill at imagining an identity for herself, often as a refuge from the reality of her situation, she intuitively understands that it is incomplete without the context of relationships, community and home. The achievement of selfhood for Anne is based not on separation and individuation from the family and home, but on connection and belonging. In all the texts studied here, the selves which these girls fashion for themselves are part of a dialogue with their history, community and environment, locating them within a landscape and a network of relationships. This way of constructing identity reflects the gendered perspective of the storytellers, prioritizing, as it does, the relational aspects of female selfhood. Belonging to a particular place, a family and a community, and a cultural heritage is a powerful imperative that focuses and shapes the stories that the girls tell. But this does not necessarily mean that their creativity is subordinated to the need to conform but rather that the apparent givens, the physical circumstances of their ‘real’ lives, are manipulated to make them compatible with the identities which the characters are in the process of constructing. Belonging is about ownership rather than assimilation.

Anne Shirley’s situation as a homeless orphan at the beginning of *Anne of Green Gables* places her quest to belong at the centre of the text. The title of the book affirms

that Anne is to be understood and understands herself in relation to the physical, social and emotional location of Green Gables. But as much as Anne comes to belong to Green Gables, so Green Gables also comes to belong to her. This is apparent at the end of the book when, although both Anne and the narrative suggest that her decision to give up the Avery scholarship is made in response to the news of Marilla's failing eyesight, the crisis which provokes Anne to voice her plans is the threatened loss of Green Gables, with all that implies. Anne's sacrifice of a college career is articulated in terms of a statement of belonging: ' "I'm heart glad over the very thought of staying at Green Gables. Nobody could love it as you and I do – so we must keep it." ' (Montgomery 2007: 241) Here and earlier Anne uses the plural pronoun 'we' when talking about keeping the farm, registering both her adult responsibility and an investment in Green Gables equal to Marilla's own. Her assertion that '[n]obody could love it as you and I do – so we must keep it', suggests not only that their emotional attachment gives them a legitimate entitlement to the place but also that she and Marilla have some kind of responsibility to their home, underlining the reciprocal nature of belonging. Further to this, the emotional and psychological importance of retaining Green Gables is emphasized by Marilla's reminder that its loss would return Anne to the state of homelessness in which she started the book:

'Mrs Lynde advises me to sell the farm and board somewhere – with her, I suppose. It won't bring much – it's small and the buildings are old. But it'll be enough for me to live on I reckon. I'm thankful you're provided for with that scholarship, Anne. I'm sorry you won't have a home to come to in your vacations, that's all, but I suppose you'll manage somehow.'

(Montgomery 2007: 239-240)

The security of home is a prize more valuable to the orphaned Anne than medals and scholarships and as the novel closes Anne has the authority to claim the home that she must bargain for at the start of the story.

4.1 Adaptive Anne

Anne is entirely displaced as the novel opens. Although the centrality of place is indicated by the focus on Avonlea in the first chapter, Anne herself is absent, both physically and conceptually, as the child that Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert have requested and expect is meant to be a boy. Gabriella Åhmansson, in her doctoral thesis on L. M. Montgomery, 'A Life in Mirrors', undertakes a close reading of the early chapters of *Anne of*

Green Gables, chronicling the arrival of Anne, in which she describes a ‘zooming-in’ process that brings the rootless orphan into the established and ordered kitchen at Green Gables:

On one axis there is the reader zooming in on Avonlea and approaching Green Gables with Mrs Lynde as a guide. On the other axis there is the child, still genderless and nameless, approaching Green Gables unaware of its destination from a place unknown. (Åhmansson 1991: 77)

Åhmansson argues that this focussing movement in the early part of the narrative, from the unknown to the specific, mirrors Anne’s journey from outcast to belonging, although she points out that this is not immediately or easily achieved. Anne’s inappropriateness and her status as an outsider and an alien are repeatedly emphasized. She is an orphan without reliable or knowable origins; she comes without references or approval; she is an unasked for girl, rather than a useful boy (Åhmansson notes the doubly negative response to girls indicated by Marilla’s insistence that she would ‘... never dream of taking a girl to bring up’ (Montgomery 2007: 13), and Matthew’s innate fear of little girls); and, to the ‘ordinary observer’ (15) at least, she does not conform to conventional standards of feminine beauty. She has nothing and no-one to recommend her, no authoritative adult voice to speak in her favour. In terms of Avonlea society, whose structure ensures reliability and knowability - both official (the rigorous discussions and procedures that precede school and church appointments), and unofficial (the prevalence of small town gossip) - Anne is without a comprehensible identity and can only be defined in terms of lack or absence. This space is filled, initially, by the fixed expectations and prejudices of adult society, here embodied in the ample form of Mrs Rachel Lynde, the ‘gate-keeper’ (Åhmansson 1991: 76) to Avonlea. In the absence of any firm information about the Cuthberts’ prospective child, Mrs Lynde pronounces upon orphan identity using a collection of alarmist rumours and reports:

‘Well, Marilla, I’ll just tell you plain that I think you’re doing a mighty foolish thing – a risky thing, that’s what. You don’t know what you’re getting. You’re bringing a strange child into your house and home and you don’t know a single thing about him nor what his disposition is like nor what sort of parents he had nor how he’s likely to turn out. Why, it was only last week I read in the paper how a man and his wife up west of the Island took a boy out of an orphan asylum and he set fire to the house at night – set it *on purpose*, Marilla – and nearly burnt them to a crisp in their beds. And I know another case where an adopted boy used to suck eggs – they couldn’t break him of it...’ (Montgomery 2007: 12)

These stories construct a dangerous, unmanageable identity against which Anne, when she appears, will be judged. Like Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden*, Anne is determined by adult voices at the outset, but whereas Mary's response to these authoritative opinions is initially characterized by indifference or contrariness, Anne is anxious to secure endorsement and recognition. The fulfilment of Anne's desire to belong is dependent on her ability to forge an identity compatible with the society into which she has arrived. In her desperation for a home and family Anne tells Marilla, ' "I'll try to do and be anything you want me, if only you'll keep me" ' (Montgomery 2007: 44), and this process of adaptation occupies the main space in the narrative for the rest of the novel. However, while Anne's plea suggests that her selfhood is entirely pliant and that she is prepared to remake herself to meet the demands of Avonlea, the text continually demonstrates that this is a two-way process as Anne's imagination and linguistic skill work to transform her environment as well as herself.

Marilla is especially conscious of the need for this 'correction' of Anne's character. She is at first resistant both to Anne's gender and her apparent individuality and vocality, telling Matthew that ' "I don't like children who have so much to say. I don't want an orphan girl and if I did she isn't the style I'd pick out." ' (Montgomery 2007: 31) But Marilla is won over, partly by Matthew's silent persistence, partly by a sense of duty to this practically heathen, skimpily dressed, unloved child, but also, importantly, by the conviction that she is a 'teachable little thing' (40). In contrast to Mrs Lynde's extravagant warnings about the irredeemable delinquency of orphan children, Marilla chooses to view Anne's identity as malleable and potentially responsive to moral instruction. There are repeated references to the possibility of teaching or training Anne in Marilla's speech and thoughts in the pages surrounding her decision to keep her. She intends to make Anne a useful, respectable and restrained girl. The emphasis of Marilla's approach is conventionality and conformity, both socially and emotionally. However, Marilla's earnest attempts to train Anne to be a model child are consistently treated ironically within the text. The narrative voice reveals how frequently Marilla's task is in conflict with her own instincts, betraying her sense of humour and her developing compassion and love for Anne as well as exposing some of her own misgivings about Avonlea society, and subtly suggests that the model child is a fictional construct rather than a feasible identity. Marilla's strict and conventional discipline rarely produces the result she expects. Those occasions on which she does succeed in eliciting ostensibly appropriate behaviour from Anne are those in which Anne is self-consciously acting out Marilla's expectations. Both Anne's apology to Mrs Lynde and her confession about the amethyst brooch are manufactured to meet the requirements of Avonlea's fixed ideas about children's conduct, but both are as much products of Anne's romantic, story-telling imagination as her daydreams about dryads or her enactments of Tennyson. The

model child, it seems, is no more real than Elaine. Although Marilla may exhort Anne to behave ‘as a good girl should’ (44), and ‘like other little girls’ (73), it is clear that while the other girls in Avonlea might be less passionate and imaginative than Anne, they are hardly more virtuous, they merely match their social roles more effectively. Anne’s mistakes are more often socially embarrassing than morally deficient, suggesting that being a ‘good girl’ is principally a matter of fitting in.

Anne is as mindful of this as Marilla. Having already disappointed their expectations of a boy, Anne is eager to fulfil Matthew and Marilla’s hopes and requirements, and those of Avonlea society more generally. Although Anne might be seen as an unconventional heroine, extending the boundaries of literary representations of girlhood, she herself is rarely overtly or intentionally rebellious or resistant to the roles available to her. As feminist critics Julia McQuillan and Julie Pfeiffer point out, far from resisting Marilla’s regime of improvement, Anne energetically subscribes to a programme of self-correction designed to facilitate her acceptance. Despite her frequent mistakes and failures, Anne proves herself to be keen to learn and to catch up with juvenile Avonlea both in the classroom and in their social and domestic achievements. However, her struggle to fit this traditional model of girlhood is persistently hard work for the unconventional Anne, and is a task for which she feels she has no natural aptitude: ‘ “Some people are naturally good, you know, and others are not. I’m one of the others.” ’ (Montgomery 2007: 146) McQuillan and Pfeiffer read into Anne’s failures a demonstration of the inherent inadequacies of a binary gender structure, which demands designation within the discrete categories of male and female, for both of which Anne has been found to be lacking, but also acknowledge that within the text Anne’s happiness depends upon her ability to conform:

Anne forces us to see that becoming a woman is a difficult, discouraging, if essential, task. This novel is not a feminist Utopia: no option other than conventional womanhood is open to Anne, but we can read the novel in a way that helps us to see the creation of Anne-the-woman as an active, visible project. (McQuillan and Pfeiffer 2001: 27)

Whether she is successful in this or not, her identity is formed as part of a process of negotiation between the child that Anne perceives herself to be and the child that she desires, and is desired, to become.

The narrative voice is largely sympathetic towards Anne’s perceived deficiencies and, as McQuillan and Pfeiffer again observe, the novel ultimately asserts the value of Anne the girl over the boy that she is not. However, the text continually emphasizes Anne’s own sense of her strangeness. She makes repeated references to these inadequacies,

confessing her shortcomings volubly, openly informing her friends and elders of the trials she causes Marilla in the course of her upbringing, and regretting that she was not the anticipated boy after all to support Matthew in his failing health. In addition to this she is also preoccupied by the differences in her physical appearance that distinguish her from the other girls. Anne is painfully conscious of her lack of conventional beauty and acutely sensitive to any comment about her looks, as Mrs Lynde and Gilbert Blythe both discover. Åhmansson places this apparent vanity in the context of Anne's general sensitivity to beauty of all kinds but also argues that the fretfulness about her appearance is connected to her desire to belong:

Being pretty is important to Anne since somehow she connects the fact that she has always been unwanted with the fact that she considers herself ugly. The red hair of course epitomizes her oddness ... Being red-haired has thus become the symbol of not being wanted, a visible sign of oddity and ostracism. (Åhmansson 1991: 87)

Anne frequently speaks of her red hair as an impediment to happiness and to certain aspects of traditional (or idealized) female life; she tells both Matthew and Marilla that she will never be able to marry unless some especially self-denying missionary is able to overlook her unfortunate colouring, and she cannot reconcile the idea of a red-headed romantic heroine: ‘ “But it’s so ridiculous to have a red-headed Elaine,” mourned Anne.’ (Montgomery 2007: 177) Although these exclamations are often presented as comically over-dramatic, to the adult reader at least, this is balanced in the text by evidence to suggest that Anne's fears about the alienating effect of her red hair are not entirely unfounded. Mrs Lynde's initial assessment of Anne makes particular and depreciatory reference to her ‘hair as red as carrots!’ (57), Josie Pye is spitefully insistent about Anne's redness, and even Gilbert Blythe's schoolroom taunt picks on the feature that most differentiates Anne from her classmates. Anne's sense of difference and inadequacy is a response not only to broad cultural standards of beauty and behaviour but also of these specific, targeted comments. Her conversation reflects the persistent disparagement she has received from her former guardians, which, to some extent, continues under the censorious guardianship of Marilla and the Avonlea matriarchy. But although Anne seems to have effectively internalized these views which she repeats frequently when speaking about herself, the characterization of Anne does not convey the level of self-abasement which this kind of castigation might be expected to inspire.

Despite everything that she is told about herself, and the unhappiness that it sometimes causes her, Anne's general disposition is joyful and optimistic. While Anne is often presented as ‘sobbing’ or ‘mourning’, with a ‘tragic’ face and clasped hands as the

result of some mistake or disappointment, this emotive vocabulary does not straightforwardly signify a state of abjection. At one level these extravagant expressions are part of the narrative technique which sympathetically represents Anne's point of view. For instance, when Anne is confined to her room until she agrees to apologize to Mrs Lynde, the narrative commentary reflects her passionate response in her conversation with Matthew: 'Anne smiled again, bravely facing the long years of solitary imprisonment before her.' (Montgomery 2007: 62) Montgomery's use of irony here, which is part of the novel's humour, is perhaps directed towards the adult reader, but this narrative identification with Anne's perspective also serves to authorize her feelings. The sincerity of Anne's emotions is not diminished as the knowing adult behind the narrative responds with recognition as well as irony. Anne's outbursts of grief are also sharply felt reactions to particular events rather than a state of settled gloom, and are equally matched by moments of rapturous joy. In contrast, Anne's general statements of self-reproach are very matter-of-fact. Her tone is steady when she tells Miss Barry: ' "Miss Marilla Cuthbert is a very kind lady who has taken me to bring up properly. She is doing her best, but it is very discouraging work" ' (Montgomery 2007: 131), and there are no sentimental embellishments when she informs Marilla: ' "I'll try to be so good. It will be uphill work, I expect, for Mrs. Thomas often told me I was desperately wicked" ' (Montgomery 2007: 49), or when she repeats Mrs Lynde's observation that she is 'full of original sin' (147). Anne speaks seriously on these occasions, her tone is not glib or disrespectful. However the words are never really her own, but mimic an adult register which is ironized by its repetition by this clearly good-hearted child. Although she does not seem to doubt the veracity of these comments, Anne has not translated them into her own idiom so they remain at a distance, the words and opinions of unsympathetic adults that sound out of place and comical in their reiteration. So while at one level Anne seems to have accepted and to regret these negative descriptions of herself, the coolness with which she speaks about her much talked over faults also suggests more subversive possibilities.

4.2 Authorized Difference

Anne so frequently and openly lists and names her imperfections, drawing attention to her individuality, as to imply some kind of contrary satisfaction in her difference, despite her gestures of contrition. The text obviously presents the conflict between Anne's unconventionality and the demands of Avonlea propriety but it also seems to dramatize Anne's internal conflict between her awareness of the need to fit in and her attachment to and pleasure in her singularity. This is apparent even when Anne is most insecure about her position. On the journey to White Sands with Marilla, from where

Anne expects to be re-dispatched to the orphan asylum, she embraces the imaginative and eccentric aspects of her personality : ‘ “I am so fond of romantic things, and a graveyard full of buried hopes is about as romantic a thing as one can imagine, isn’t it? I’m rather glad I have one.” ’ (Montgomery 2007: 37) This statement not only demonstrates Anne’s skill at transforming her disappointments into material for her imagination, but also suggests the value she places on her unconventionality. For most of the text this is a conflict that can only be read from between the lines of Anne’s speech, much as Marilla reads the abuse of Anne’s early childhood from between the lines of her history, and is one of which Anne herself is not wholly aware, but as she matures the friction between these opposing aspects of her persona occasionally comes within the field of her conscious vision:

‘Marilla is such a sensible woman. It must be a great deal better to be sensible; but still, I don’t believe I’d really want to be a sensible person, because they are so unromantic. Mrs Lynde says there is no danger of my ever being one, but you never can tell. I feel just now that I may grow up to be sensible yet. But perhaps that is only because I’m tired.’ (Montgomery 2007: 165)

Although Anne is again echoing Mrs Lynde’s turn of phrase when she says there is ‘no danger’ of her growing into a sensible adult, the use of this expression also hints at Anne’s anxiety about growing out of her romantic imagination. The danger in becoming sensible is the loss of Anne’s individuality and imaginative energy as is suggested by her speculation that good sense is the product of weariness. In this context, when Anne, two pages later, declares that her imagination is her ‘besetting sin’ (167) it is difficult to detect any remorse or regret in her admission, particularly as Montgomery swiftly moves the conversation between Anne and Diana onto an account of Anne’s latest, particularly sentimental composition. Anne’s musings also provide a neat reversal of the common belief in the danger of an overactive imagination, a belief which appears to be supported in one of the novel’s more didactic episodes, ‘A Good Imagination Gone Wrong’. As such, it is suggestive of the ambivalence in the text towards the conflicting demands of conformity and individuality. Like her red hair, which she did not realize how much she prized until it was all cut off, Anne cherishes the strangeness of her romantic imagination even though she is aware that it separates her from the social order to which she so desperately desires to belong. Despite this, it is certain that she has secured her place in Avonlea by the end of the novel, emphasized by her position as a schoolteacher at the heart of the community, without having decisively shed her creative originality. While so much of the impetus of the narrative is directed by Anne’s necessary transformation from unconventional orphan outsider to acceptable, rooted member of society, it is not actually clear that Anne changes very much at all.

The necessity for change and improvement in Anne is not as evident as either the characters insist or the structure implies. Anne is rarely portrayed as self-consciously rebellious and her behaviour is not deviant in the same way as Mary Lennox's or Judy Woolcot's. Her idiosyncrasy is a difference of perspective and imaginative exuberance rather than an ideological opposition. So despite Marilla's and Mrs Lynde's mission to train Anne and her own sense of deficiency, the need for Anne to change has no real moral imperative. As Foster and Simons observe, Anne's 'mishaps are not given exaggerated significance or made the focal point of a weighty moral message as they would have been in their literary predecessors.' (Foster and Simons 1995: 155) Even so, much of the text is organized as a series of lessons to cure Anne of her faults, which both she and Marilla discuss frequently:

'Marilla, isn't it nice to think that tomorrow is a new day with no mistakes in it yet?'

'I'll warrant you'll make plenty in it,' said Marilla. 'I never saw your beat for making mistakes, Anne.'

'Yes, and well I know it,' admitted Anne mournfully. 'But have you ever noticed one encouraging thing about me, Marilla? I never make the same mistake twice.'

'I don't know that's much benefit when you're always making new ones.'

'Oh, don't you see, Marilla? There *must* be a limit to the mistakes one person can make, and when I get to the end of them, then I'm through with them. That's a very comforting thought.'

(Montgomery 2007: 144)

This is characteristic of the dialogue between Anne and Marilla on the subject of Anne's misadventures, with both characters subscribing to the need for improvement in Anne, but significantly without any narrative comment to support this position. Elsewhere in the text the narrator tells the reader explicitly that Marilla conceals her feelings behind a cool and often critical exterior and also that she feels it her duty to check Anne's emotional extravagance:

Something warm and pleasant welled in Marilla's heart at the touch of that thin little hand in her own – a throb of the maternity she had missed, perhaps. Its very unaccustomedness and sweetness disturbed her. She hastened to restore her sensations to their normal calm by inculcating a moral.

(Montgomery 2007: 66-7)

But exchanges such as the one above are often unpunctuated by narrative intrusion. The need for improvement in Anne is not explicitly endorsed by the narrative voice; instead, the context, both of the characters and the mistake under discussion (the inconsiderable offence of flavouring a cake with liniment), invites an ironic reading of the scene. In fact, Anne's value as a warm, sensitive, intensely imaginative and independent-minded girl is continually asserted throughout the text. The explicit 'moral fable' structure of the novel is persistently undercut by the irony with which these lessons are presented, suggesting an implicit narrative support of Anne's difference. Marilla's motives and methods are not only revealed, but are also subject to the wry humour of the narrative voice: 'Marilla was as fond of morals as the Duchess in Wonderland, and was firmly convinced that one should be tacked on to every remark being made to a child who was being brought up.' (Montgomery 2007: 52) And the wisdom and authority of Mrs Lynde, Avonlea's social and moral guardian, are mitigated both by the ironic commentary of the narrative voice and by the responses of the characters themselves. The advice of Anne's other adult guides, Miss Stacey and Mrs Allan, is presented more seriously within the narrative and although much of it amounts to adherence to calm and conformity, it is usually given without personal criticism. The two characters that are most strongly supportive of Anne's effusive and independent perspective are both themselves outsider figures of sorts, although both work within the text to champion her unique qualities. Anne recognises both Matthew and Miss Josephine Barry as kindred spirits, in spite of their very different characters. Miss Barry is far from an idealized or straightforwardly sympathetic character, but she is portrayed as an astute, independent and demanding woman who is impressed by Anne's originality, and her appreciation of Anne for what she is is an important counterbalance to the general interest in training her into what she should become: a reliable, useful, realistic young woman. But Anne's most constant supporter is Matthew. While his extreme diffidence keeps him on the margins of Avonlea social life, this same gentleness makes Matthew a powerfully sympathetic and influential character in the context of the narrative. His commitment to Anne contributes to the representation of her as worthy of love and acceptance in her own right. Matthew quietly encourages Anne's dreams and aspirations, stubbornly defends her emotional and aesthetic needs and cautions her against purging herself entirely of her romanticism. In addition, Anne's recognition of and connection to Matthew are also suggestive of the value of her independent response to people and the world in general. And Anne retains this independence of outlook throughout the novel.

The end of *Anne of Green Gables* ostensibly seems to be an endorsement of conformity, as Anne willingly relinquishes her academic scholarship in favour of the traditionally feminine duties of home and family. This ending does not, however, entirely close down feminist readings of the text, as much of the modern criticism of the novel demonstrates,

and although Anne's choices are not ideologically radical, the narrative does not abandon her spirited individuality. The transition from wayward girl to sensible woman is not smoothly or unproblematically achieved in the final chapters so while Anne's social positioning at the end of the novel reflects a conventional conclusion to her development, imaginatively Anne remains substantially unchanged. There are, of course, some adjustments in Anne's character. Marilla, particularly, notices that the skinny, verbose, scatterbrained orphan has become slender, quieter, reliable and indispensable to herself and Matthew on many levels. But the narrative voice is insistent upon Anne's continued capacity for dreaming, for an emotional and imaginative life beyond her direct physical circumstances. While her Queen's friends discuss exams and dresses Anne, despite her proximity to adulthood, is still indulging her characteristic romanticism:

But Anne, with her elbows on the window sill, her soft cheek laid against her clasped hands, and her eyes filled with visions, looked out unheedingly across city roof and spire to that glorious dome of sunset sky and wove her dreams of a possible future from the golden tissue of youth's own optimism. All the Beyond was hers with its possibilities lurking rosily in the oncoming years – each year a rose of promise to be woven into an immortal chaplet. (Montgomery 2007: 228)

The cloying sentimentality of this description is perhaps rather distracting, but it demonstrates the persistence of Anne's imaginative life beyond childhood. Here again the narrative voice adopts the vocabulary of Anne's wistful reverie, although this time the tone is nostalgic rather than ironic. The merging of the adolescent girl's and the mature narrator's language here reinforces the sense of continuation between child and adult, rather than the compartmentalization of these two life stages into 'romantic child' and 'sensible adult'. This is reflected in the narrative as a whole which seems to challenge the notion that it is desirable to train young women out of exuberant, imaginative, spontaneous girlhood and into a more sober adult form, even while the text appears to repeat many of the patterns and models of this process. Here, as Anne is on the cusp of leaving it, the state of girlhood is idealized. While on the one hand this suggests a resistance to the conventional restraints that womanhood imposes, on the other it might also be seen as a retreat from engaging with the difficulties of retaining and representing an unorthodox and independent female identity into adulthood. Many of the phrases in this passage are reminiscent of the child Anne's (often comical) poeticisms and suggest that the mature Anne is changed in presentation rather than substance. Anne herself is aware of this, so that while other characters remark upon her reformation and development, she explicitly tells Marilla: ' "I'm not a bit changed – not really. I'm only just pruned down and branched out. The real *me* – back here – is just the same." ' (Montgomery 2007:

220) This assertion that Anne has effectively changed very little recasts the story of her improvement to suggest a broader transformation. Anne's progress towards acceptability ultimately seems less conditional on her own reconstruction than on her ability to refashion the circumstances of her situation.

4.3 Adapting Avonlea

From the beginning, Anne's encounter with the world, which is initially hostile to this friendless child, produces a double response: a self-conscious desire to fit in, and a habitual refashioning of her often unpleasant reality into a romance of her own making. This second response shapes the narrative as powerfully as the first. But whereas in the first strand of the narrative (fitting in) Anne is frequently powerless, the object of misunderstandings, mishaps and the preconceptions of others, the second principle places Anne as the author of her own story, in control of her environment, her relationships, and her identity.

Anne embarks on this venture immediately. The centrality of Anne's imagination is stressed repeatedly in the scene in which she first appears in the novel. Her first speech is about imagining and in the ensuing three pages she uses the word sixteen times (Montgomery 2007: 16-19). This emphasis clearly indicates that Anne's relationship with the world is dominated by her internal manipulation of almost every external feature of her life. While at the orphan asylum it seems that much of Anne's imaginative energy has been employed in straightforward escapism, a strategy she is apparently still employing as Matthew arrives at Bright Water station, as she contemplates the romantic delights of a night spent in a wild cherry tree rather than consider the prospect that she has been abandoned. However, the journey to Green Gables provides new uses for her imagination. As Anne approaches Avonlea she begins a process of renaming the physical space which she continues through most of her childhood and over much of the landscape:

'But they shouldn't call that lovely place the Avenue. There is no meaning in a name like that. They should call it – let me see – the White Way of Delight. Isn't that a nice imaginative name? When I don't like the name of a place or a person I always imagine a new one and always think of them so.' (Montgomery 2007: 22)

Here Anne's imagination works as an engagement with rather than an escape from the material world. Moreover, it is a self-conscious act of revision. Not only does Anne

rename the Avenue for herself but she questions the authority of those that have named the place so prosaically: they, as well as she, should call it the 'White Way of Delight'. Her telling remark that the current name has 'no meaning' implies that she is ready to assume the role of assigning meaning herself. As an orphan girl child Anne's physical circumstances are entirely dependent on the decisions of the adults around her, and yet in routinely renaming the people and places she does not like, or that do not fit with her perspective she retains control over her mental landscape. Naming is thus a way for Anne to establish ownership and control. This transforms what might be seen as fanciful daydreaming into a more subversive and empowering activity. In naming her new environment this habitually alienated girl is placing herself in a relationship with her surroundings. Anne's desperation to belong somewhere, which, as has been explored above, is displayed in her earnest yet often conflicted attempts to conform, has another more active manifestation in this act of rechristening. Naming connects her to these places, demonstrating Anne's investment in this promised home, but also creating a textual and linguistic link between the girl and the place and an implied sense that they belong together. The names which Anne chooses are based on her own aesthetic response, translated through her reading and poetic imagination, and her bid to re-label 'The Avenue' and 'Barry's Pond' is rooted in her recognition of their natural beauty, which is not reflected in their current, mundane names. Just as her claim to Green Gables at the end of the novel is based on an emotional connection, so, the text seems to suggest, Anne's heightened aesthetic sensibility gives her the authority to re-designate 'The Avenue' as 'The White Way of Delight'. Anne's ability to see beauty in the everyday landscape of Avonlea creates a sense that there is an almost spiritual connection between Anne and Green Gables (which, of course, is also implied in the book's title) and affirms her appropriateness in this place.¹

The importance of Anne's naming of her world is located in the act of giving linguistic form to her unrestrained imagination as Foster and Simons have observed:

Central here is her manipulation of language, seen in a propensity for naming which she shares with Katy Carr. Through words, Anne reconstructs and thus reclaims for herself the surrounding environment. ... Anne thus demonstrates her sensitivity to the flexible relationship between words and their signification, and, in creating her own discourse, challenges the privileging of the male Logos. (Foster and Simons 1995: 161)

¹ This act of naming and so laying claim to the landscape also has obvious colonial overtones, particularly as the language which Anne uses is drawn from a European Romantic tradition. Anne's linguistic mapping of her new environment recalls the project of the settlers and pioneers, among whom, in Canada's literary history, there are several notable female figures, such as Catherine Parr Traill (*The Backwoods of Canada* 1836) and Susanna Moodie (*Roughing it in the Bush* 1852).

As it is for Mary in *The Secret Garden*, the process of speaking and telling is integral to the development of Anne's vision, so that while hers is an intensely personal response, her vocalization of it invites a shared experience. This involves Anne in multiple experimentations in language as she self-consciously explores the relationship between the world and the word, engaging, as she does so, in the kind of re-evaluation described by Foster and Simons. Åhmansson also perceives a challenge to traditional authority in Anne's artistic revision of Prince Edward Island place names. Following Mary Rubio's lead, she likens Anne to Adam naming a new world in a subtle inversion of the conventional economy of the word: 'A young female Adam is a daring leap of the mind, a concept which adds new dimensions to the received hierarchy with God at the top, whose words are taken to embody the creative impulse, and women and children at the bottom.' (Åhmansson 1991: 104) The connection between language and the creation of the material world which Åhmansson highlights here underpins the impact of Anne's imaginative response to her situation. Rubio, in her essay 'Satire, Realism, and Imagination in *Anne of Green Gables*', articulates the full creative potential of Anne's reconstruction of the world around her, recognising that Anne is not simply describing her environment from her own point of view, she is actually creating it. In renaming the places she encounters Anne reconfigures the landscape, not just for herself, but for those around her, who are repositioned in the context of their surroundings and offered an alternative to their familiar response, and also for the reader, as the narrative presents Prince Edward Island through Anne's eyes. Rubio observes how Anne 'takes the commonplace and makes it beautiful' (Rubio 1976: 34), and goes on to argue that Anne's perception of reality is not only an optimistic personal perspective but yields material effects beyond the interior world of the imagination:

Anne's stay in Avonlea is a fascinating study of how one's imaginative perception of the world can in effect metamorphosize the actual structure of the world. One of the most exciting and satisfying aspects of the novel is Anne's transformation of an ordinary farm into a fairyland and of an inarticulate old bachelor and a cheerless old maid into people who can articulate their love. (Rubio 1976: 34)

It is easy to see how Anne's presence and personality affect life at Green Gables: she acts both as the 'wise child' bringing love into the lives of Matthew and Marilla and adds her aesthetic sensibility to the bare Puritan decoration of the house itself. These changes signal Anne's capacity to refashion the world for others as well as for herself. In naming, speaking and narrating her imaginative vision, Anne invites her community of friends to share in the dreams, thrills and intense emotions which she experiences. Miller suggests that this ability to adjust the perspective of others is a form of social artistry

which Anne practises throughout the text to re-structure her environment and secure her sense of home: ‘... Anne’s perception of the world becomes the lens through which the Avonlea community begins to see reality. Most notably this re-visioning of their world ... occurs in the domestic sphere, as Anne fashions a family for herself, made up of the Cuthberts and other members of the Avonlea community.’ (Miller 2008: 40) Anne’s creative eloquence wins over first Matthew and then Marilla, Mrs Lynde and Josephine Barry, despite their previous dislike of effusive little girls, and she introduces beauty and love into the emotionally stagnant lives of the Cuthberts. This kind of domestic artistry, Miller argues, reflects a particularly feminine creativity which uses the materials of daily life to transform the mundane:

Anne offers her audience, the community of Avonlea and the community of imagined readers, a different way of seeing reality – a woman-centered perspective rooted in the power of Anne’s own imagination and the ‘dailiness’ of her social artistry. Female artistry becomes defined by a woman’s ability to offer creative representations of the world surrounding her, through a variety of media such as writing, painting, sewing, gardening and conversation (Miller 2008: 34)

Anne is not only generous in sharing her own perceptions, she also encourages and prompts others to develop their own imaginative and empathetic potential: she frequently disarms Avonlea’s more forbidding matriarchs by asking them to imagine themselves in her position, and she establishes the story club to help to cultivate the imaginations of her school friends. Here, as in *The Secret Garden*, the girl protagonist’s storytelling can be seen to function in dialogue with her surroundings and community, actively constructing her experience as part of the exchange.

This is apparent as Anne approaches Green Gables:

‘Is there a brook anywhere near Green Gables? I forgot to ask Mrs Spencer that.’

‘Well now, yes, there’s one right below the house.’

‘Fancy! It’s always been one of my dreams to live near a brook. I never expected I would, though. Dreams don’t often come true, do they? Wouldn’t it be nice if they did? ...’ (Montgomery 2007: 20)

Here again there is an overlap between Anne’s dreams and the real world of the novel. Throughout her life of displacement and disappointment Anne has constructed an image

of an ideal home in which it seems that the text colludes in its provision of Green Gables from where she can ‘hear the brook laughing’ (32). Anne’s words hint at the wish-fulfilment that the story goes on to supply as a product of the force of her imaginative vision. As Miller observes: ‘In a sense, Anne dreams her home into being – she has always imagined herself living on PEI, near a brook; the landscape of her mental home-space predicts itself upon the physical surroundings of her future home.’ (Miller 2008: 41) Anne’s creative abilities not only serve to describe the world, but actually work to shape it, to mould her own future, so that, as Rubio argues, imagining empowers Anne: ‘I think that ultimately what readers respond to in *Anne* is not the momentary, amusing diversion of Anne’s imaginative flights of fancy, but rather something far more powerful – the recognition that our perception of reality often becomes the blueprint for our lives.’ (Rubio 1976: 34) Anne’s ability to see beyond the limits of her homeless, orphan state, allows her access, imaginatively and literally, to another life.

Textually, Avonlea is also constructed as a reflection of Anne’s perspective. The descriptions of the places she travels through on her way to Green Gables are presented as Anne sees them for the first time and the names which she gives to these places, and those she encounters afterwards - ‘The Lake of Shining Water’, ‘Lovers’ Lane’ and ‘Dryad’s Bubble’ – are taken up by the narrative voice and used as established place names. Anne’s view is privileged and given authority by its incorporation within the language of the third-person narrator. So although the novel opens with the view from Mrs Lynde’s window the narrative perspective quickly shifts to Anne’s viewpoint. While the narrative voice retains an independent commentary on the characters, social occasions like the Sunday school picnic and adventures such as a visit to Miss Josephine Barry’s for the Charlottetown exhibition are explicitly recounted in Anne’s voice as she retells events to Matthew and Marilla back at Green Gables. Although the narrator’s voice is distinct from Anne’s own, their roles as authors of Avonlea and Anne’s story are subtly merged.

4.4 Performing Identities

The significance of names and naming in suggesting a sense of belonging recurs throughout the novel. As well as place names, Anne’s own name is used to indicate the appropriateness of her situation at Green Gables. When Anne first arrives at Green Gables the precariousness of her whole identity is signalled by her namelessness. Her introduction to Marilla and her longed-for new home focuses entirely on Anne’s failure to be a boy, defining her as an absence and erasing her identity:

‘Matthew Cuthbert, who’s that?’ she ejaculated. ‘Where is the boy?’

‘There wasn’t any boy,’ said Matthew wretchedly. ‘There was only *her*.’

He nodded at the child, remembering that he had never even asked her name. (Montgomery 2007: 25)

While on the journey to Green Gables Anne has been busy naming the places they pass through to bring them inside her imaginative world, but she herself has not been named and so claimed by anybody. Her response when she is finally asked her name is also telling: ‘The child hesitated for a moment. “Will you please call me Cordelia?” she said eagerly.’ (Montgomery 2007: 27) Partly this is a comic symptom of Anne’s romanticism but it is also suggestive of the more complex dynamics at play in that moment when Anne is asked to name herself. In one sense ‘Cordelia’ is an alias, allowing Anne to displace her feelings of rejection and retreat to another level of fantasy. But her question also implies that, starting from a point of absence, Anne is potentially empowered to create for herself whatever identity she chooses. Both her and the text’s response to this notion is tentative, a question rather than a statement, and ‘Cordelia’ is soon abandoned, but from this point of uncertainty and ambivalence Anne is able to move on to articulate her identity more clearly and confidently. In accepting her own name, but qualifying the spelling, Anne regains control of her developing sense of selfhood, and Matthew and Marilla’s recognition, however grudgingly, of Anne’s self-defining ‘e’ signifies their appropriateness as guardians of this sensitive girl. This becomes particularly apparent when Mrs Peter Blewett is offered as an alternative guardian in response to Marilla’s attempts to return Anne to the orphan asylum:

Mrs Blewett darted her eyes over Anne from head to foot.

‘How old are you and what’s your name?’ she demanded.

‘Anne Shirley,’ faltered the shrinking child, not daring to make any stipulations regarding the spelling thereof, ‘and I’m eleven years old.’
(Montgomery 2007: 43)

Mrs Blewett’s unsuitability is signalled by Anne’s inability to insist upon her chosen spelling of her name, reducing this normally loquacious girl to ‘mute misery’ (43). Although there are numerous other, perhaps less subtle, indicators of the different care and opportunities Anne would receive from these two prospective benefactors, these repeated references to naming reveal the text’s concern with the development of Anne’s selfhood as well as with her material conditions. It seems clear that Anne’s distinctiveness would be stifled and curtailed under Mrs Blewett whereas Marilla’s tolerance of Anne’s attempts at self-definition suggests the potential for her identity to flourish. Despite all her ‘rustiness’, her apparent lack of sympathy and her insistence that she can train Anne

into conformity, her acceptance of Anne with an 'e' is an early textual clue that Marilla will not be able or, indeed, not entirely want to repress Anne's individuality.

Marilla is, however, resistant to being transformed herself by Anne's skilful relabeling. In the same way that Anne rechristens the landscape in order to incorporate it within her own vision, so she also uses names to construct relationships with people. When Anne learns that she is to be allowed to stay at Green Gables her instinct is to secure her relationship to Marilla with a linguistic identification of their new roles:

'What am I to call you?' asked Anne. 'Shall I always say Miss Cuthbert? Can I call you Aunt Marilla?'

'No; you'll call me just plain Marilla. I'm not used to being called Miss Cuthbert and it would make me nervous.'

...

'I'd love to call you Aunt Marilla ,' said Anne wistfully. 'I've never had an aunt or any relation at all – not even a grandmother. It would make me feel as if I really belonged to you. Can't I call you Aunt Marilla?'

'No. I'm not your aunt and I don't believe in calling people names that don't belong to them.'

'But we could imagine that you were my aunt.'

'I couldn't,' said Marilla grimly. (Montgomery 2007: 49-50)

What Marilla cannot grasp but Anne seems to understand, and the narrative affirms, is that people and their relationships can be reassigned by a name. Marilla may not biologically be related to Anne but allowing herself to be renamed and to imagine this new connection would instantly reformulate their relationship. Anne is accomplished in this almost performative use of language: acquaintances become 'kindred spirits' because Anne calls them so and it is by refusing to name him that Anne attempts to reduce Gilbert Blythe almost out of existence. This is also apparent in Anne's desire to remain in control of the language which is used to name and describe her. Her anger at Mrs Lynde, and later Gilbert, for their derogatory remarks about her appearance, particularly her hair colour, seems irrational (although not entirely incomprehensible) to Marilla who reminds Anne that she herself often makes similar reference to her undesirable looks. But Anne is aware that naming her own perceived faults at least gives her power over how they are represented - romantically, as a 'lifelong sorrow' (20) - or imagined away – 'I can imagine that I have a beautiful rose-leaf complexion and lovely starry violet eyes' (20) - whereas Mrs Lynde's disparagements objectify and depersonalize her.

Her friendship with Diana is also sealed linguistically. Anne has modelled both Diana and their friendship in her imagination long before they actually meet, as she tells Marilla: ‘ “A bosom friend – an intimate friend, you know – a really kindred spirit to whom I can confide my innermost soul. I’ve dreamed of meeting her all my life. . . .” ’ (Montgomery 2007: 52) When they are introduced the nervous Anne is quick to consolidate her dream before practical considerations, such as compatibility and shared interests, threaten to undermine her expectations. Her very first exchanges with Diana involve swearing an oath of friendship binding them in a relationship which it simultaneously constructs:

‘We must join hands – so,’ said Anne gravely. ‘It ought to be over running water. We’ll just imagine the path is running water. I’ll repeat the oath first. I solemnly swear to be faithful to my bosom friend, Diana Barry, as long as the sun and the moon shall endure. Now you say it and put my name in.’ (Montgomery 2007: 75)

Marah Gubar observes how ‘this rather abrupt initiation into intimacy’ (Gubar 2001b: 55) echoes a marriage ceremony, noting both the romantic setting of the garden and the poetic style of the language borrowed from the girls’ shared reading. Like wedding vows, the words of this promise form the foundation of the girls’ future intimacy which is sustained not only by a mutual sympathy but through the continual restatement of the attachment. Throughout their friendship the girls frequently renew their vows by declaring their commitment to one another in the same heightened language, while Anne’s imagination projects their relationship into a future of continued devotion and improbable circumstances. The relationship also produces some of Anne’s most self-conscious romantic diction. Anne usually seems unaware of the elevated and stylized manner of her speech which astounds or amuses so many of the adults she addresses, including the knowing (adult) reader, as when she is first introduced to Mrs Barry: ‘ “I am well in body although considerably rumped in spirit, thank you ma’am,” said Anne gravely. Then aside to Marilla in an audible whisper, “There wasn’t anything startling in that, was there, Marilla?” ’ (Montgomery 2007: 74) But the dramatic quality of these declarations of lifelong love and friendship suggests a more deliberate manipulation of language to create a particular effect. When Anne and Diana say goodbye after Mrs Barry forbids any further contact between the two girls, Anne characteristically copes with unhappiness by exploiting its sentimental potential and slips into clichéd and highly affected expressions of parting:

‘And I will always love thee, Diana,’ said Anne solemnly extending her hand. ‘In the years to come thy memory will shine like a star over my lonely

life, as that last story we read together says. Diana, wilt thou give me a lock of thy jet-black tresses in parting to treasure forevermore?’ (Montgomery 2007: 110)

There is no claim to naturalness in this scene and Anne tells Marilla explicitly: ‘ “I used the most pathetic language I could think of ...” ’ (111). This does not quite amount to self-parody, although it is certainly knowing, but it does demonstrate that on a conscious as well as subconscious level Anne successfully restructures the world through language to actualize her dreams and make Avonlea and its inhabitants live up to her expectations. And in the process of doing this, Anne is not only constructing Diana (and Avonlea) in these encounters, she is also constructing herself.

These acts of transformation do not, however, represent a coherent, linear or fixed project of modification. Both Anne herself and her environment are subject to numerous imaginative reinventions as she matures and explores her potential identities. Storytelling, or, as Åhmansson notes, perhaps more specifically in Anne’s case self-dramatization, is central to this. Most of Anne’s stories are in some way about herself. Some refer directly to her own experience as she enthusiastically recalls the day’s events, a special occasion or one of her many mishaps, while others are sentimental daydreams about nursing Diana through the smallpox only to catch it herself and die tragically. This second type is a mild example of Anne’s propensity to create new roles and personae for herself. Early on, when Marilla asks Anne for her history she pleads to be allowed to tell that which is for her the most important and self-defining: what she imagines: ‘ “Oh, what I *know* about myself isn’t really worth telling,” said Anne eagerly. “If you’ll only let me tell you what I *imagine* about myself you’ll think it ever so much more interesting.” ’ (Montgomery 2007: 37) Her reply indicates not only her desire to mask or repress the unhappiness of her early childhood but also that she characterizes herself less by the facts of her situation than by what is effectively her ability to transcend them in imagining an alternative identity for herself. Although Marilla insists on the facts on this occasion, other clues in the text suggest that the real tale of her neglected life before coming to Green Gables is paralleled by an invented one of honeysuckle covered houses, dimpled elbows and blue satin dresses in which she is variously called Geraldine, Cordelia and later Rosamund. These characters, often in a more melodramatic and sensational form, also find their way into Anne’s written stories and the colourful compositions she prepares for school. Although the characters themselves are highly derivative (indeed some of them, like Elaine from Arthurian legend, are direct re-stagings of already established figures), they allow Anne to trial identities beyond those assigned to her by her social and economic conditions and also provide a means of

expressing the passionate emotions which are so disapproved of, especially in little girls, by polite provincial society.

However, these stereotypical romantic heroines, although they meet some of Anne's emotional needs, are continually at odds with her real world situation, competing with rather than renegotiating her actual circumstances. These characters are more often in conflict with reality, frequently collapsing under its weight, as is vividly demonstrated in the chapter, 'The Unfortunate Lily Maid', in which Anne's attempts to recreate Tennyson's version of Elaine's journey in her death-barge sink, literally and comically, leaving a humiliated Anne clinging to a bridge pile. Catherine Sheldrick Ross argues that episodes such as this are a self-conscious parody of the romance tradition. In an essay which considers a number of novels by Canadian women writers, Ross demonstrates how clichéd alter-egos or parallel plots are used to construct the apparent realism of the main story in contrast to the familiar but unlikely romance characters and scenarios. Ross is quick to point out the irony that *Anne of Green Gables* itself very much resembles a fairytale and that while Anne struggles to reconcile romantic paradigms and 'real life', she is, of course, fictional herself, as artificial and constructed as her romantic counterparts and as reliant on recognizable codes and patterns for her 'realistic' representation (Ross 1979: 46-8).

And yet, these codes too seem to be explicitly on display in the novel. Structurally and thematically the text is organized within the familiar patterns of domestic fiction, even appearing to resemble a conduct book at times, with chapters devoted to the sin of lying and the dangers of an overactive imagination (although these are subtly inverted and never really carry the conviction of the narrative voice). There are also intertextual references to other well-known books in this tradition: Foster and Simons detail comic revisions of episodes from both *Little Women* and *What Katy Did* (Foster and Simons 1995: 156-7), which points to the fictiveness of the story's apparent realism. Within this context Anne herself can be seen to be adopting and performing roles from this tradition as knowingly as she contrives her romantic alter egos. This role-playing may at first seem less conspicuous, as the identities it demands are less extravagant and more in keeping with the setting of the story, but, nonetheless, the text demonstrates that Anne must still self-consciously construct these characters. Perhaps ironically, it is on those occasions when Anne is socially most conventional, in the scenes when she attempts to replicate the behaviour of a model child, that she is most visibly acting a part. Anne's apology to Mrs Lynde for her angry outburst and her confession about the loss of Marilla's amethyst brooch are manufactured to fit Marilla's requirements about acceptable conduct, although they also manage to confound her expectations. In both cases, Anne approaches the task with the same imaginative commitment which she expends on her daydreams about dryads and her re-enactments of Tennyson. So

while Anne's romantic role-playing is one of the most striking aspects of her character it is matched by a corresponding tendency towards self-dramatization within the real world of the text: she actively performs both the part of romantic heroine and dutiful daughter.

As a child and an adolescent Anne is adept at switching between these two modes, but as she matures she increasingly inhabits an identity constructed within the real world discourse and modelled on the family story pattern. Her romanticism is not displaced, but it is less frequently and spontaneously expressed, suggesting that part of the process of growing up is learning to suppress at least the outward signs of her imagination. It is a task explicitly addressed in her formal education, where, on Miss Stacy's gentle but firm advice, Anne agrees to refrain from reading sensational stories, and, in her own writing, to train herself out of melodramatic excesses and develop a more realistic style: 'Miss Stacy sometimes has us write a story for training in composition, but she won't let us write anything but what might happen in Avonlea in our own lives' (Montgomery 2007: 205). This redirection of Anne's imaginative energy is, as Foster and Simons observe, an ambivalent one: 'She also abandons her romance writing, a gesture which seems partly an affirmation of realism . . . and partly authorial recognition that in a world dominated by patriarchal and rationalist values the productions of the female literary imagination must be obliterated or suppressed.' (Foster and Simons 1995: 169) While, on the one hand, Miss Stacy's rule serves to validate the local, domestic, feminine experiences of provincial Canadian life as material worthy of literature, a claim which emphasizes the value of both women and colonial Canada for a girl whose dreams have been dominated by passive heroines and an idealized English past, it, on the other hand, seems to be placing limits on the appropriate subjects, genres and emotions available to Anne as a storyteller. However, while the text certainly does suggest that fitting in to adult womanhood requires some adjustment from 'that Anne-girl' (131), it also resists closing down her story completely. Ostensibly, Anne's previously supple selfhood appears to be settling into a practical and rather conservative shape:

Anne's horizons had closed in since the night she had sat there after coming home from Queen's; but if the path set before her was to be narrow she knew that the flowers of quiet happiness would bloom along it. The joys of sincere work and worthy aspiration and congenial friendship were to be hers; nothing could rob her of her birthright of fancy or her ideal world of dreams. And there was always the bend in the road! (Montgomery 2007: 245)

A century on, readers may feel rather let down by Anne's ready acquiescence to the 'narrow path' even though she does not relinquish her imagination and dreams, but

the last line here introduces some ambiguity into the closure of Anne's story. Foster and Simons observe how the uncertainty of this ending differs from many earlier books in the genre: 'The difference here, however, is that the pattern of her later life seems less determined. Whereas with the earlier works, the narrative conclusion presupposes closure, despite apparent indefiniteness, in this novel the predominant validation of pre-adolescence produces a genuinely ambivalent ending. Anne will of course have to grow up, but the text refuses to formulate the inevitabilities that await her.' (Foster and Simons 1995: 169-70) The narrative implies that this apparently more conformist identity is still contingent, that her selfhood is not entirely fixed, or even fixable, by refusing to dismiss the possibility of further change. The bend in the road allows for further twists in Anne's tale.

Part Two

Chapter 5

A flexible tongue – *Harriet's Daughter* by Marlene Nourbese Philip

One of the most striking, and perhaps unexpected, differences between the fictional girls from the early twentieth century and those from the late twentieth century is their family context. Counter to the popular perception and social reality of the decline of the nuclear family over the course of the twentieth century¹, the fictional girls in the more contemporary books in this study belong to fairly traditional family units, with both of their parents and siblings forcefully present. While there are certainly some revisions and redefinitions of the roles within these units, they stand in contrast to their early twentieth century counterparts, the motherless Judy Woolcot, and Anne Shirley and Mary Lennox, who are both orphans trying to find their place in unconventional family structures where there is neither a clear hierarchy nor any unproblematic affiliations. This suspension of the expected security of home and family is not only the catalyst for the drama of the novels, but also a trope for the girls', perhaps adolescent, sense of alienation and unease about their identity: they are socially marginalized, unpractised in the prevailing standards of feminine behaviour and representatives of a colonial sense of displacement. Despite their relatively stable class and family background the late twentieth century characters experience similar feelings of disaffection and struggle to locate and define themselves in a way that echoes the earlier texts. For Anne and Mary, the development of a sense of self and the possibility of happiness are visibly intertwined with their finding and creating a place for themselves within a social and familial context

¹ Cunningham notes how the rapid rise in the divorce rate after the Second World War and the subsequent shift in the structure of families has become a significant feature of childhood experience (Cunningham 2006: 213).

from which they are initially excluded, and Judy's instability as a character stems from the problem of translating her singularity into a social role. These girls must secure their identities in both personal and social terms. Certainly, by the end of the texts the focus for the girls' future seems to be directed more intently on their roles than their inner selves as they conclude with Anne's and Mary's achievement of a socially acceptable and gender appropriate position, and with Judy's death, apparently because she cannot find such a place. Anne, particularly, strives to establish herself within the community, adopting the roles of dutiful daughter and respectable lady schoolteacher, although, as I have argued, not without some adjustment from Avonlea itself. The 'real *me*' (220) that Anne claims is still there beneath her more mature and conventional exterior is present as an already given, a creative inner self which she can draw upon as a resource in her project to fashion an acceptable social self. Roberta Seelinger Trites argues that this is often the distinguishing feature between those late nineteenth and early twentieth century children's books which present intelligent, energetic and sometimes rebellious heroines whose dynamism is spent responding to others' (or society's) needs, and more modern feminist children's fiction in which the protagonists' creative powers are focussed on fostering and strengthening their sense of selfhood (Trites 1997:ix) This shift is, of course, a response to political as well as literary developments, but such a distinction seems to overlook the importance of the survival of Anne's 'real me' despite the constraints of social living. The narrative voice is insistent that Anne retains this artistic self into adulthood and in doing so demonstrates her accommodation to a social role without the loss of self. Alternatively, Judy, although (possibly because) she is more overtly rebellious, does not manage to balance the competing demands of selfhood and convention. Although the narrative sets up several key moments when Judy might follow the expectations of the genre and adapt her behaviour – being sent away to school, collapsing with an inflamed lung, breaking her back – the text declines to negotiate an identity between the rebel and the paragon, and so, unable to sustain the rebel and unwilling to surrender to the paragon, Judy is expelled from, or perhaps escapes from, the text and, in the last of these incidents, dies.

Mary's social positioning is more problematic, for although *The Secret Garden* is profoundly about the interactions of class, status and gender, Mary, unlike Anne, does not arrive into an established, functioning social order. Ironically it is Mary's influence that rebalances the power relations of the house, and symbolically society, so that as the story progresses she is re-placed: within the shifting hierarchy of the house, by Colin in the narrative and from her active subject position. Physically and narratively Mary is, as I have argued, undetermined as the novel closes, but her anticipated social role has been hinted at by the text's most potent and influential voice, Mrs Sowerby:

‘An’ thee, too!’ she said. ‘Tha’rt grown near as hearty as our ‘Lisabeth Ellen. I’ll warrant tha’rt like thy mother too. Our Martha told me as Mrs Medlock heard she was a pretty woman. Tha’lt be like a blush rose when tha’ grows up, my little lass, bless thee.’

...

Mary had not had time to pay much attention to her changing face. She had only known that she looked ‘different’ and seemed to have a great deal more hair and that it was growing very fast. But remembering her pleasure at looking at the Mem sahib in the past she was glad to hear that she might some day look like her. (Burnett 2006: 160-161)

The image of the ‘blush rose’, and Mary’s response to it, seems to encapsulate many of the competing discourses of the text as a whole. Symbolically the rose image links Mary to the garden, to Nature and to the spiritual and mothering nurturance of Mrs Craven. But Mrs Sowerby, rather confusingly, uses the image to connect Mary to her own mother, the beautiful, neglectful socialite, and in doing so seems to evoke the rose’s more traditional symbolism of romantic love and sexuality, qualified here, in consideration of Mary’s age, by the inclusion of ‘blush’, a word that itself is simultaneously modest and sensuous. Mary’s response, which is one of the last times that Mary’s perspective is represented in the book (apart from a small aside implying her admiration of Colin’s stature as he greets his father), is also telling. Mary remembers looking at her mother, an act in which she has the agency, but projects into a future in which she may become the recipient of some else’s gaze, a mirror image of her mother. Interestingly this remains a speculative possibility rather than a present reality, however it seems indicative of some of the conflicts the text avoids by leaving Mary’s narrative open-ended. The association with Mary’s mother means this role cannot be read as unproblematically endorsed by the text, and yet neither is it completely rejected by Mary.

Although there is certainly some evidence of a tension between the inner and the social self in these early twentieth century texts, the two are never entirely divisible. The development of the protagonists’ maturing identities is intimately connected to their relationships and environment, so that clear distinctions between the two are not simply difficult but actually inadequate. The girls not only fashion stories which give shape to their sense of self, they also respond to the stories which are told to them, incorporating them into their creative vocabulary and constructing a dialogue with the exterior world. For all the immediate differences of period, context and issues that exist between the books in this study, this remains a point of continuity. While the late twentieth century protagonists may not be constrained by the same social boundaries of class and gender, they are, nonetheless, negotiating their identity in relation to their cultural context and

so engaging with issues of community, ancestry, language and gender to formulate selves which function in dialogue with others, with their environment, and with the reader.

5.1 Foremothers and Black Female Identity

Notions of female identities as relational and flexible are significant in writing by women across a broad geographical, cultural and historical spectrum and have a particular resonance in black women's writing. Mary Chamberlain asserts the importance of re-thinking the boundaries of the self in her work on the oral life stories of Caribbean women. In her essay, 'The global self: Narratives of Caribbean migrant women,' she argues for a sensitivity to cultural as well as gender differences and draws attention to the centrality of kinship and especially of mothers, real and ancestral, in her interviewees' narratives about their own lives: 'The response to the question "Tell me about your mother" began "My mother, my grandmother," myself. Time and again, in my West Indian narratives, I hear not the autonomy, but the collectivity, of the individual.' (Chamberlain 2000: 159) The centrality of community and its interrelatedness with the individual which Chamberlain finds to be so crucial to the experience of the Caribbean and Caribbean migrant women in her interviews is also reflected in Caribbean-heritage (and Afro-American) literature. Negotiating the fractures and discontinuities of slavery, colonialism, diaspora and racism, there is a powerful tradition in black women's writing of forging meaningful ties with the past, particularly through ancestral mothers, and of celebrating strong, nurturing female communities in the present. Inevitably, these definitions are themselves problematic and complicated. While Maggie Humm cites 'a sense of 'community' that is not a fragile concept but a source of care and emotional strength,' as a 'core theme' (Humm 1992: 122) of black feminism, both Carole Boyce Davies and Susan Willis argue that the communities represented in black women's writing are rarely idealized and are often interrogated as complex sites which may oppress as well as nurture the black female subject. Certainly, in *Harriet's Daughter*, this ambivalence is apparent in Margaret's relationships with her home, family and Caribbean heritage. Alternatively, notions of collective or relational identity may also be seen or used to undermine the unique personality of the woman, although much writing by black feminists focuses not on losing individuality but rather gaining plural subjectivities which are responsive to the context of community and history and flexible enough to encompass multiple roles and relationships. Chamberlain explores this idea, again in a particular, Caribbean context:

This may be termed a 'syncretic' self, which enfolds within it an acknowledgement of lineage, and their place within it. This place necessarily shifts

along with the course of the life cycle. In this sense, it is as much to do with origins as continuity . . . an awareness of the roles women play in their own life cycle and that of their families – my mother, my grandmother, myself. Like the culture it represents, it says as much about origins as creativity. Women, in other words, may have a plural sense of self, fashioned by the roles they perform and their positioning as intermediaries in their lineage. (Chamberlain 2000: 161)

The significance of this in the context of children's, and particularly adolescent, literature, can be illustrated by again recalling Alison Waller's example of Lyra's *dæmon* as a metaphor for the maturation and consequent stabilization of identity at the end of adolescent novels, which presupposes a more fixed and consistent adult selfhood. While *Anne of Green Gables* and *The Secret Garden* may resist or sidestep completely 'fixing' the shape of Anne's and Mary's identities, both texts do make visible a coherent, recognisable role into which the girls might be expected to fit. However, by conceptualizing the self as plural and shifting throughout women's lives, the adolescent self does not have the same perceptible goal but becomes part of a continuous process of remaking and becoming. Potentially this may radically alter the shape and boundaries of the narrative. Structurally, Margaret in *Harriet's Daughter* does seem to make some linear progression towards a more self-assured adult persona: she gains confidence, comes to feel loved for who she is, acquires a more profound understanding of her cultural heritage, reclaims her name and fulfils her promise to return Zulma to her grandmother in Tobago. But, significantly, the novel ends with a journey, a dream, a meeting and with Margaret considering renaming herself in the future, all of which are signs not of closure and fixity or resolution, but of change, growth and continuance.

The matrilineal and maternal relationships which Chamberlain observes are integral to this relational construction of identity also seem especially pertinent to children's literature. The issue of mothers and mother-daughter relationships is an important theme in feminist theory in general, and the problems and insights found here are often relevant in a black feminist context (although there are also concerns that some of this debate is too universalizing in its assumptions, eliding important cultural differences), but symbolically and experientially, mothers, mothering and motherhood acquire additional, multi-layered meanings in a post-colonial and/or post-slavery culture. As Susheila Nasta explains in her introduction to an anthology of essays about black women's literature which is entitled *Motherlands*:

The idea of motherlands, mothercultures, mothertongues seemed an appropriate theme for discussion for a number of reasons. Clearly mothers and

motherlands have provided a potent symbolic force in the writings of African, Caribbean and Asian women with the need to demythologise the illusion of colonial 'motherland' or 'mothercountry' and the parallel movement to rediscover, recreate and give birth to the genesis of new forms and new languages of expression. (Nasta 1991: xix)²

Here mothers are connected to identity in a national and cultural sense, although this emblematic status also speaks forcefully about the co-incidence of the personal and the political in the discourse about mothers/motherhood. In reflecting on the culture and symbolism of mothers, critics, theorists and writers interweave academic analysis with personal references to their own mothers and daughters: Nasta concludes her introduction to *Motherlands* with a dedication to her daughter; Carole Boyce Davies opens her book, *Black Women, Writing and Identity* (1994), with a description of her mother's crossings and migrations between the different locations and cultures she inhabits. Alice Walker eloquently expresses this fusion of cultural history and intimate experience in her essay 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens' (1984). Mothers, Walker argues, biological and ancestral, offer a physical and spiritual connection to the past and are a source of creativity that, historically, has been silenced by oppression. The challenge for contemporary black women writers is not only to recover and retell the hidden histories of these women, but to honour and draw inspiration from the creative inheritance they provide, from their skill in transforming their domestic resources into art: 'But when, you will ask, did my overworked mother have time to know or care about feeding the creative spirit? The answer is so simple that many of us have spent years discovering it. We have constantly looked high, when we should have looked high – and low.' (Walker 1984: 239) Using examples of quilting, singing, storytelling and her own mother's gardening, Walker demands recognition for each of these 'anonymous' women as 'an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use.' (Walker 1984: 239) But she also refutes their anonymity, insistently referring to mothers and grandmothers, incorporating them, and herself, not only in a tradition, but also a lineage.

This sense of an ancestral community and motherhood not simply as a biological fact but as a creative relationship is apparent in the title of Philip's novel, *Harriet's Daughter*, which links the contemporary teenage protagonist, Margaret, to the spirit of Harriet Tubman, the runaway slave who freed herself and hundreds of others in a series of escapes to Canada:

² This volume is prefaced by an extract from a poem by Marlene Nourbese Philip, 'Discourse on the Logic of Language,' (Appendix A) which explores the problems which gender, culture and colonialism present to finding any form of articulation within a language which is at once a 'mother tongue' and a 'foreign language'. – (Nasta 1991: xiii)

In successfully helping her friend to return to Tobago and her Gran (albeit with the help of another older woman, Mrs. Billings – a foremother); in challenging her loving but misguided parents who refuse to understand her; in making a claim for her own uniqueness and identity as a young woman of African-Canadian heritage, Margaret was and is indeed a direct descendant of Harriet Tubman. I had it – the name of the book! *Harriet's Daughter*. (Philip 1996: 93)

And mothers generally have considerable symbolic value in children's literature. While there is certainly a long tradition, since the mid-nineteenth century, of disposing, one way or another, of their restrictive parental presence in order to allow children to pursue their own adventures carelessly and independently, often, even in their absence, mothers remain an important psychological and symbolic force. Most straightforwardly mothers might be seen to represent the security of home and unconditional love, a notion which is both maliciously satirized and sentimentally idealized by the narrator of *Peter and Wendy*, and embodied by Mrs Darling, but, as this ambivalence suggests, they are often complex sites of conflicting emotions and discourses, perhaps becoming increasingly complex in more contemporary children's fiction as mother figures become individuals in their own right. Of the multiple associations and images that collect around the mother figure, one of the more enduring and cross-cultural, and the one that is of greatest interest to this study, is the link between mothers and storytelling. These informal, intimate, unauthorized narratives are an important means of communication across the generations, creating a bond between teller and listener and enacting the kind of artistic inheritance suggested by Walker. In *Harriet's Daughter*, Margaret's access to her mother's and foremothers' stories comes in adolescence, a time which signifies a period of transition and re-evaluation in a girl's relationship with her mother and all that she stands for in terms of an adult, cultural and gender model, so, in the context of black feminist theories about mothers, Margaret's adolescent quest for selfhood becomes conflated with a post-colonial search for identity in a broader context.

5.2 A 'Multi-Level' Narrative

The various challenges that these ideas and conceptions of selfhood represent to mainstream culture are articulated in a multitude of diverse forms in postcolonial black women's writing. Often the radical reformulating of notions of what constitutes identity, voice and authority affects the shape, form and structure as much as the content of the text, as the established, recognisable narrative modes and patterns, as well as language itself, are implicated in the hegemony of a particular white, male, European

perspective. Black women's writing often works to interrogate, expand, expose, explode and/or re-invent conventional forms of artistic expression, to produce formally experimental texts in order to make a space within a language which fundamentally excludes or nullifies their experience. In their introduction to a collection of essays on Caribbean women's writing Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido point to the search for alternative forms of expression in these writers' work, citing examples of fragmented or 'quilted' texts which stitch together multiple modes and the use of oral storytelling patterns in the structure and themes of the text as strategies for eluding the constraints of traditional, masculine literary genres: 'The linear, phallogentric form of the male text is often rejected by Caribbean women writers. . . . Caribbean women's texts are also engaged in the process of radical re-invention and redefinition of what makes a work of art aesthetically female.' (Davies and Fido 1990: 6)

Marlene Nourbese Philip's work for adult readers, which includes poetry, prose, drama and essays, is deliberately and self-consciously challenging in its use of form and language. In her essay, 'Managing the Unmanageable' (1990), Philip discusses her decision to become 'unmanageable' as a writer in response to the colonial history of management of the black subject's body, identity, culture and language:

In *She Tries [Her Tongue]* I set out to be unmanageable. I refused to 'know my place,' the place set apart for the managed peoples of the world. I intended to define my own place and space and in doing so would come up against the role of language and the issues relating to that. I was also to discover that I could not challenge the language without challenging the canon that surrounded the poetic genre. (Philip 1990a: 296)

The poems and other writings that are products of this approach do not conform to any single style or genre and actively resist easy classification. Instead, these works attempt to reflect the competing discourses which act upon the experience of black women and the articulation of that experience. Consequently, as Philip acknowledges, the poems in *She Tries Her Tongue* (1989) are difficult in the sense that they do not participate in the rules and expectations of 'normal' reading practice, they '...have become unreadable in the traditional sense' (Philip 1990a: 297). For example, 'Discourse on the Logic of Language' (Appendix A) challenges the reader not only with its themes and subject material, but by problematizing how to approach the poem, where to begin to read and how to position the text. In addition to the slipperiness of the language, the four separate but simultaneous voices compete for the reader's attention, unpicking and enriching the words and meaning of the other strands, demanding different reading positions, physically as well as intellectually and emotionally, and requiring the reader

to switch between registers, build relationships between different parts of the text and extrapolate possible meanings.

The level of formal difficulty and the kind of complex reading activity required by this text is not normally associated with children's literature, and indeed, *Harriet's Daughter* is a far more accessible and less technically fraught work. The question of accessibility is one which is frequently raised in discussions about children's texts and is often seen as central to defining what constitutes a children's book. This term is generally applied not merely to the content, the subjects deemed suitable and recognisable in children's literature, but to the style, vocabulary and narrative strategies employed to communicate that content. As Peter Hunt has observed, this raises further questions about how the implied audience, the child reader, is conceived and how the whole issue of categorizing children's literature is subject to multiple interpretations and uses (Hunt 1991 and 2001). Popular assumptions about the limitations of the child reader, in terms of range of vocabulary, interpretive skills, aesthetic appreciation and textual experience, have often contributed to a general view that children's books are of a lower literary standard than peer texts because, in order to become comprehensible to their target readership, those features which are traditionally assigned literary value must, necessarily, be compromised. Although research suggests the fundamental difficulty and contingency of making any broad statement about how children read and understand a text (Benton 1999), there are still widespread expectations that books for children will be simpler and less problematic than those intended for adults, as Hunt points out:

Many of the confusions over the status and quality of children's books and literature stem from the assumption that they must necessarily be what Roland Barthes has called *lisible* rather than *scriptable* (sometimes translated into English as 'readerly' rather than 'writerly'). They are 'closed texts' which the skilled reader reads 'below capacity'. (Hunt 1991: 81)

While there are certainly writers for children that subscribe to these criteria it is equally certain that there are many who do not. Robyn McCallum, in her entry on 'Metafictions and experimental work' in the *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (2004), points to a healthy strand of more formally radical and demanding work in children's literature for all ages, including picture books for very young children. Writing of this kind challenges the traditional assumptions about the relationship between the child reader and the text by inviting a more active reading stance and providing the opportunity to develop alternative perspectives and interpretations. While McCallum explains how the metafictional strategies in such texts may be positive aides to a child's reading development, she also acknowledges that there is still a common concern that

stylistically experimental texts are too difficult for a young audience. And while the notion that a children's book must automatically be a lesser book, in some qualitative sense or in terms of its interpretative potential, is the extreme end of this view, in between many writers and commentators do perceive that some concession to the child as reader is necessary. This is by no means automatically pejorative: both Jill Paton Walsh and Alan Garner in separate articles reprinted in *The Cool Web* (1977) compare the discipline required in writing for children to that of writing poetry where multi-layered meaning is made available through tightly controlled language and structure:

Now, within this group [adolescents], the age of the individual does not necessarily relate to the maturity. Therefore, in order to connect, the book must be written for all levels of experience. This means that any given piece of text must work at simple plot level, so the reader feels compelled to turn the page, if only to find out what happens next; and it must work for me and for every stage between.... An onion can be peeled down through its layers, but it is always, at every layer, an onion, whole in itself. I try to write onions. The disciplines of poetry are called for to achieve such multi-level validity. Simplicity, pace, compression are needed, so that the reader who has not experienced what I am getting at will not be held up, since the same text is also fulfilling the demands of plot. (Garner 1977: 197)

This mode of 'multi-level validity' is in operation in *Harriet's Daughter*. The book is conspicuously less radically experimental in form than Philip's adult works, but it covers much of the same ground in its focus on black female identity, language, the ownership of the word and the development of a voice. The novel is, on its simplest level, a reasonably straightforward coming-of-age story: a first-person narrative in which the protagonist, the fourteen-year-old Margaret, struggles against the role expected of her by her family and society to find her own sense of identity, a process which is reinforced by her physical maturation towards womanhood and the start of her menstruation. This part of the text is readily accessible to readers from across a broad spectrum of skills and experience. It provides a familiar *Bildungsroman* structure, as Margaret strives to meet external goals, by helping her friend Zulma return to her grandmother in Tobago, and also bring about personal change, as defined by the lists she makes which centre on her relationships with her family. This plot supplies the 'what happens next' tension in the novel by conforming to recognisable reading codes and, as such, Margaret's story is predominantly linear in structure. Margaret's narrative, however, is not. Although she is the single narrative voice of the novel, Margaret, and thus the text, which is the story as she tells it, builds her tale and enacts her growth through numerous other sources and voices. Margaret's

development as an individual is never the result of sustained introspection, of an inward-looking and self-analytical narrative voice. The transformations which she enacts are always the result of active engagement with others: with her family, particularly her mother, with her community, and with her past, both personal and cultural. It seems significant that the catalyst for change in Margaret's life is not her inward sense of discontent and alienation, Ti-cush's solipsistic 'life sucks' philosophy, but the decision to act positively to help a friend, to respond to the needs of her community (which is a community of friendship here). It is an act of community spirit in line with that embodied by Mrs Billings and finally recognised by her mother as a cultural as well as a compassionate response:

'I want to help, Carol. Margaret has been asking me for months to help Zulma, and I used to say it wasn't my business but it is, and I want to help. You know sometimes I wonder whether is the cold that make us so closed-in and narrow in this country, only concentrating on your own life. Years ago, I didn't think twice about bringing this old, white lady into my home and helping her; I couldn't bear to see her so lonely, and that was what people was for, to help each other...' (Philip 1988: 124-5)

Motivated by her determination to help her friend, Margaret is also inspired to renegotiate her own position and relationships, but crucially she does this by bringing together various resources - histories, biographies, memories, games, photographs, dreams and imaginings - and integrating them into her self-understanding and into her own story. Margaret comes to understand herself not as part of a linear journey (although that is also there in the text) but in terms of a complex web of other narratives which double back, overlap and intersect and continue to do so as the novel ends.

Although, as a first person narrative, the text is technically mono-vocal - it is Margaret's perspective, opinions and interpretations that are represented throughout - the story that she creates about herself is poly-vocal, knitting together voices and experiences from other people and sources to give shape to her developing sense of identity. Margaret actively seeks out historical and cultural role models, like Harriet Tubman and Mata Hari, in library books and history lessons and uses their names, stories, images and symbolic status to address her own struggles with authority. She also starts to talk to the women in her community and gains access to a more intimate past through the life story fragments of her close foremothers, Mrs Billings, Harriet Blewchamp and her own mother. The Underground Railroad game that she devises also requires the participation of a community of children to play and becomes, amongst them, a spontaneous collective narrative in which many voices collude. All of these are integrated into

the text and into Margaret's understanding through a multiplicity of different registers and narrative modes, including historical texts, oral accounts, role play, day dreams as well as the frequent subconscious negotiation of this material in sleeping dreams, dialect and lists, all held together by Margaret's own questioning voice. In this way the text performs an (at least) double task, providing a comprehensible and accessible structure while simultaneously suggesting the numerous ways in which the story expands beyond both its formal constraints and the singularity of Margaret's perspective. Margaret's increasing sense of her identity as relational is reflected in the patchwork of voices which she uses to construct her story. Again, these are themes and strategies which are continuous with Philip's adult work. Her commitment to exploring how black women's identity and experience can be expressed in an alien language and literary tradition involves challenging the conventions of genre and form, as she explains in an interview with Patricia Saunders:

I think the impulse to mess with form may have to do with our history and how much the colonial powers attempted to restrict us and put us into categories and forms. There is very much a sense of wanting to explore and explode those restrictions and see where it takes you.

... The bringing together of different genres in one piece points to the idea of poly-vocality that is so much a part of the Caribbean aesthetic, and I see that poly-vocality expressing itself in the poly-formal, if you will.

(Philip in Saunders 2005: 215)

Harriet's Daughter engages with these same concerns although here the task of collecting and piecing together the various strands, stories and voices is performed by Margaret as it were for the less experienced reader. The implied reader of *Harriet's Daughter* is led towards making the connections between the different parts of the story more explicitly than in Philip's peer texts and in this sense the novel is more guided or closed in its possible interpretations. For instance, Margaret calls Mrs Billings a 'modern-day Harriet Tubman' (105) when she offers to help the girls escape the tyranny of their fathers, overtly making the link between these strong, liberating and self-liberated women and the tradition they comprise rather than leaving this connection implied.³

Nevertheless, the text does demonstrate how both stories and identities are complex, multi-stranded and poly-vocal, implicitly challenging any notion of a fixed and isolated selfhood. Margaret's narrative voice is strongly individual while at the same time the intertexts within her story reveal the net of relationships and culture which informs and

³ This is further complicated by the power imbalance between the adult author and child reader: Margaret's is ostensibly a child's voice addressing other children, but it is, of course, really the adult author who is guiding the young reader's interpretation.

sustains her sense of self. This emphasis on the synchronicity of the collective and the individual is apparent from the opening lines of the novel:

Our group – three slaves and me, Harriet, as leader – were walking real fast, making good time. We weren't running; we didn't want to call attention to ourselves. Suddenly I heard a noise. I stopped, held up my hand; everyone stopped too. Yes, there it was, the sound of the slave-owners and their dogs, and they were coming fast. (Philip 1988: 1)

Susan Willis focuses on the community as a key issue in contemporary black women's fiction. She argues that the slave narratives that comprise some of the earliest texts by black women in the Americas foreground the individual 'I' subject as a means of affirming presence and claiming a space:

If the slave narratives begin by positing the 'I', they do so dramatically to wrest the individual black subject out of anonymity, inferiority and brutal disdain. The 'I' stands against and negates the perception of the black person as indistinguishable from the mass, as slave, as animal. The 'I' proclaims voice, subject, and the right to history and place. (Willis 1991: 213)

But, reading the opening to Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Willis remarks on how this more contemporary novel begins not with Sula herself but with the neighbourhood, insisting on the context of place, history and community in understanding the subject: 'Morrison's *Sula* – and, to varying degrees, all contemporary novels by black women – resists the tendency in bourgeois fiction to isolate the individual.' (Willis 1991: 213) In some ways *Harriet's Daughter* engages with both of these narrative positions. As a child, particularly a black female child, Margaret's narrative 'I', like the 'I' of the slave narratives, performs the function of claiming the authority to speak but it is also a slippery, shifting 'I' which only becomes meaningful in context.

Returning to the opening lines of the novel, many of these complexities are introduced in this first paragraph. It appears initially that this might be a slave narrative, but it starts in the middle of the story and as the narrative progresses there are both linguistic and circumstantial clues that suggest that something else is going on, although the fact of the game is not disclosed until a page and a half later. There is a destabilizing lack of context in any terms which allow this incident to be located in time, place or even plot. However, another kind of context is very clearly established based on culture and relationships: there is a marked identification with black history, a shared struggle against oppression and a strong sense of collectivity. The first words in the text are

‘Our group’, a phrase given additional visual impact by the use of the dash directly afterwards so that it appears almost a statement in itself, establishing it as a primary unit of meaning and agency. Harriet, the voice of the narrative, the ‘I’, is revealed in relationship to this concept of ‘our group’, as all the individuals of which the group comprises are textually bracketed together within the pair of dashes. The positioning of this ‘I’ subject later shifts so that it is more central as it becomes apparent that the narrative is primarily Margaret’s story, narrated by and so focalized through her. While her subjectivity is certainly not represented as isolated or separate from the world around her, ‘I’ becomes the dominant narrative stance. However, the initial affirmation of ‘our group’ and the powerful presentation of collective identity and collective action are significant in creating the tone and framework for reading the text and understanding the individual in relationship to the wider group or community. The group here does not only signify those other ‘three slaves’ or children but membership of a broader cultural unit and is one of the contexts in which the subject, the ‘I’, might be understood, particularly for the black woman.

Collective identity here seems to imply a sense of belonging, shared experience, recognition and solidarity which extends rather than subsumes the boundaries of the subject and is closer to the models of identity posited by feminist and black theory. In an interview with Kristen Mahlis, Philip describes how a request to read a poem from *She Tries her Tongue* illuminated for her how the poly-vocality in the poems is another way in which they challenge the structures that underpin white, masculine authority and exclude black female experience:

I suddenly heard myself saying, in response to the student’s request to read ‘Universal Grammar,’ ‘Yes, if you read it with me.’ That’s it, I thought, that’s what I was doing – moving from the solo voice to the chorus. I realized too that the presence of the chorus meant that I had been successful in displacing the lyric voice. And maybe that’s more familiar to women; maybe that’s closer to the woman’s way of being or even the African way of being, having a chorus rather than a solo voice which is the fount of everything including its own legitimacy. (Philip in Mahlis 2004: 686)

The poems that Philip is talking about here are technically very different from *Harriet’s Daughter* and embrace ‘unmanageability’, unreadability and formal experimentation in a way that is arguably not appropriate or useful in a children’s novel. But I do want to argue that, notwithstanding these obvious differences, these works share the same aesthetic and that there are echoes of this choral voice in ‘our group’, the starting point of *Harriet’s Daughter*, in the concert of unrestrained voices in which the slaves/children

celebrate reaching Freedom - ‘We all wanted to talk about what happened. We all did, at the same time, at the tops of our voices’ (Philip 1988: 2) - and in Margaret’s constant reference to other sources, despite the text’s movement towards a more conventional narrative mode.

Alongside these suggestions of the collectivity and relationality of the subject in the first paragraph, there are also the beginnings of an exploration of the flexibility and contingency of identity. The narrative voice not only places herself in the context of ‘our group’, she also names herself Harriet. Like the apparent mode of the slave narrative, this introduction is ambiguous and misleading. Harriet, it is later revealed, is not Harriet at all, or, at least, is only Harriet conditionally, in certain circumstances and to certain people. But the narrator names herself in the first sentence in a particularly self-conscious way: ‘Our group – three slaves and me, Harriet, as leader - ...’ (1). There is a development within this clause from subject, to name, to role – me, Harriet, leader – which becomes particularly significant when it is made apparent that these are self assigned definitions. In changing her name to Harriet, Margaret is not merely swapping one word for another, she is also assuming a new persona. Taking the name Harriet is a self-conscious decision to connect herself to a chain of meaning that she feels her given name lacks and to the active roles of leader and survivor, like Harriet Tubman and Harriet Blewchamp, and to a powerful heritage of female and black resistance. Harriet, then, is one possible identity for Margaret and, as the novel progresses, it becomes clear that there are multiple alternative roles and personas which she can choose or reject. Nor are these presented as necessarily exclusive. That ‘Harriet’ might be some kind of alias is first revealed in a slip by one of the other children: ‘ “What’s the time somebody?” “12.45 Mar... I mean Harriet.”’ (Philip 1988: 2) The slippage here seems symbolic as well as linguistic. It suggests that these two identities are not discrete, complete or fixed but are instead part of a more elastic continuum of selfhood which allows for movement between roles and even the possibility of occupying different personas simultaneously. Margaret and Harriet are not competing identities (although Margaret perhaps does not always realize this), but Harriet might be seen as a focused expression of one aspect of a complex and fluid subjectivity. At the end of the text, Mrs Billings brings these two names and identities together – ‘ “And you Margaret-Harriet,” she chuckled’ (Philip 1988: 146) – signalling integration and acceptance of her plural selfhood.

5.3 Margaret: A Disconnected Name

Names and identities are intimately connected in the text, and Margaret’s desire to occupy a new identity by adopting a new name is stimulated by her association between

her given name and her broader sense of alienation. Margaret's feelings of disempowerment and alienation range across multiple aspects of her life: she feels misunderstood and unwanted at home where her independent, questioning spirit is labelled rude and 'faysty' (22), but she is also seeking a broader affirmation of her cultural identity which is lacking from her father's self-abnegating views on 'Coloured People' (14) and from the popular images of black people available in the media: '... even the Cosby show sucked – I mean everybody on it was so perrrrfect, cute, rich and black. I mean how could *anybody* be so lucky, *and* with parents who understood them and talked and even discussed THE IMPORTANT THINGS OF LIFE?' (Philip 1988: 3) These 'lucky', 'perrrrfect' apparent role models elide the struggle and discrimination that is part of the history and identity of the black subject and so seem unreal to Margaret, a fantasy of an assimilated black self. This frustration and sense of disconnectedness is distilled in Margaret's dissatisfaction with her given name which she perceives to be meaningless, and another expression of adult power. When the narrative voice finally discloses her given name as Margaret, some five pages after declaring herself as Harriet, it is, tellingly, revealed as part of something she imagines her mother might say: 'I could hear my mother's voice: "Don't ask so many questions Margaret. It's rude!"' (Philip 1988: 5) Effectively, Margaret's name here is spoken in someone else's voice, emphasizing her sense of 'Margaret' as a name/identity imposed on her by the oppressive adult authority of her parents and as something which is, as here, frequently used against her. The way in which the narrator reveals herself is expressive of her relationship to her name which is characterized by a perceived lack of ownership and control. It is also significant, in this context, that she does not seem to offer her name to Zulma in her report of their first meeting, although she is immediately curious about the unfamiliarity of Zulma's name, wondering 'what it meant and where it came from' (Philip 1988:4), which are the very things which cause her so much anxiety about her own name.

Specifically, 'Margaret' is the name chosen by her father, who Margaret recognizes as the primary source of oppressive power in her family and, indeed, her life. In many ways the relationship between Margaret and Cuthbert Cruikshank is paradigmatic of the adolescent/parent conflict: Margaret rails against her father's adult and patriarchal power and his political conservatism whilst simultaneously craving his acceptance and approval, and Cuthbert's confusion and frustration in the face of his daughter's independence of spirit echoes the Captain's response to Judy in *Seven Little Australians*. The dynamics of this relationship in the text are, however, subtle and complex. The generational conflict is also nuanced by gender issues here as Margaret struggles against a double designation of her position as a girl informed by both Canadian and Caribbean culture. Differing relationships to 'home' and adoptive cultures also inform and complicate the relationship. Margaret does not question her Canadian-ness explicitly in the

narrative. She has a strong sense of Canada as her home - ‘ “I’m not going, I’m not going,” I yelled, “you can go if *you* want, but I’m not going to Barbados or anywhere, this is my home...” ’ (Philip 1988: 91) - and although she thinks about running away, she considers going with Zulma to Tobago only once she is already effectively exiled by her father. Her interest in black history and in recovering and asserting her identity as a black woman is always in the context of her place in Canada – rather than a Pan-African or Pan-Caribbean quest for a return to a mythologized homeland. Cuthbert’s almost obsessive anxieties about his place and how he and his family are perceived by mainstream white Canada function within the text to contextualize Margaret’s apparent confidence in her Canadian-ness by suggesting how contingent and contested that part of her/their identity remains.

However, Margaret is not unaware of institutionalized racism and does not dismiss her father’s concerns about the difficulties of being black in a predominantly white Canadian society:

My father is always going on about HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO DO WELL AT SCHOOL, and get good grades and all that stuff, because being COLOURED PEOPLE we have to be twice as good to get anywhere – and I believe him. I just wish he wouldn’t go on so about it. Once or twice a year would be enough; instead it’s like every week we get this lecture. The funny thing is that although I get good marks and am at the top of the class, he still prefers Jo-Ann who’s lucky if she scrapes a fifty average. (Philip 1988: 15-16)

Margaret recognizes her father’s attitude as a response to real issues of racism and discrimination, but the narrative also reveals the doubleness of this response. While Cuthbert’s lectures ostensibly aim to equip his children to combat prejudice, his favouritism for Jo-Ann suggests the value he places on eliding rather than confronting racist preconceptions. His emphasis is consistently on integration and assimilation. For Cuthbert, remnants and reminders of his recent Caribbean past are perceived as a threat to his acceptance into Canadian culture. Allegiance to a black cultural identity is seen as dangerous, as a marker of an undesired and undesirable difference. While his character development is limited by Margaret’s perspective, Cuthbert is, obliquely, a complex figure. While striving to assert his control within the home, and particularly over women, it is clear that in wider (white) society he experiences the kind of ontological anxieties observed and analysed by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952): ‘There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the

equal value of their intellect.’ (Fanon 1986: 12) Implied in Cuthbert’s repressive conformism is yet another history of struggle and survival against a hostile world, although Margaret cannot entirely understand this.

Caribbean culture is practised only unwillingly, almost involuntarily, by Cuthbert, through his reluctant enjoyment of a game of dominoes and his appetite for rice and peas, or called upon tactically, and ironically, to enforce adherence to perceived white cultural norms by checking Margaret’s rebelliousness with the threat of ‘some Good West Indian Discipline’ (33). This brand of cultural retention highlights the contradictions in Cuthbert’s attitudes, both to his cultural heritage and to his patriarchal power. In spite of his persistent assertions of his masculine dominance as head of the household, his apparently authoritative decision to send Margaret to Barbados for some Good West Indian Discipline is, in fact, an abdication of power and responsibility, a handing over of the daughter that he himself cannot control to the matriarchal authority of his own mother.⁴ This act, or the threat of it, also repositions Caribbean culture and, indeed, Barbados itself, into both the site and instrument of suppression, specifically the suppression of a self-confident and self-recognizing black identity. Barbados, the former slave colony, becomes once again the place of exile, discipline and enforced adherence to the values of white culture for the black subject, where Margaret is apparently meant to learn to be less faysty, rude, independent and visible.

It is from this context that Margaret wants to un-name herself, to de-enlist. When she asks her mother to start calling her Harriet she claims it is because the name Margaret is meaningless to her:

‘... I want a name that means something to me – Margaret doesn’t mean anything to me at all. Also Mrs Blewchamp wanted me to have the name, Harriet.’

‘Margaret is your grandmother’s name; your father wanted you to have it.’ (Philip 1988: 47)

However, as her mother’s reply suggests, it is rather that ‘Margaret’ means too much: it is evidence of her father’s power to name her, of his expectations and his attempts to define her, but it is also the name of ‘Good West Indian Discipline’, of her grandmother who is only associated, in Margaret’s narrative, with punishment and control. Ironically, as Margaret’s choice of ‘Harriet’ suggests, at least in part, a quest to retrieve her foremothers through their names, she ignores the real, physical link that her name

⁴ In this regard, Cuthbert again echoes the actions of the Captain in *Seven Little Australians*, who, exasperated by Judy’s behaviour and ineffective at managing her himself, sends his daughter away to school to be disciplined by the ‘very firm’ (42), female hands of the Misses Burton.

already provides to generations of her female ancestors and their history: it is the name not only of her grandmother but of 'her mother before her' (90), directly placing her in a chain of foremothers connected by their name. Margaret's lack of curiosity and her failure to relate to this element of her family and cultural past creates a gap in her process of self-discovery, but one which she can only acknowledge once more pressing battles for autonomy and acceptance have been won, and she is flying over Barbados on her way to Tobago:

'Do you hear that, Zulma? Barbados.' We peered through the window.
'Gee it's pretty – I didn't think it would be so pretty. Look at all the red roofs and the sea, it's so blue. It's nice isn't it? I wonder why he left?'

The image was gone so quickly, but not from my mind. I was thinking of the tiny, perfect island I had just seen. I wished the plane could have stood still over it for a while so I could look some more. (Philip 1988: 149)

Now that its designation as a place of punishment has been removed, Margaret is curious about Barbados and ready to 'look some more'. Although she does not yet have opportunity to experience the physical place, the narrative suggests that she is beginning to incorporate this part of her past and her heritage into her imagination, which plays such a crucial role in the construction of her identity.

Margaret's lack of a connection with her grandmother is represented by the absence of stories about her. The breakdown in communication between Margaret and her father means that there is little opportunity or inclination to share stories about family and history from Barbados. When Cuthbert does speak of his Bajan past, with perhaps surprising warmth, it is only of himself and his (probably male) friends and of an almost idealized childhood, 'when the world is yours and you are the world.' (Philip 1988: 55) From the father who is keen to dissociate himself from any expression of Caribbean culture this tale is without any meaningful context and seems irretrievably distant and romanticized, especially for the troubled teenager who identifies with figures from the past through a shared knowledge of struggle and conflict with authority. In the same way that the *Cosby Show* is too 'perrrrfect' (3), so her father's recalled childhood is alien to Margaret, a fantasy or fairytale lacking any apparent relevance to her own preoccupations and the experiences through which she understands and defines herself. Cuthbert's story, of cricket games and mango feasts, is also missing any reference to his mother, her grandmother, Margaret, an apparently insignificant presence in this remembered Eden. However, it is not simply the case that Margaret does not have very much material about her paternal grandmother. She is adept at fashioning meaningful stories for her other foremothers, sometimes from only the sparsest of information, as

with Harriet Blewchamp. She creatively extrapolates around the symbolic importance of these figures to make her own stories about them for herself. But Grandmother Margaret is not merely exorcised from Cuthbert's stories of his Barbadian youth, she is appropriated by him as the proxy of his patriarchal power; of Cuthbert's many attempts to silence the women around him this is perhaps his most successful. The only meaning that either her grandmother or her name has for Margaret is derived from her father: 'I mean, like who was Margaret? My father's mother, whom I didn't really know, and didn't like, because HE was always threatening to send me to her for some Good West Indian Discipline.' (Philip 1988: 25)

5.4 Stories in Dialogue

The name Harriet, in contrast to the connotations of control and oppression that have collected around the name Margaret, is resonant with implied rebelliousness, female strength and liberty. Harriet is the name Margaret might have had, the name given to her by Harriet Blewchamp, and it is loaded with meaning. According to Margaret's mother, Harriet Blewchamp had wanted Margaret to have her name because she recognized in her a shared courage and energy even as an infant:

'...she took a real liking to you. Said you reminded her of herself and she used to use a word to describe you – feisty – that sound very much what I always say you acting like – faysty. I asked her once and they mean the same thing. Strange, from the first day she lay eyes on you in the hospital she like you. She even asked me to call you Harriet, her name, but Cuthbert wanted Margaret, his mother's name. She used to call you Harriet though...' (Philip 1988: 22)

Harriet Blewchamp values in Margaret the very qualities that her family do not seem to understand. The play on the word 'feisty' suggests the ambiguity both of language and of cultural responses to female feistiness. It is used alternately here as a term of approval and reproach, implying a cultural and contextual slippage between the standard English (white) 'feisty' and the idiomatic Caribbean (black) 'faysty'. Tina's story also reveals that Margaret's name has been contested from the beginning, the site of a struggle between her father's determination to control her and this foremother's wish to mark the continuity, of struggle and of strength, between these generations of women. Although Margaret's initial interest is in the money that this 'second mother' has left her, and the

possibility it provides for helping Zulma, Harriet Blewchamp's other legacy, her name, becomes more important and perhaps more empowering than the financial bequest.⁵

Although her mother is able to provide only partial hints to Harriet Blewchamp's past, Margaret is quick to expand these into a story of survival:

'... A friend of mine who used to work for someone who knew her said she was in the war and escaped.'

'You mean she was a spy?'

'Don't think so – go and get me some hairpins, and hurry.'

I came back with the hairpins real quick.

'Well, if she wasn't a spy, what was she escaping from?'

'I don't know Margaret. She had some numbers tattooed on her wrist that my friend said was connected with the war, but she never talked about it.'

'Numbers! She must have been Jewish, Mum – those numbers mean she was in a concentration camp.'

'I don't know Margaret. ...' (Philip 1988: 23)

From these scant scraps of information Margaret is adept at reconstructing a past, a story, and so an identity for Harriet Blewchamp, by organizing the factual clues into a narrative of implied resistance. Even though Harriet Blewchamp is white, Margaret is able to imagine a connection based on a shared history of persecution by a brutal and racist regime, and so responds to her story, positioning her as another foremother. However, Margaret's urgency in collecting the facts and piecing together the evidence to reconstruct an intelligible narrative is in marked contrast to her mother's telling of this story which is characterized by hesitation, deferral and uncertainty. Tina recovers Harriet Blewchamp's past by access to a different kind of historical material: although factual evidence is sparse and frequently vague, her story is rich in intuitive and emotional detail. Several things are striking about Tina's story: the shape of the narrative, which is fragmented and non-linear, her focus on personal detail rather than broader historical context, that the telling is part of a dialogue rather than a self-contained account, and the largely non-linguistic character of much of her material.

Chamberlain, discussing the complexities of interpreting oral testimonies as historical evidence, argues for attention to the shape as well as the content of the narratives told by interviewees:

⁵ Mrs Blewchamp also bequeaths Margaret an archive of papers and books, perhaps to allow her fuller access to their mutual histories, although within the text this remains only a latent project.

... whereas the men presented their life accounts in the form of linear chronology, in the women's accounts, detail, time and chronology were often conflated. For the historian, the chronology of their lives, and their specific migration stories, needed to be disentangled from the multiple voices which were constructing and shaping them. Of course, a coherent thread could be pulled out, and a 'realistic' account, that was both readable and comprehensible could be presented, but to do so would have distorted the wider weave of their lives. (Chamberlain 2000: 163)

While these Caribbean women's stories appear to be more 'surreal' (Chamberlain 2000: 157) than traditionally privileged realist historiography (and so by implication less intelligible and useful historically), Chamberlain contends that the form of these accounts, the ways in which they structure memories and relationships, and employ language, tense and cultural metaphors, reflect the strongly relational and collective identities of Caribbean women. The insights gleaned from this style of 'topic-associated response' (Chamberlain 2000: 161) are different from those accessible in the more conventional chronological, realist accounts, from which social, economic and political details are more easily extracted, but map frequently elided historical experiences and relationships. However, it is just this lack of coherent structure and narrative drive in Tina's story about Harriet Blewchamp that so frustrates Margaret. Tina's starting point is neither with the verifiable facts, the numbers tattooed on Harriet Blewchamp's arm, nor at the chronological beginning of the story. The shape of her account inverts the traditionally privileged realist, rational, objective (Western and masculine) patterns of cause and effect and favours a subjective, compassionate response: ' "She never told me much, in words that is, but her eyes used to talk a lot. You just had to look at them and know that she had seen some bad times, real bad times ... well at least I could see it."' (Philip 1988: 21) The story unfolds backwards and discontinuously and only with regular prompting from Margaret, emerging through fragments of understanding and experience: the silent recognition of suffering between the two women, the implied loss of Harriet holding Tina's newborn children with a 'far-away look' in her eyes (22), the mention, from an external third party, of the war, and finally the physical evidence, inscribed on Harriet's body, of the numbers. Although, even then, Tina rejects committing herself or inserting her story within the grand, master narrative of History, 'I don't know Margaret' (23) she says to her daughter's logical inference that the numbers signify Harriet's survival of the Holocaust.

Tina's emphasis in her storytelling is consistently on the small, the private, the emotional and the subjective. When recalling Harriet Blewchamp's funeral and the 'important-looking' man (23) who came to speak to her she shows no interest in the

man's status or his historical significance, remembering instead an emotional detail: 'He was crying; I had never seen a man cry before or since.' (Philip 1988:23) She seems almost wary of allowing her story to become complicit in the broader, grand-scale narrative of History, continually retreating from these implications and connections and re-focussing on intimate observations and impressions. On one level the text here performs the important function of giving voice to the stories of those traditionally excluded and silenced by the authoritative master narratives of History. As a black woman, Tina has traditionally been disenfranchised and denied agency from the project of history and, further to this, her use of language and narrative, her choices about what to tell and how to tell it have been regarded as insignificant and unreliable. But Tina's story demonstrates, as Chamberlain argues, that these stories enrich the inevitable partiality of historical enquiry: '...historians should perhaps, at least in reading and interpreting oral testimony, begin to interpolate into the infinitely small in order to see the new expanse. There is, perhaps, more than one way of imagining the past.' (Chamberlain 2000: 164) However, this is not all that the text offers here. Tina's story is told within a conversation, a dialogue with Margaret who, as persistently as Tina keeps returning to the small, is constantly pushing outwards to discover a wider significance. With reference to her adult work, Philip has spoken about how attempts to creatively juxtapose '...two ideas of history, the uppercase History –the large events that happened ... with [the] small history of family and so on...' (Philip in Mahlis 2004: 686) impact on the form that the writing takes, and led to the development of a choral voice, or multivocality in her poems. In a different interview Philip explains how fundamental this has become to her work: 'The form of a work is of particular importance to me, and often the form of a work is as much the substance of it as the content is. The form of discourse, the way that the different parts speak to each other, is an integral part of that poem.' (Philip in Saunders 2005: 215) This discourse is dramatized here in the conversation between Tina and Margaret. Space and voice are given to both upper- and lower-case history so that it is not a matter of privileging one at the exclusion of the other, but creating a dialogue, an intercourse in which the elisions and insights of both are made visible, and through which the relationship between them can be explored. Both ways of telling Harriet Blewchamp's story are partial, limited to personal agenda or perspective; telling them together, however, opens up further meanings, but also reveals other gaps (the friend that knew about the war and the old man at the funeral, for instance). This dialogue works as part of the broader polyvocality of the text, weaving different voices through Margaret's narrative to collect not only new information, experiences and insights but also alternative ways of seeing and speaking.

Mae Gwendolyn Henderson has argued that dialogue is, in a variety of forms, a significant feature of black women's writing. As both black and female, these writers frequently

project a plural sense of selfhood, as I have argued, and engage multiple, diverse and simultaneous racial and gendered perspectives to respond to marginalization not simply from the dominant, white, masculine discursive order, but also from the oppositional discourses of black (male) and feminist (white) criticism:

What is at once characteristic and suggestive about black women's writing is its interlocutory, or dialogic, character, reflecting not only a relationship with the 'other(s),' but an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of self that constitute the matrix of black female subjectivity. The interlocutory character of black women's writing is, thus, not only a consequence of a dialogic relationship with an imaginary or 'generalized Other,' but a dialogue with the aspects of 'otherness' within the self. (Henderson 1989: 17-18)

Henderson employs Bakhtin's dialogics to describe the interaction between the competing positions that black women's voices occupy, both within her own subjectivity and in her social and creative exchanges. However, Henderson also contends that this '*dialogic of differences*' operates alongside a '*dialectic of identity*' [Henderson's italics] which speaks to '...those aspects of the self shared with others.' (Henderson 1989: 19) It is this simultaneous expression of difference and identity that Henderson characterizes as key to black women's writing:

Through the multiple voices that enunciate her complex subjectivity, the black woman writer not only speaks familiarly in the discourse of the other(s), but as Other she is in contestorial dialogue with the hegemonic dominant and subdominant or 'ambiguously (non)hegemonic' discourses. These writers enter simultaneously into familial, or testimonial and public, or competitive discourses – discourses that both affirm and challenge the values and expectations of the reader. As such, black women enter into testimonial discourse with black men as black, with white women as women, and with black women as black women. At the same time, they enter into competitive discourse with black men as women, with white women as blacks, and with white men as black women. If black women speak a discourse of racial and gendered difference in the dominant or hegemonic discursive order, they speak a discourse of racial and gender identity and difference in the subdominant discursive order. (Henderson 1989: 20-21)

This flexibility and plurality of expression Henderson terms 'speaking in tongues'. It is a phrase which has obvious biblical and religious connotations and also one that encompasses a dual association: by 'speaking in tongues' Henderson means both the practices

of glossolalia and heteroglossia. Glossolalia, as performed in some churches and religious communities, refers to the ecstatic unknown speech which is unintelligible to others but which is commonly perceived to be a sign of privileged spiritual communication. Heteroglossia, which also has a biblical precedent, is the alternative gift of speaking many languages, and so the ability to communicate beyond the speaker's own linguistic group:

If glossolalia suggests private, nonmediated, nondifferentiated univocality, heteroglossia connotes public, differentiated, social, mediated, dialogic discourse. Returning from the trope to the act of reading, perhaps we can say that speaking in tongues connotes both the semiotic, presymbolic babble (baby talk), as between mother and child – which Julia Kristeva postulates as the ‘mother tongue’ – as well as the diversity of voices, discourses, and languages described by Mikhail Bakhtin. (Henderson 1989: 22)

The dialogues and tensions between the plurality of voices in black women's writing are not only between the various public discourses which the texts negotiate, but also between these diverse modes of speech and expression.

These different forms of speech are encoded in the dialogue between Margaret and Tina. On one level, Margaret identifies with Harriet Blewchamp, although neither she nor her mother attempts to elide the racial difference – ‘... and Mrs Blewchamp, who was no relative of mine, liked me and thought I was special – she was even white.’ (Philip 1988: 25) – but the way that she understands and speaks of this identification is predominantly in terms of a shared opposition to racist, white, masculine authority. Margaret is keen to connect Harriet Blewchamp's story to world events, to the realm of public history and large-scale conflicts. The story she extracts fits easily within conventional historical codes: she identifies instances of action and opposition, moments that place the individual within a context of upper-case History and emphasize struggle and tension. In Henderson's terms, she constructs Harriet's story as competitive discourse against a white, male hegemony. Margaret's ability to identify with Harriet Blewchamp is based on this sense of mutual resistance, rather than other, broader shared experiences, and she defines her in terms of her opposition to the dominant order. Her desire to have the story told quickly also suggests her assumption that it will be easily and immediately comprehensible and communicable in language. For Tina, however, the task of translating the story into words is difficult and slow:

‘Sorry Mum, but you just telling the story so slowly. Can't you talk faster?’

‘My tongue moving as fast as I can move it, Margaret. You too rude child, I keep telling you that.’ (Philip 1988: 21)

The use of the word *tongue* accentuates the physicality inherent in Tina’s retelling, which is based less on the abstract signs of language than on more intuitive and corporeal forms of communication. Tina’s telling of Harriet’s story is closer to Henderson’s notion of glossolalia, a ‘dialectics of identity’. Understanding between the two women is gleaned from private encounters and non-linguistic exchanges. When Tina tells Margaret that Harriet’s eyes spoke of the bad times she had seen she qualifies this by saying, ‘well at least I could see it’ (21), implying that this recognition is founded on a shared experience of suffering, inaccessible to the privileged, the safe and the lucky. The image of Harriet holding Tina’s babies and ‘talk[ing] to herself real low’ (22) again focuses attention on the female, maternal body and on feminine instinct rather than on intelligible ‘known’ languages and the discourses, like history for which there is an implied distrust. The empathy between these two women emanates from shared experiences like sorrow and motherhood, experiences which may be affected by but are not based on their interactions with the dominant hegemonic order. From the very beginning of the text Margaret demonstrates her skill at speaking in many public voices, alternating between Harriet and Margaret, switching register to talk to adults or peers, but as the narrative progresses she also becomes attuned to these more personal and obscure languages, the glossolalia, which are often expressed through women’s bodies, in the intimate details of their lives and in the subconscious imagery of dreams.

5.5 A Multitude of Foremothers

Harriet Blewchamp’s story is interesting because these two aspects of history and of discourse are brought together in the dialogue between Margaret and Tina, dramatizing the interplay between them. In many ways this exchange is a microcosm for how the text as a whole operates, juxtaposing different/similar stories and diverse forms of telling, and so sliding between the private and the public, between glossolalia and heteroglossia. The text balances Margaret’s interest in ‘famous women’ (27) as historical foremothers with the intensely intimate, previously unspoken narratives of the women she knows in her community, women that she had formerly viewed more simply, defining them by their roles rather than their experience. Both Tina and Mrs Billings reveal to Margaret their memories of an abusive adolescence, when, as orphaned or abandoned black girls, they were chronically overworked by the relatives who took them in. Tina recalls how her name became a weapon with which to exploit her, calling her to task after task, until she could no longer endure the sound of it, as she explains to her daughter how she

also changed her name, from Vashtina to Tina. Mrs Billings also tells a story of neglect, beatings and life-sapping drudgery at the hands of her aunt. But these are also tales of survival and escape. Both women finally elude the control of their guardians, Tina by subverting her name and Mrs Billings in her flight from the house with her aunt's silver. The private struggles and hidden heroism of these women with whom Margaret has immediate contact recontextualize her fascination with the exploits of famous women like Harriet Tubman and Mata Hari by demonstrating that their experience and courage are not unique or extraordinary, and so inaccessible, qualities. Apart from the political and social defiance that these historical figures represent, Margaret is also attracted by the quality of excitement in their stories. The settings, during slavery and wartime, and the focus on daring escapes and espionage, transform the biographies of these women into adventure stories. While this appeals to Margaret's need for strong, active role models it also removes them a step from her own struggles – she imagines herself swallowing cyanide rather than giving away her secrets (28) or speculates that she needs a war to provide opportunity for her own heroic feats (37) – making their example less attainable. The local, intimate, immediate memories of the women that Margaret knows from everyday life create an important bridge between the heightened adventures of these much mythologized historical figures, and a broader, more encompassing continuum or tradition of struggle and survival in black women's culture. Not only do their testimonies permit Margaret new insight into these women as individuals – 'I understood better why she always wanted to buy things for the house and for us' (Philip 1988: 48) – but it also allows her to see what they share.

Here again, the way in which the stories are told is as significant as the material they contain. While Margaret actively seeks out information about Harriet Tubman and Mata Hari, the stories from Tina and Mrs Billings erupt spontaneously, and almost involuntarily, into the conversation unbidden. In both cases the memories are triggered by Margaret asking the women for help – she asks her mother to start calling her Harriet, and Mrs Billings to help her and Zulma run away – and these requests bring to the surface buried incidents from their own lives which echo Margaret's problems and anxieties. The stories are not what Margaret expects or wants and, in contrast to her keen interest in the lives of historically more removed foremothers, she is uncomfortable with the revelations her requests prompt. The memories recounted by Tina and Mrs Billings are strongly confessional in style. They are told to Margaret directly, they are not mediated or filtered through books, films, photographs or history, nor are they rendered as a dialogue here. The usually curious and interrogative Margaret is silent, transfixed, throughout their accounts and on both occasions she senses that the women have almost forgotten that she is there: 'Mrs B suddenly went loose, it was funny, like a big sack or balloon losing its air. She covered her face with both hands, then wiped

them over her closed eyes, as if she was trying to wipe away something. She just sat there staring, not at me, but at something only she could see.’ (Philip 1988: 98) Instead the women speak from an apparently altered state of consciousness, withdrawn into themselves and into their memories, Tina’s face is ‘pulled in and closed’ (47) and later Mrs Billings tells Margaret, ‘... forgive me, child, forgive me, but I couldn’t help myself. When I heard you wanted to run away, everything just came rushing back so clear and fresh; it was like I was there again, at Auntie Cleo’s, just wanting to get out.’ (Philip 1988: 102) Their trance-like detachment from the present moment is reminiscent of the state of those possessed by the spirit while speaking in tongues in a religious context. The physical effects of this are particularly apparent in Mrs Billings whose body and voice are dramatically transformed as these powerful memories resurface and become present. Words alone seem insufficient to express her experience of loss and abjection, an experience that inextricably involved physical as well as psychological dis-integration, and so which requires not only re-telling but also re-membling through her body:

‘What I did was wrong, very wrong ... I know that, knew it back then. But she stole my health, my strength ... and my youth ...’ Her face was deep grey now. I was getting real scared – what if she got sick? Her body had collapsed even further into itself, she looked like she didn’t have any bones, like she was all flesh. If I could put a colour to her voice, it would have been the same rough, grey colour as her face. ‘I figured it was a fair exchange – my youth for Aunt Cleo’s money.’ She laughed again, pulled herself up and her skeleton came back. (Philip 1988: 101)

The intensity of these memories and the cost of retelling them are expressed through Mrs Billings’s body as well as her words, draining her of colour and form, re-enacting the dehumanizing effect of the abuses she has suffered. Margaret, too, responds with her body, as she experiences the physicality of this storytelling: ‘Her laughter was like a hoarse bark, it scraped at my ears.’ (Philip 1988: 101) Tina’s meditation on her name is less explicitly corporeal, but the structure of her sentences reflects the physical and emotional toll of her experience rather than being organised to present a linear narrative. There are several iterative and cumulative sentences which repeat the same idea, expressing firstly her isolation: ‘I had nowhere to go, no place to put my head, no bed, nothing’ (Philip 1988: 48), and then her misuse: ‘And every day a million time a day is “Vashtina”’: Vashtina fetch, Vashtina carry, Vashtina clean, Vashtina scrub and Vashtina wash – all day long.’ (Philip 1988:48) Here too the past seems to be carried into the present through these chanted phrases; the memory and the language seem to possess the speaker.

Henderson's trope of speaking in tongues is useful here. The style of these stories, which are presented as oral tales within the written text, reflects the conditions of glossolalia in the spiritualist sense. The women suddenly and involuntarily begin to speak, they appear disconnected from the present moment and become rapt in the process of telling their histories. In both cases Margaret senses that she is being given privileged access to normally unspoken stories, that these mother figures are sharing with her, an adolescent girl on the cusp of womanhood, a silenced part of their lives:

I wrapped my arms around myself. I didn't really want to listen, but Mrs B's words wouldn't let me go – I felt caught by them – like they had taken the place of my words. Somewhere I knew that Mrs B had to tell me what she was telling me, and she told it like it was the first time she had ever told the story. (Philip 1988: 100)

While throughout the text Margaret self-consciously forges a connection with foremothers from history, women she believes shared and valued strength of will and 'faystyness', and who she changes her name to emulate, she persistently feels misunderstood by and separate from her present family and community. These stories from immediate foremothers, however, speak directly of shared desires and experiences, a 'dialectics of identity' in Henderson's terms, which is not publicly told, but privately communicated. Although the effect on Margaret does not involve an instantaneous awakening or awareness of belonging within a current community of women, the stories are a vital part of her understanding her identity not simply in terms of opposition to the variously adult, male, white, conformist, stereotypical roles and authorities which she perceives threaten her individuality, but also as part of a continuing tradition, a community and a heritage, a process which allows her to reclaim her given name by the end of the text. As well as connecting directly with Margaret's present experience the personal testimonies of Tina and Mrs Billings, which tell of their virtual enslavement in the post-abolition period (and within their own community), mirror the struggles of the more historically distant women of the slave era, including Harriet Tubman, and demonstrate how liberty, for black women, is an ongoing campaign, of which Margaret becomes a part in her own battles for freedom.

And yet there are no easy or clear distinctions between the public and the private voices within the text. Each of the many stories within the narrative engages in Henderson's 'simultaneity of discourse', this 'speaking in tongues' (Henderson 1989: 22). Alongside the private story of Harriet Blewchamp, the primary inspiration for Margaret's choice of an alternative name is Harriet Tubman, the ex-slave and heroic conductor on the Underground Railroad who led an estimated three hundred slaves to freedom between 1849 and 1860. She is, immediately, a far more public figure about whom Margaret

has learnt at school and whose life is officially recorded in books. Even so, Harriet Tubman's story is, as the text makes clear, a specialized interest rather than part of the mainstream narrative of history: Margaret has studied her only in her black heritage classes. She is exactly the kind of role model that Margaret actively seeks, an emblem of black female resistance who, like Angela Davis whom Zulma cites as an aspirational figure, is famous for her opposition to the injustices of white male power. She appears to be an obvious choice in many ways, particularly in her defiance of gender and racial boundaries, taking on roles involving leadership, planning military campaigns during the Civil War and, importantly, leaving a mark on the historical record. However, the other renowned figure who intrigues and inspires Margaret is an apparently more confusing and problematic choice.

Mata Hari was a white, European woman of uncertain, if any, political affiliations, who obtained military secrets from her influential lovers during the First World War on the promise of considerable financial rewards. Famous also for her exotic, minimally clothed dances before the war, she is implicated in the orientalist, imperial appropriation and misrepresentation of Eastern culture (in this case Malay and Indonesian), primarily in the service of Western, male titillation, and despite her implied sexual power as a courtesan she appears ultimately to have been silenced by the closed trial for treason which preceded her execution in France in 1917. She is an incongruous role model, even potential foremother, for a black, prepubescent, post-colonial, politicized girl. However, Mata Hari's history can be seen to involve multiple crossings or confusions between the public and the private realms, between the known and the unknown, the reality and the myth, the popular image and the untold story. As a dancer on the Paris stage Mata Hari had a public presence, although she created this persona using a fictional name and identity: the Dutch Margaretha Zelle MacLeod⁶ claimed to be the daughter of a Malay princess, adopting a name which translates from the Malay as 'eye of the day'. This public reputation provided her with access to influential men which allowed her to carry out her secret work of spying, an occupation which is necessarily covert. Although she has subsequently become most famous for her espionage, the details of this are extremely murky and facts are difficult to obtain because the court records of her trial are sealed. Another layer of ambiguity is created by the popular mythology of the 'femme fatale' spy and the film versions of the story, most notably the one in which she is played by the notoriously mysterious Greta Garbo: '... Mata Hari ... has come to personify the archetypal female spy, not only of the First World War but also of the modern era, one who seduces men into betraying their country's secrets and then passes them on to the enemy.' (Grayzel 2002: 44) Mata Hari's story performs a tightrope act in which public

⁶ The doubling of Margaret with Margaretha here perhaps suggests an encoded link between Philip's protagonist and this enigmatic figure's capacity for reinvention.

image and private, concealed information operate to balance, and eventually unbalance, readings of this socially and sexually deviant woman. The juxtaposition of this problematic, contested, contradictory character with the apparently more straightforwardly emblematic and uncomplicated figure of Harriet Tubman works to expose some of the instabilities and tensions within popular perceptions and representations of her, as, on the one hand, the public face of resistance to slavery and, on the other, as Margaret says, a kind of spy who, by necessity, carried out her work in secret.

Nellie Y. McKay argues that the site of Black women's resistance and their claim to selfhood is often located in private spaces and encounters in their autobiographical writing. This, McKay claims, is markedly different from the public declarations of autonomy found in black men's writing. Comparing the slave autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, McKay demonstrates the contrast between Douglass's public defiance of his master as pivotal moment of self-assertion and the covert resistance of Linda Brent, Jacobs's textual persona, to gain some level of personal control:

Brent's presentation of her life during and after enslavement includes a portrait of the constricted physical and psychological spaces allotted to black women and contrasts sharply with Douglass's audacious statement of 'walking away from slavery,' followed by his meteoric rise to abolitionist spokesman par excellence. . . . But in the outcome of her efforts to forge her own freedom Brent's strategies deserve great applause. Her political insights, her ingenuity in thwarting her master, and her ultimate success in depriving him of power over her life make her text extremely significant in the larger struggle for black freedom. (McKay 1998: 98)

This is a trend which is reflected in Tina's stories, particularly, in *Harriet's Daughter*, where personal freedom is achieved through small but meaningful acts such as subverting her name and, eventually, defending her daughter. In this last act it is significant that Tina does not choose a direct confrontation with Cuthbert about her decision to defy his plans to send Margaret to live with his mother, but, quietly and with the support of other women, she takes control of the situation:

After we women made our plans, everything went real quickly – new clothes, tickets, passports; my mum didn't tell my dad a thing. She let him think I was on my way to Barbados. She now had an extra something in her voice when she spoke to him – like the days of taking crap from him were coming to an end – and fast. (Philip 1988: 128)

However, McKay also notes exceptions to her model and cites Harriet Tubman, ‘well-known for her bold missions of rescue’ (McKay 1998: 98), as an unusual example of an (ex)slave woman who operated within the public sphere and engaged in acts more commonly associated with male heroism. McKay is careful to define these differences not qualitatively but in terms of opportunity and it is self-evident that Tubman’s place in the historical record is a result of her public profile which is in contrast to the clandestine challenges to slavery made by many now anonymous women. Yet despite her notoriety in her own lifetime – there was a reward of forty thousand dollars offered for her capture – and her almost iconic status as a symbol of resistance then and now, the success of Harriet Tubman’s work was reliant on her ability to operate undercover. Although Harriet Tubman undoubtedly had an active public persona and overtly partook in a competitive discourse of opposition to slavery and discrimination through her participation in the abolitionist movement, for which she made speeches and gave lectures, and through her extraordinary involvement in planning and implementing military campaigns with the Union army during the Civil War (Hine 1993: 1179), she simultaneously employed a privileged discourse of secret codes and signs to secure her own and her people’s freedom by guiding escaped slaves on the long and dangerous journey north to Canada and liberty. The public self is always contingent upon this paradoxically both private and collective self. In this context McKay’s observations about the gendered construction of selfhood still seem relevant to Harriet Tubman. Her contradictory relationship to the public sphere is made apparent in a letter from Frederick Douglass in 1868 in support of the publication of her biography:

The difference between us is very marked. Most that I have done and suffered in the service of our cause has been in public, and I have received much encouragement at every step of the way. You, on the other hand, have labored in a private way. I have wrought in the day – you the night. I have had the applause of the crowd and the satisfaction that comes from being approved by the multitude, while the most that you have done has been witnessed by a few trembling, scared, and foot-sore bondsmen and women, whom you have led out of the house of bondage, and whose heartfelt ‘God bless you’ has been your only reward. The midnight sky and the silent stars have been the witness to your devotion to freedom. (Douglass quoted in Hine 1993: 1180)

The public self constructed by the written text of Sarah Elizabeth Bradford’s biography is qualified here by Douglass’s recognition of Harriet Tubman’s hidden life.

And despite Margaret’s ostensive focus on finding a famous figure with whom she can identify, it is consistently the closed, covert elements of Harriet Tubman’s story

that are emphasized in *Harriet's Daughter*. Early references in the text pair Harriet Tubman with Mata Hari, drawing attention to the doubleness of her role, as I have argued above, and to the aspects of her work which are allied to espionage. Mata Hari is actually mentioned first in the narrative and Margaret's initial interest in her is based on a naively glamorized notion of what it means to be a spy: ' "Hey guys," I said, "can you imagine being killed 'in the line of duty'?" I dropped my voice on the last words, "and getting medals after you die? That would be real exciting wouldn't it? I think I would like to be a spy."' (Philip 1988: 27) In this context spying represents a kind of adventure fantasy: the heightened tone is supported by Mata Hari's exotic stage costumes in the book Margaret borrows from the library and the drama implied by the photograph of her being shot by the firing squad. In contrast, Harriet Tubman's photograph is disappointingly unsensational until Margaret looks beyond the surface to read the story told in the Underground Railroad conductor's eyes, in yet another form of secret communication:

On the back of one of the Tubman books was a picture of Harriet Tubman; for someone who lived dangerously she looked quite harmless. I don't know what I was expecting, but it wasn't the calm strong face that stared back at me from the cover – and plain too. The eyes though, looked like they had seen things; maybe this was what my mother meant when she talked of Mrs Blewchamp's eyes – like they'd seen things. Would I trust my life to this woman? I stared at the face, stroked the picture ... yes, yes I would. I would trust her. (Philip 1988: 31)

But the emphasis shifts when Mata Hari appears in Margaret's dream about Harriet Tubman, where their juxtaposition leads Margaret to rethink her ideas about spying. Contemplating this dream and what she has read the following morning, Margaret explores her own opportunities for surveillance and finds them lacking in both the desired excitement and, indeed, very much purpose. However, the connection created between the two women in the dream stimulates Margaret to consider spying in a broader context and to recognise the skills and tactics of espionage in the missions of Harriet Tubman.

Unlike Mata Hari, however, the details of whose secrets are either unknown or irrelevant to Margaret, Harriet Tubman's secrets have substance, form and meaning: 'Harriet Tubman. She was a sort of spy too, but her work was even more scary. She had to take care of people: babies, children, men and women – she had to bring them all the way up to Canada, and not get caught. She was carrying secrets too, a different kind of secret – people; and we didn't need a war for this either.' (Philip 1988:37) Whereas spying as an idea had previously been disconnected from reality, like the scary stories Margaret likes

to hear when she knows she is safe (28), through Harriet Tubman it becomes a practical strategy for helping Zulma, for resisting the authority of adults, and for tackling her own sense of disempowerment. This is, significantly, also the point at which Margaret decides upon a new name. Like Tubman herself, who discarded her given name Araminta and took instead her mother's name, Margaret adopts the name of her spiritual foremother, Harriet. On one level this is an act of disguise, a spy's trick to outwit the enemy, but on another it is a more powerful claim of kinship and on the freedoms that heritage fought to secure: 'Harriet, Harriet Tubman, Harriet Blewchamp, again I thought of changing my name to one that meant something – like Harriet. Harriet Tubman was brave and strong and black like me. I think that was the first time I thought of wanting to be called Harriet – I wanted to *be* Harriet.' (Philip 1988: 37) Margaret increasingly identifies with Harriet Tubman through her own covert activities: through the game of the Underground Railroad which she organizes in secret, in the alternative names and disguises which she uses to evade the prescriptions of adult authority, in her plans to rescue Zulma, and in the privileged discourse of her dreams.

5.6 Finding a Voice

Dreams are a recurrent feature within Margaret's narrative and suggest the different discursive modes adopted by this first-person narrative voice. I have already argued for the text's polyvocality through the numerous other voices and stories encountered by the single narrator and each of these contributes to a patchwork not only of tales but of forms of speech and discourse. But in addition to these Margaret's own narrative displays considerable flexibility. The text opens with an initially disorientating fragment of the Underground Railroad game. 'Harriet' speaks in the past tense, chronicling the slaves'/children's flight to 'Freedom', but the style is very direct, providing a moment by moment commentary on their sensual, physical and emotional experiences. After the immediacy of this opening the narrative voice switches to the position it occupies most consistently throughout the text, that of the fourteen year old Margaret telling her story retrospectively. This voice, which forms the majority of the narrative, speaks in an informal, oral style; the language is idiomatic, characterized not only by slang expressions but also by the emphasis, hyperbole and repetition of adolescent speech:

It was all too much, especially living with a sister who fancied she was a clone of Denise Huxtable, and bloody, bloody hell, she was pretty, prettier than me. Thank God she was fat, well plump, and she wasn't rich; but she (my sister) – was really too much with her make-up and designer jeans, and all that gunk she put in her hair to make her look like Denise Huxtable. So

I grunted in agreement with Ti-cush; life did suck, it really did, and I had done nothing to deserve this from life, nothing. (Philip 1988: 3)

There is a truculence here which immediately establishes this as a teenage voice, full of petulant discontent and outrage that life is not fair. Yet there is more to Margaret's voice than this, as the use of prolepsis, first introducing the narrative voice in the context of the game, promises. Self-pity is generally quickly redirected into positive action and despite describing inarticulate nihilism – '... my jaw was too frozen for me to more than grunt my agreement to Ti-cush's favourite comment about the world – "Life sucks."' (Philip 1988:3) – Margaret's use of language and sentence structure is energetic and expressive.

The conversational tone also works to open the narrative outwards; Margaret tells her story to an implied audience. Although the complaints about parents and the observations about adult culture in general invite a complicity which suggests an implied adolescent audience, the text resists defining the addressee too closely. As a black, adolescent girl Margaret speaks from multiple sites of race, gender and age (another factor which compromises her place within the power structure) and constructs a dialogue which, to varying degrees throughout the text, recognises shared experience, with any or all of these positions, and articulates differences from among the implied audience. Alongside the many stories which are given space in the text, Margaret's own narrative voice also encompasses the plurality of which Henderson speaks: 'As gendered and racial subjects, black women speak/write in multiple voices – not all simultaneously or with equal weight, but with various and changing degrees of intensity, privileging one *parole* and then another.' (Henderson 1989: 36) These various exchanges surface in the different modes within the narrative of *Harriet's Daughter*.

The most characteristic features of Margaret's narrative voice are her determination to question everything and her refusal to be silenced. From the very first time the narrative voice speaks as Margaret the oral style implies a voice that wants and plans to be heard:

That was the first time we played the Underground Railway Game. Some might say that was when it all began.

No one did, but if anyone had – ask me that is – I would have said that it all began in the playground at my school, Winona, and before the Underground Railway Game. Some people might even say that it really began a long time before that, with me and my parents, but since I began with them you can say everything began with them. I prefer to say it began that day in the

playground. It was Monday, Monday the sixteenth of January: that was the day I met her, my friend Zulma. (Philip 1988: 2)

The choppy fragmented sentence structure, which is repeatedly interrupted by qualifying clauses, tangents, dashes and dramatic emphases, invites active reading and refuses to be confined, either by conventional syntax or by anyone who may attempt to prescribe the boundaries of her story. Margaret at once acknowledges that there are several ways to tell her story, destabilizing any notion of a single authoritative or authentic account, while simultaneously claiming ownership of the story as she wants to tell it. The tone is confident, perhaps even slightly defensive, and establishes Margaret's narrative stance in opposition to the adults who threaten to overwhelm or take control of her story. The narrative is a space in which she can exert control, renaming her domineering father as 'the MCP' (male chauvinist pig) (14), or, ironically and reductively, simply HE, her conformist brother as the Rib-Roast Prime Minister, and her favoured sister as the Chub Queen, reversing the advantage they have over her in the rest of her life. While her parents' most frequent complaint is that Margaret is 'too rude' and 'faysty' in the conversations and arguments with them that she records, within her narrative she goes further, interrogating their values and authority. Because of the explicit power dynamics of family life, much of Margaret's oppositional energy is directed towards her parents, especially her father, although this also provides a broader commentary on the views and values he embodies. More potently, however, Margaret's target is often the very nature of power relations. Her contention is that adults' will prevails not because it is right or better than children's, but merely because their position gives them power and challenges the hegemonic order as a whole: 'I had always known that most adults were con-artists who didn't run their lives any better than most kids – they just had more power – and here were my parents proving it to me.' (Philip 1988: 138) At this most explicit and accessible level, Margaret's oral, story-telling voice persistently engages with and challenges the discursive authority of others, both on an individual level and in the scale of social and cultural norms.

This questioning voice remains strong throughout the text; it is important for the survival of her identity, as her mother says in her climactic argument with Cuthbert: 'So she faysty and have a mouth on her, but she need it in this world, because it rough out there, specially when you our colour. She just have to learn when to use it.'" (Philip 1988: 138) But Margaret's selfhood is only partially constructed by her conflicts with the world around her, by defining herself in opposition to others. The text also narrates the growth of Margaret's identity, not just as a struggle with the 'other' but also as the development of the shared self. Partly this is achieved through the stories told to her by other women and her relationship with Zulma, through which she comes to recognize

a kinship, a continuity of identity. The sense of a connected, relational selfhood is also central to Margaret's invention of the Underground Railroad game. Although she devises the game herself as a way of dramatizing her frustrations and rehearsing her escape, she develops the idea in dialogue with her friends, adapting and revising the game's narrative as they talk. Playing the game also requires the participation and imagination of other children, so what begins as Margaret's private fantasy expands into an ongoing project of collective authorship. Margaret extends her identity, especially as everyone in the game calls her Harriet, through this communal creative project, finding solidarity and recognition among a diverse group of children. However, in addition to this tangible collective of friends, Margaret also develops bonds of identification in the more intimate space of her dreams.

The dreams which Margaret recounts early in the narrative display an obvious anxiety about her name and identity. In the first she is confronted by a firing squad of parents, her own and those of her friends, armed with signs with her name on, forcibly imposing this identity on her from their position of power. In this part of the dream she is significantly alone and voiceless against the united authority of the adults. In the second dream she cannot persuade her mother, who appears to be Harriet Tubman, to accept her newly chosen name, Harriet, and so finds herself un-named, without a recognizable identity. Both dreams are distressing and can easily be interpreted as expressions of her frustration. However what Margaret takes from these dreams on waking is a growing sense of connectedness to Harriet Tubman. The public texts of biography and history that she has borrowed from the library provide Margaret with information about Harriet Tubman's life but it is in her dreams that she develops a relationship with her as an ancestral figure: 'This was the first dream I had had about Harriet Tubman. I was going to have a lot more. Some I remembered and some I didn't, but I began to feel really close to her – like I knew her.' (Philip 1988: 37) In both of these dreams her usually strident voice, from which most of the narrative is constructed, fails her; she is un-voiced, being either unable to speak or unable to make herself heard. Instead, her connection to Harriet Tubman is marked in non-linguistic signs of identity, such as the transformation of the calm, plain face from the photograph in the book into one that smiles at Margaret, or the certainty with which Margaret knows that the woman with Harriet Tubman's face is her mother. So while her dreams play out her sense of alienation they are also imaginative spaces in which Margaret can create a personal, private connection with Harriet Tubman as a foremother, rather than a distant public figure.

Whereas the conversational tone of the majority of Margaret's narrative implies an audience, dreaming is, by its nature, a private activity, suggestive of subconscious or

suppressed anxieties and desires. Within the text these dreams create spaces where Margaret's public voice is suspended and the discourse shifts to a more surreal juxtaposition of images, which are not wholly reliant on language for meaning, and which gain significance in their relation to one another. The conflation of different historical moments to connect people and experiences works to illuminate the relationality and collectivity of Margaret's identity. An extended and particularly surreal dream occupies most of the final pages of the book, suggesting that the process is ongoing as Margaret engages with another aspect of her past in her journey to the Caribbean. Cynthia James argues that throughout the text Margaret reconnects with her West Indian heritage through Zulma: 'Through contact with her, Harriet can perform the West Indian-ness that is lost to the young West Indian born outside the West Indies.' (James 2007: 48) She goes on to observe the pivotal moment of this cultural exchange: 'On the flight, the two teenagers' dreams crisscross. Through airplane travel from modernity to rurality, Harriet crosses, literally and metaphorically, into the West Indian landscape she has only heard about, but is about to experience.' (James 2007: 48)

The simultaneity of the girls' dreams is also suggestive of the development of Margaret's relational identity. From the first time they meet in the playground there is a special form of communication between the girls. Margaret is particularly sensitive to Zulma's gestures, to the non-verbal parts of her expression, and she immediately understands the way that Zulma uses words:

'TTTo ... TT ... TTobb ...' She couldn't get out the word. She shook her head like she was trying to clear it, then she took a deep breath and slowly, very slowly and very carefully, I still remember it, she said the word, stopping between each syllable: 'To-ba-go.' I knew exactly what she meant, the same thing I mean when I say the word ab-sol-ute in that way. It means something extra special, even a little different. I had stopped walking, she had too – and I watched her as she said the word. It was like the word was fragile, sort of precious, and if she didn't say it like that it would break. (Philip 1988: 4-5)

This subtle manipulation of language, in which meaning and understanding shift minutely but significantly, represents a particular kind of privileged discourse between the girls which is the basis of their close bond. While there is not this kind of intensity to all their conversation, there are several instances where the communication between the girls slips just outside or beyond normal dialogue into a language which they make their own, such as Margaret's lessons in Tobago-talk or when Zulma sings along to Bob Marley: 'Goosebumps came up again on my skin as her big voice painted pictures of Trench

Town ghettos and love. When she sang the refrain, ‘no woman, no cry’, it was like she was telling herself – her mum, her gran, maybe even me, not to cry – and all I could do was cry.’ (Philip 1988: 61) In this context, the girls sharing the same dream on their journey to Tobago is a powerful expression of their capacity to share a discourse of identity.

The polyvocality of *Harriet’s Daughter* works on numerous levels to express the richness and collectivity of black women’s subjectivity. Throughout the text Margaret integrates the public and private voices of her foremothers, both distant and close, into a dynamic patchwork of stories which speak to each other within the narrative. But to do this, she herself has to develop a flexible tongue, capable of its own multivocality. In the same way that Margaret’s name becomes pliable, so that she can be alternately, sometimes simultaneously, both Margaret and Harriet, with the possibility of further transformations in the future, so her voice develops the ability to occupy multiple subject positions. In the course of the narrative Margaret demonstrates that she can speak the alienation, marginalization and opposition of her gendered, racialized, adolescent difference while her voice still draws strength and creativity from the shared cultural heritage of black women’s imaginative energy. To speak of Margaret finding her voice is perhaps a misnomer; more accurately, *Harriet’s Daughter* represents Margaret’s project to find her many voices.

Chapter 6

‘Outside her own authorship’ – *The Other Side Of Silence* by Margaret Mahy

Voice is a central component of storytelling. In the texts considered so far in this study speaking is crucial to the development of the protagonists’ creativity and identities. This is apparent in the character of Judy, as the hesitancy about representing her voice in *Seven Little Australians* limits her potential as a subversive figure within the text. While Mary begins *The Secret Garden* as a sullen, taciturn child, using her voice only to abuse or command, her tongue and her imagination are unlocked, like the garden, by conversations with Martha, Ben and Dickon, and her personal growth is articulated through her increasing skill with spoken words as she revives Colin with her magical stories of the garden, acquires new means of expression in her experiments with the Yorkshire dialect, and chants spells which make things happen in the world around her. Although Mary seems to speak less towards the end of the text, her voice has been the instrument of change throughout the book. Anne’s unrestrained talk both exasperates and beguiles in *Anne of Green Gables*, and while it is often the source of her troubles, her voice is also the means by which she imprints her imagination on the world, drawing others into her field of vision and remaking her environment and her circumstances in the process. In *Harriet’s Daughter*, Margaret is an irrepressibly voluble narrator/protagonist from the start, employing her voice to question, resist, answer back, try out alternative registers, assert herself and ask for help. Even so, throughout the text, Margaret’s conception of her own voice expands to recognise and incorporate not only the clamour of protest but also the unheard, unspoken, unintelligible voices which are equally part of her cultural identity. Naming, conversing, sharing, plotting, role playing, chanting and weaving together narratives and images, these girls use their voices to reshape the

world and construct their identities. The protagonist of Margaret Mahy's *The Other Side of Silence* (1995), however, is an elective mute. For the majority of the story Hero speaks to no-one except, briefly and secretly, her older brother, Athol. Apart from these occasional, covert exchanges, Hero is silent. Yet, despite her determined and persistent silence, it is, nevertheless, her voice that dominates the narrative because, in the first paradox in a text full of metafictional twists, tricks and ironies, Hero is the first-person narrator of her own silent story. This tension, between silence and story, is present throughout the novel, as Hero self-consciously explores the different qualities of silence, both her own and that of others, while simultaneously constructing herself in a narrative of words. Her story both charts the recovery of her voice and is itself the means by which that is achieved.

6.1 Silence and Stories

Fifteen-year old Hero's narrative is retrospective, providing a fictional-autobiographical account of events which took place three years earlier. Her story combines domestic drama, detailing life amidst her clever, loquacious family and the sudden return of her gifted but estranged older sister, Ginevra, with a kind of gothic, fairy tale mystery in which Hero becomes embroiled when she is tempted into the trees surrounding a large walled house which dominates the landscape of the fashionable middle-class suburb to which the family have recently moved. Hero has not spoken for three years when the story begins, and starts to talk again only at the end of the book, when, having discovered the secret of Credence House - that Miss Credence has kept her neglected, mentally disabled and, significantly, speechless daughter, Rinda, confined in a tower room for eighteen years - she calls out for help from the tower in which she herself has now also become trapped. As even these spare plot details suggest there is considerable play here with fairy tale tropes, gothic devices (especially from *Jane Eyre*), and the critical issues concerning the suppression of the female voice, most notably as chronicled by Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Silence is structurally and thematically central to *The Other Side of Silence*; it drives the plot forward (perhaps ironically) and the meaning of silence is an explicit topic of discussion as the retrospective narrative voice of Hero explores various explanations for her muteness, presenting the theories of child psychologists alongside her personal musings not only about her own refusal to speak but also about silence more generally. These direct engagements with the subject offer ways of thinking about silence as a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon (perhaps especially for the younger reader), while the text as a whole pulls together numerous, multi-textured threads of silence from which to weave a story. Rather than

being a passive absence, silence becomes, in the text, an active strategy through which to re-define what it means to speak with a voice.

The various silences in the book, chosen or imposed, prompt a broader consideration of the quality of silence, not simply as an absence of voice, sound or having anything to say, but as a historical, social, political and/or cultural position and sometimes as tactical decision. Silence abounds with possible meanings. It may suggest spiritual contemplation, a retreat from the social and the worldly; it may provide a strategy for defence, a refusal to be implicated, or, indeed, engaged; it can imply virtue and dignity or, conversely, guilt and cowardice; it may confound or illuminate. Silence is also an instrument of oppression, a denial of identity, validity, voice and worth and includes a refusal to hear as much as an interdiction on speech: voices are silenced when they are censored, ignored, shouted out or spoken over. However, silence can also be used to protest, to frustrate or to signal dissent or non-cooperation. Silence might be a response to trauma. It may indicate the lack of a forum or a language or a medium for speech. But silence is also a component of speech: the spaces between words, the pauses in sentences, are part of what gives them meaning; silence is a tool of the voice. The problem is that if silence can contain so many, often conflicting, meanings, is it not in danger of not really containing them at all and becoming something of a *tabula rasa* which can be inscribed with almost any sign? Yet as a trope and as a strategy this refusal of a singular, unequivocal meaning is part of its power: if language is often used authoritatively to fix meaning, silence can play a part in unsticking it. These contradictions surface in *The Other Side of Silence*: Hero's muteness allows her to escape the expectations of her family, and in particular, her mother's celebrated theories on child-rearing, but it also makes her vulnerable to the imposition of other people's stories.

Silence is also a well theorized concept in feminist scholarship and women's writing. In her introduction to *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*, Deborah Cameron summarises the multiple linguistic conditions which problematize women's relationship to language and speech, which range from when and where women's voices are deemed acceptable, and when they are denied or excluded, to what kinds of experience and perception dominant linguistic practices describe, validate and even create (Cameron 1992: 5-15). Across the scope of these various critical approaches is a recognition that language is intimately linked with power and agency, and that the dominant systems and modes of discourse privilege masculinity. In a more specifically literary context, women writers have long felt the effects of such systemic cultural silencing in getting their work published, in the forms and subjects which have been accessible to them and in critical responses to their work, and many contemporary women writers engage directly with this tying of their

tongues, including, in her work for adults, Marlene Nourbese Philip¹. The silencing of women's voices and of a female literary tradition has, since the 1970s, also been a central concern for feminist literary criticism. In the Anglo-American tradition influential texts such as Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Gilbert's and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) have analysed not only how female writers have been systematically excluded from the literary canon but also how female creativity itself has been designated both monstrous and mad. The French school of feminism, proceeding from a more psychoanalytic approach to language, has also explored women's alienation from the Symbolic Order and posited the possibility of women developing an alternative language which flows from their bodies and their unconscious, such as that posited by Hélène Cixous in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975): 'A woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardour – once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction – will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language.' (Cixous 1997: 355) Christine Wilkie-Stibbs deploys critical insights from both of these strands of feminist thought in her reading of *The Other Side of Silence*, to argue persuasively that the text dramatizes the alienating and often violent effects of the imposition of the patriarchal language on the female psyche (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 63-74).

The Other Side of Silence also resonates with another specific kind of silence: the often magical silence of fairy tales. Fairy tales are embedded in the text on multiple levels. They are explicitly part of Hero's frame of reference, both as a character and the teller of her story. She seeks advice, makes decisions and interprets her experience based on fairy tale precedents, she weaves the language of the tradition in with her own words and, in many ways, tells her own story in the form of a fairy tale. But fairy tales are deeply implicated in the silencing of women's voices, as Gilbert's and Gubar's analysis of 'Little Snow White' clearly demonstrates (Gilbert and Gubar 1980: 36-44), and the mute girls in Hero's story are also part of fairy tale culture. Ruth Bottingheimer, in her detailed study *Grimm's Bad Girls and Bold Boys*, remarks on the numerous devices in the text for silencing female figures. She includes the functional silencing of dead mothers in many of the most famous tales, alongside the implicit textual silencing of girls by limiting their direct or indirect speech in the stories and the narrative silences which arise as curses, punishments or tests which divest heroines of their voice. In her close analysis of the narrative and linguistic features of the tales, she argues:

...depriving a girl of her voice is particularly effective in breaking her will.

¹ See Philip's poem 'Discourse on the Logic of Language' (Appendix A) from her collection *She Tries Her Tongue: Her Silence Softly Breaks*. Her book *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (1991) is a complex exploration of the relationship between language and silence.

This completes the equation of speech with individual power and autonomy. It is precisely the deprivation and transformation of power that seems to motivate the shifts evident in the transformation of the individual folk and fairy tale heroines during the Early Modern period in European history. Positively presented, powerful female figures either were deprived of their inherent power or else had their power transformed in the tales into the godless potency of witchcraft, punishable by unimaginably vicious executions; on the other hand, a large proportion of 'happy' endings were preceded by the loss or deprivation of female speech. (Bottingheimer 1987: 76-7)

Although Bottingheimer argues that Wilhelm Grimm emphasized the virtue of female muteness in his editorial process, inscribing both his personal prejudices and those of nineteenth century Germany in general into the stories, there is a long history of idealized female silence and distrust of women's talk in fairy tales. Marina Warner provides numerous examples in her exploration of the fairy tale tradition, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, noting, in particular, the enduring popularity of Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Little Mermaid', in which the heroine not only relinquishes her tongue, but also sacrifices her life for her beloved prince: 'The story's chilling message is that cutting out your tongue is still not enough. To be saved, more is required: self-obliteration, dissolution.' (Warner 1995: 398)

However, while the silence of heroines may perform a moral or socializing function in fairy tales, it can also be seen to reflect the lived experience of the poor and powerless women amongst whom this oral culture flourished, as Warner has also observed. The triumph of silence may transform the state to which many of the tellers and listeners of fairy tales found themselves confined. Warner remembers her own response to the various versions of 'The Twelve Brothers' (Grimm) or 'The Wild Swans' (Andersen) in which a sister submits to years of silence, even when her own life is threatened, in order to free her brothers from their transformation into birds. Her pleasure in the tale, she recalls, derived from a perception of the sister's heroism in this redemptive act of silence, even if the terms of its expression were limited: 'Women's capacity for love and action tragically exceeded the permitted boundaries of their lives – this self-immolatory heroism was one of the few chivalrous enterprises open to them.' (Warner 1995: 393) Yet, here again is a tension between silence and story. The subtitle of Warner's book, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* is particularly illuminating, and she argues that these enduring, flexible and powerfully influential stories need to be understood not simply in textual or symbolic terms, but in the context of their telling, a context which often has women at its very centre. Although the most famous literary collections of fairy tales were transcribed by male writers like Charles Perrault (1697)

and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (final edition 1857), much of their source material was provided by women and draws upon a rich seam of folk tales which predominantly, if not exclusively, circulated amongst nurses, ‘old wives’, spinsters and children. Female silence within the stories, Warner suggests, needs to be understood in relation to the women’s voices that tell the tales, and sometimes to the way in which the stories shift and develop as they become written texts, edited and retold by male authors:

Just as history belongs to the victors and words change their meanings with a change of power, stories depend on the tellers and those to whom they are told who might later tell them again. ‘Never trust the artist. Trust the tale,’ D. H. Lawrence’s famous dictum, fails to notice how intertwined the teller and the tale always are. (Warner 1995: 25)

These are issues which seem central to *The Other Side of Silence*. Hero’s silence within the story is shaped by her own narrating voice. But even within this story, the younger Hero is already using tales and texts, and the magical kind of silence they so often contain, to construct a narrative of and for herself, which the older Hero then re-interprets and re-shapes in turn. Of course, the published text also adds another layer of telling, so that this story of silence actually echoes with many voices, like a fairy tale.

6.2 Birdsong: An Alternative Language

Hero’s speechlessness in *The Other Side of Silence* does not represent a lack of words or an absence of stories, but instead suggests a struggle with form and with positioning herself in relation to the story. It is apparent from the outset that Hero has a rich vocabulary of images and narratives; even as she introduces herself as an elective mute, she immediately qualifies her own silence: ‘All the same, even in the heart of my silence, I was still a word child.’ (Mahy 1997: 2) It also quickly becomes apparent that Hero is skilled at conjuring a vivid fantasy life for herself: ‘Once I was up in the trees I turned into a true child of the wild woods, someone who had been fostered and fed by birds.’ (Mahy 1997: 5) Hero’s silence, however, seems to proceed from her inability or unwillingness to voice her imagination. She conceives the world of imagination and stories as radically separate from the mundane everyday life of the real world, and experiences them as two distinct realms or lives:

And I had better explain that back then when I was only twelve, I had two lives. The life I lived with my family was my real life, but the tree life – the

early morning life, which I lived before anyone else was up and about – was also my true life even though it was partly invented. (Mahy 1997: 2)

The text is divided into chapters labelled ‘True Life’ and ‘Real Life’, reinforcing Hero’s sharp sense of distinction between these spheres and, for the most part, her two lives occupy different physical spaces: real life takes place in her suburban family home while true life happens in the forest, garden and, eventually, the Credence mansion. She places great emphasis and value on the true life of her imagination but, as the book opens, the twelve-year-old Hero cannot translate this imaginative energy into her everyday experience and this refusal to deploy her linguistic and creative skills to perceive and tell her real life narrative produces her literal and metaphorical silence in that realm.

Hero’s ‘true life’ is not really silent at all. She introduces her lack of speech as a charm she has cast: ‘I had somehow magicked myself into silence’ (Mahy 1997: 2); but, like so many fairy tale enchantments, this is a spell of transformation rather than a simple disappearing act². Even before Miss Credence names her Jorinda, Queen of the Birds, Hero’s imaginary self is strongly associated with bird imagery. The true life, tree canopy world is the space of birds and Hero becomes, within its branches, ‘a spirit of leaves and air’ (4). Her entry into the forest is a kind of flight (in both senses of the word) for although she eventually climbs over the wall from the playground into the Credence garden, this trajectory is first glimpsed from the highest arc of the swings: ‘I felt that if I was ever brave enough to let go, I might fly over the wall, changing into something wonderful as I flew.’ (Mahy 1997: 11) Later, too, fleeing the commotion of Ginevra’s return home, Hero takes off for Credence house and feels that she might be swept into the air on her way there: ‘In spite of rattling pages and billowing curtains, I had not realized how strong the wind was. But as I ran down Edwin Street it seemed to snatch my steps from under my feet before they had been properly finished so that I felt as if I were about to fly.’ (Mahy 1997: 40) When Miss Credence bestows a name on her, taken, at a slant, from Grimm’s tale of ‘Jorinda and Joringel’ about a maiden transformed into a nightingale³, she solidifies the diffuse and shifting images that Hero

² Marina Warner argues that transformation is a central and defining feature of fairy tales: ‘Shape-shifting is one of fairy tale’s dominant and characteristic wonders. . . . More so than the presence of fairies, the moral function, the imagined antiquity and oral anonymity of the ultimate source, and the happy ending (though all these factors help towards a definition of the genre), metamorphosis defines the fairy tale.’ (Warner 1995: xv-xvi)

³ In this lesser known tale from the Grimms’ collection a shape-shifting witch lives in an old castle in a forest, casting a spell of stillness over anyone who comes within one hundred paces and capturing any passing innocent maiden by turning her into a bird and keeping her caged within the castle. Jorinda and Joringel are betrothed lovers who wander too close to the castle. While Joringel is immobilized by the witch’s magic, Jorinda is transformed into a nightingale and taken away. Joringel is freed by the witch but does not forget Jorinda. Guided by a dream, he finds a magical flower which releases anyone it touches from enchantments and, armed with this, he returns to the castle to rescue Jorinda, relieve the witch of her powers and return the seven thousand birds kept there to their maiden forms. Jorinda and Joringel then live happily ever after. (Grimm 2004: 294-6)

has already been using herself⁴. Most significantly, in her imagination, Hero's voice has the quality of birdsong:

My unused voice always surprised me. Whenever I did speak, I was always astonished to hear how booming I sounded. In my mind, my voice was as pure and clear as the voice of a bird. In the outside world it sounded more like a frog ... a tuneful frog, but a frog all the same. (Mahy 1997: 69)

Not only does this speak of the painful disconnection between Hero's imagination and the real world, where she perceives herself transformed into a far baser fairy tale creature than the aerial spirit of her true life, but it also suggests that Hero's inner voice, far from being silent, speaks in an alternative language that does not translate across the boundary into real life. Miss Credence, who, Hero soon realizes, also inhabits a divided life, recognizes in Hero's silence a different, extra-linguistic form of expression: ' "I always think flight is a kind of language." ' (Mahy 1997: 18) The discourse of Hero's imagination is unspoken, unintelligible in the real world but it resonates around the Credence forest making it tremble with birdsong and stories.

The symbolic connection between voice, particularly women's voices, and birds has a long history in mythology and folklore. Jorinda's transformation into a nightingale in Grimm's tale recalls the Greek and Latin myths of Philomela and Procne, a story which spins on the dangerous potential of the female voice and its ability to find forms of expression beyond the boundaries of male discourse. There are many versions of the story but all focus on the nightingale's song as a female voice raised in beautiful but melancholy lament. In Ovid's telling of the myth, Procne sends her husband, King Tereus of Thrace, to Athens to ask that her sister, Philomela, be allowed to visit. However, when Tereus sees Philomela he is overcome with lust and, instead of bringing her to her sister, he takes Philomela to a cabin in the forest where he rapes her. Horrified Philomela promises to expose his crime so Tereus cuts out her tongue and tells Procne that her sister died on the journey. Locked in her forest prison, Philomela weaves her tale into a tapestry and, by signs, persuades a servant to smuggle it to her sister. Procne is dumbstruck when she receives this graphic description of her husband's brutality but secretly rescues her sister during the Bacchanalian festivities. Reunited, the sisters enact their revenge by killing Procne's and Tereus's son, Itys, and serving him to Tereus at a banquet. When

⁴ Although Hero's true life persona is most strongly identified with the imagery of a bird girl – '... the true child of the wild woods, someone who had been fostered and fed by birds' (Mahy 1995: 5) – the metaphors remain markedly fluid. Hero's imagination encompasses the broader communion with animals found in Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, and she finds a fairy tale animal guide in the ill-fated ginger cat who greets her on her entry into the Credence forest. The first of the rare instances of direct speech from Hero in the text is directed to this cat: ' "Miaou," I said, but for his ears alone.' (Mahy 1995: 12) This perhaps emphasizes her distrust of conventional human language and her willingness to try out other tongues.

Tereus realises that he has eaten his own son he pursues the sisters who are transformed into a nightingale and a swallow⁵ as they flee while Tereus himself becomes a hoopoe. The myth suggests the power of female speech and men's fear of it; women's words make themselves heard despite the most extreme and brutal attempts to suppress them, and the result is Bacchanalian frenzy, 'unnatural' havoc, the devastation of the patrilineal order and, finally, metamorphosis: and still the woman sings. For the abused Philomela, her voice is her defence against the shame which Tereus hopes will silence her and even the physical removal of her tongue is inadequate against the power of this voice; in Ovid both stump and dismembered muscle continue to writhe and mutter beyond their separation:

But as she fought, outraged, for words and called
 Her father's name continually, he seized
 Her tongue with tongs and, with his brutal sword,
 Cut it away. The root jerked to and fro;
 The tongue lay on the dark soil muttering
 And wriggling, as the tail cut off a snake
 Wiggles, and, as it died, it tried to reach
 Its mistress' feet. (Ovid 1998: 138)

Part of the power and threat of Philomela's female voice is that it appears to operate outside and beyond the recognisable and controllable forms of male discourse. Even before her tongue is mutilated, Philomela contrives to circumvent attempts to silence her through exclusion and isolation by finding alternative ways to proclaim her tale, promising to make the very landscape resonate with her story: '... my voice shall fill the woods / And move the rocks to pity. This bright sky / Shall hear, and any god that dwells on high!' (Ovid 1998: 138) Finally, she communicates her narrative not in the conventional male discourse of public oration, but through the traditionally feminine, domestic art of weaving. In contrast, Procne's silence on discovering her sister's fate perhaps implies the inadequacy of language. The sisters' transformation into birds again suggests their exclusion from conventional discourse but also their ability to transcend it as the nightingale's song persists as an expression of grief both recognisable to but outside human language.

The Procne and Philomela myth engages with persistent cultural concerns and anxieties about the power and deployment of the female voice, as Marina Warner observes in

⁵ Ovid does not specify which sister becomes the nightingale and which the swallow and the myths vary on this point. In his notes to the Oxford World Classics edition of *Metamorphoses*, E. J. Kenney observes: 'generally Greek poets made Procne the nightingale, Philomela the swallow; in Roman poets it is usually the other way about.' (Ovid/Kenney 1998: 413) Philomela, or Philomel, has become a common poetic name for the nightingale in the Western tradition.

her book, *No Go the Bogeyman*: ‘The classical myth of violated and muted Philomela gruesomely dramatizes the relation of utterance and freedom, silence and deprivation, song and desire.’ (Warner 1998: 225-6) This ambivalent association between women, birds and voice recurs elsewhere in classical mythology, notably in the bird-bodied sirens whose enchanting song lures sailors to their death on the rocks. Warner points out that in Homer and Cicero the overwhelming allure of the sirens’ song is knowledge, although the influence of Christianity and Norse folklore about mermaids have attributed a more sexual danger to the vocal temptations of these figures (Warner 1995: 399-402). Tracing the sirens’ history in classical iconography, Warner notes that the sirens were also depicted assisting mortals on their passage to the underworld⁶ and, in this role, acquiring yet another connection to storytelling: ‘But the sirens above all possess “utmost music”, these web-footed, hybrid women were mouthpieces for others’ stories. The dead pleaded with the sirens, their companions to the other side, to sing for them’ (Warner 1995: 401). The bird-like female storyteller surfaces again in the archetypal teller of fairy tales, Mother Goose. Appearing on the frontpiece of Perrault’s 1697 edition of *Contes du temps passé*, Warner notes how the term *contes de ma Mère l’Oye* (Mother Goose tales) and the figure of Mother Goose gained popularity alongside a similar tradition of ‘Stork Tales’ or *contes de la cigogne* (in which the stork is also generally identified as female) arguing that the symbolism of these particular birds reflects a more derisive attitude to women’s speech. Following the numerous strands of myth, folklore and etymology which surround these birds and their ‘song’, Warner observes their double aspect as signifiers both of the foolishness and triviality of women’s gossip and talk – ‘The goose serves as the emblematic beast par excellence of folly and, more particularly, of female noise, of women’s chatter’ (Warner 1995: 56) – and as possessors of subversive female knowledge of sexuality and fertility:

Emblematic signs of the goose and the stork, like the webbed foot or the long beak, recur in synecdoche to denote female sexual knowledge and power, as well as the implied deviancy which accompanies them; the sirens who lured men on to the reefs with their song were also bird-bodied and web-footed, in the classical tradition. These signs were attached to the stories and other materials in which such knowledge was transmitted and counterpoised to male strengths, both physical and social, the domain of fertility opposed

⁶ Warner warns that, in this connection to death, the sirens should not be confused with the Harpies, another mythological example of bird-bodied women. However, in the context of storytelling, it is interesting to note the role played by Harpies in Philip Pullman’s *The Amber Spyglass*. The Harpies guard the land of the dead, but agree to guide Lyra and the ghosts to the outside world in exchange for their true life stories, which they say nourish them. Although not storytellers themselves, these Harpies are sustained by narrative which therefore becomes a valuable currency. For an illuminating discussion on the different approaches to ‘truth’ in storytelling in the work of Mahy and Pullman, see Lisa Scally’s essay ‘“Telling Stories of Desire”: The Power of Authorship in *The Changeover* and *The Amber Spyglass*’ (Scally 2005: 130-47).

to the male domain of sovereignty: *contes de ma Mère l'Oye, contes de la cigogne*. (Warner 1995: 65)

These rich, complex, ambivalent connotations inhabit the background of Hero's bird-girl persona, not linking her explicitly with any single myth, but adding layers of melody and meaning to Hero's silence and voice. The bird imagery, however, extends beyond Hero and her silence to also encompass parallel dislocations from language in Miss Credence and Rinda. Although earthbound, Miss Credence's affiliation with birds is established through her dramatic daily ritual of feeding her forest's tree-top occupants:

...once Miss Credence appeared, the whole forest would begin to tremble and thrill with waiting birds ... sparrow, starlings, blackbirds, and thrushes. ... Plunging her hand into the basket she would throw out handfuls of bread in all directions. A rapid thud-thud-thud of wings! Within seconds she would be ankle deep in a living carpet of sparrows, pecking like toys wound up to go; all so used to being fed each morning that they flew down at once, instead of closing in cautiously, branch by branch, watching out for cats, as they did at our house. Starlings and blackbirds were so bold that they perched on Miss Credence's shoulders, or on her hat, even landing directly in her basket. (Mahy 1997: 4)

This vivid, magical image places Miss Credence in direct relation to the avian throng but simultaneously suggests a slightly and unnervingly artificial relationship between them. The tameness of the wild birds is perhaps made more unsettling by Miss Credence's witch's garb (she roams her garden dressed in a black cloak and hat), but, more particularly, the image of the mechanical toy birds not only foreshadows Miss Credence's pecking finger as she enters the code for her front door – 'Over at the door, Miss Credence's long forefinger was pecking at a little panel, ... her finger looked just like the beak of a bird,' (Mahy 1997: 17) – but also poignantly comes to represent the limitations of her own position. Primed as if for flight by her academically successful father, she is suddenly repositioned into the role which she perceives as no more than a domestic automaton when her mother dies and her father expects her to take over the running of the house; on several occasions throughout the text, Miss Credence uses the language of flight to articulate her thwarted ambitions: 'I could have flown.' (Mahy 1997: 139) Her speech is less immediately bird-like, although in her later conversations with Hero she is repeatedly described as 'gabbling', a term suggestive less of coherent human utterance than unintelligible animal or baby noises. Rinda's voice, however, is consistently attributed with a bird-like quality, although, ironically, not with the eloquent and beautiful song of her namesake, Jorinda, who became a nightingale. Instead, Rinda's vocal

emissions echo bird shrieks or cries, as in warning or distress, or the decidedly unromantic and untuneful ‘gobble’ of the domesticated, flightless turkey. The sustained bird imagery collected around these three female figures focuses on metaphors of birdsong and flight to suggest the interconnectedness of these two aspects of bird symbolism: voice and freedom.

6.3 In The Shadow of Words

In her narrative Hero expands on some of the theories developed by psychologists, counsellors and her family to explain her elected muteness. The most widely accepted diagnosis is that Hero’s condition is the result of trauma as a reaction to the arguments between Annie and Ginevra that raged volubly around her and resulted in Ginevra’s walking out, still shouting. Other theories surface⁷ and by the end of the text Hero has claimed her own reasons for silence, but this connection between speechlessness and trauma hovers over the narrative and, in a broader sense, speaks of women’s relationship to language in more general terms. Wilkie-Stibbs argues that Hero’s traumatic retreat from language is symptomatic less specifically of the arguments between Annie and Ginevra, than of Annie’s broader control and imposition of language on her daughters. Annie’s books and her academic career are based on powerful words framed in masculine discourses of public speech and published texts which both shape and overshadow family life for the Rappers, and which, Wilkie-Stibbs suggests, distort her daughters’ ability to express themselves:

Both Annie Rapper’s girl children have committed acts of violence against themselves as expressions of their rage against their mother. Hero’s has been an anorexic response through which she has starved herself of the words her mother would impose on her, and so she is silent in the face of too many words. It is symptomatic that her mother has failed to give her a language in which to speak in the feminine as a daughter, and as a woman. (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 101)⁸

⁷ Interestingly both Rappie, Hero’s paternal grandmother, and Annie view Hero’s silence as a punishment for maternal failings, a supposition which is telling both about the widespread scapegoating of mothers which here takes on the flavour of fairy tales and about the generational practices which coach women for silence.

⁸ Wilkie-Stibbs refers here to Hero and the car crashing Ginevra as Annie’s two daughters who exhibit a traumatic response to language, but Sap, the youngest of the Rapper children, also has a problematic relationship with words. Sap strives for linguistic dominance and identity by gaining mastery over the eclectic and singular vocabulary listed in *Mrs Byrne’s Dictionary of Unusual, Obscure and Preposterous Words*. While there is an obvious enjoyment of these eccentric words in the text, Sap’s use of them ironically demonstrates the strictures that language and discourse impose upon expression. In her eagerness to display her linguistic skill, Sap tailors what she says in order to showcase a particular word.

Annie's investment in the power of the Symbolic Order is signified by the lines of books which fill the shelves in the Rappers' living room:

Behind me and just over my head were two whole bookshelves filled with copies of the same book. *Average-Wonderful*, said the words on the spine, and then in smaller print, *Annie Rapper*. They were hardcover books, different reprints, or the same title in other languages. Below these were paperbacks, tapes, videos ... thirty copies of *Average-Wonderful* in different forms. Halfway along the third shelf, red and yellow spines suddenly gave way to shiny blue ones, not quite as cheerful, but thicker and more commanding. *Bright Babies*, said white print down the spine. *Annie Rapper*. This time the author's name was bigger than the title of the book. (Mahy 1997: 25)

The multiple copies of the same book form an insistent physical statement which operates to validate Annie's public identity by an enumeration of words, particularly as they mark her increased status as her printed name becomes larger than the title on the books' spines. It is significant that Hero's favourite works of children's fiction and the collection of fairy tales, texts which are traditionally assigned a lower value within the (patriarchal) academic and literary canon, are hidden behind the chair on the bottom shelf of the bookcase. These are the books which inspire Hero's true life and speak the language of her imagination, but their location indicates the marginalized position these forms of expression occupy in the Rapper household. Hero's distrust of the formal language of academic and scientific discourse is evident, with some irony, in the way that her narrating voice reports the psychologist's theories about her muteness: 'The reports said that I was *aphasic voluntaria* ... blah! blah! blah!' (Mahy 1997: 95) It is clear that Hero feels alienated and objectified by that language that is used about her:

One counselor [sic] recommended the utilization of a treatment strategy that acknowledges the individual situation of the subject. (Me, that is. I was the subject.) He said that he had tried what he called positive reinforcement of

In this sense, the words start to prescribe what she can and does say; language begins to speak her rather than the other way round: 'Mrs Byrne says a *cogger* is a false flatterer, so it must have been a hard word for Sap to bring into any conversation because there wasn't a lot of false flattery in our family.' (Mahy 1997: 8) However, elsewhere Sap claims these words in order to extend her expressive range when she uses them not to confound or assume superiority over her listeners but to communicate with Hero in an alternative language: ' "Skookum! Skookum!" she said, using one of Mrs Byrne's preposterous words. Sammy didn't ask what she meant, and nor did I, though she'd used the word several times in the last day or two, so I knew it was a way of telling me in a private language that she thought he was terrific.' (Mahy 1997: 57-8) Throughout the text, Sap's speech is loud and insistent, but this does not necessarily imply a confident and controlled voice capable of expressing her sense of self. Instead, Sap can be seen to be experimenting with different kinds of language – like Mrs Byrne's words, or swearing – just as Hero experiments with silence, as a way of making herself present in a house of words.

verbal behavior in the beginning . . . which meant that he made a huge fuss of me if I accidentally said anything, no matter how silly it was. (Mahy 1997: 96)

The specialized scientific language assumes an authority which Hero's narrating voice is quick to undercut, and demonstrates an attempt to control, explain and define Hero's subjectivity by fixing her in language. Her description of Athol's academic practice, when she believes him to be preparing his thesis, is even more graphic in its suggestion of the violence perpetrated through language by controlling its subject: '... every now and then he'd scribble something down . . . some fact he had run to a standstill. I came to imagine the poor fact lying there, panting and helpless, and Athol ruthlessly fixing it into his notebook, not so much with the point of his pen as with a skewer of words.' (Mahy 1997: 23) The idiom of the counsellor's report is also similar to the academic register used by Annie, in her telephone conversation about an upcoming conference or, later, when she is enthusing about the developments in Rinda's speech, and is a style of talking recognized by her family as her public, authoritative, pedagogical voice: 'Annie began to speak in what Sap called her "lecturing" voice.' (Mahy 1997: 160) As her response to the counsellor's report suggests, Hero feels herself outside of and alienated by this form of language which is privileged by and passed to her through Annie, her mother.

Annie's impressive bookcase is mirrored by Professor Credence's heavily bound volumes of *Philosophy and Literature* in the study of Credence House, where the precedence of patriarchal discourse is even more dramatically apparent. Miss Credence preserves these bookcases as a kind of monument, just as she attempts to conserve the rest of her father's estate. Although beyond her financial and practical capacity, Miss Credence insists on retaining the house and land in their original state as a way of maintaining the legacy of her father and grandfather. The crumbling, decrepit condition of the property is not, however, indicative of her inadequacy as a woman to sustain the patriarchal and patrilineal order, but rather of her attempts to preserve these structures in a context where they are no longer applicable. Instead of claiming the house as her own and remaking it for herself, both Miss Credence and the house are fixed in the image of her father. The double naming of the house in the text reflects Miss Credence's strained relationship with her family home. Officially called Credence House, standing at the top of Credence Crescent, the house claims ownership and attests to the importance of the man from whom that name is taken, Miss Credence's grandfather, who built the house. The word itself, Credence, also demands belief, suggests solidity and certainty. Hero's alternative name for the house, Squintum's House, stands in contradiction to this image. As well as suggesting an askance perspective shared by Miss Credence's mis-matched

eyes, the name is taken from a folk tale⁹ in which ‘you never find out anything about either Squintum or the house. Squintum might have been a man or a woman, the house might have been real or imaginary. . . . It was a place with a name, but otherwise quite unknown.’ (Mahy 1997: 20) In this tale Squintum’s House is a signifier without a signified, an empty phrase used to dissemble and the name suggests the same thing in *The Other Side of Silence*. The belief asserted by the property’s official name is a cover for the emptiness within and Miss Credence herself clings to fictions in order to support her idealized identity.¹⁰

The witch’s cloak and hat that Miss Credence wears in the garden are actually the remnants of Professor Credence’s eccentric wardrobe which most of the time hang empty in the hallway, as if Miss Credence herself were suspended on the dusty hook, as, in some sense, she is, her identity subsumed within his. She also speaks through her father’s voice, not only repeating his values, maxims and convictions like a ventriloquist’s doll, as Hero comes to realize – ‘. . . she became a puppet of her father’s glory, and that glory was not just the hand inside the puppet. It was a mouth as well . . . a mouth with teeth . . . which spoke for her in the beginning, but, in the end, turned on her and chewed her up’ (Mahy 1997: 165) – but also actually mimicking the cadences of his voice: ‘. . . she was speaking in her first voice, that dry, half-amused, rustly [sic] garden voice that I thought might be a version of her father’s.’ (Mahy 1997: 146) Miss Credence is at her most coherent and intelligible when she speaks in this, her father’s voice. But when her voice slips away from this close imitation, her speech becomes more erratic and difficult to comprehend as a stream of ‘gabbling’ words escape from her, still running over the assertions and views inherited from her father, but desperately lacking in confidence and coherence. Miss Credence both desires and is alienated by the patriarchal language of her father, but, caught within its verbal net, she is effectively silenced from telling her own story and identity. As Wilkie-Stibbs argues, she is ‘a woman who defines herself through meaningless utterances and whose subscription to patriarchal language has paradoxically silenced her intellectual genius.’ (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 67) In this respect Wilkie-Stibbs pairs Miss Credence with Hero as ‘manifestations of the double aspect of language and madness.’ (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 67) Both are daughters whose voices are functionally muted by the predominance of masculine discursive practices in their home and family

⁹ In this folk-tale a fox finds a bumblebee and puts it in a bag. He takes the bag to a house and asks the mistress to look after the bag while he goes to Squintum’s, specifying that it must not be opened in his absence. The woman looks in the bag and the bee escapes to be eaten by her rooster. When the fox returns he demands the rooster, as the bee is now inside him, and then leaves to repeat the trick at several other houses, increasing his booty as he goes, each time leaving the bag while he goes to Squintum’s, until he is finally outwitted by a clever housewife and eaten by the family dog. (Johnson 1916)

¹⁰ Hero suspects that Jorinda might be similarly unreal, a name without a subject: ‘. . . it had seemed that here was no real girl – only a fairy-tale name and a face stolen from a newspaper photograph.’ (Mahy 1997: 130)

life. But as a mother, Wilkie-Stibbs argues that Miss Credence is also paired with Annie as ‘an equivalent but inverse image of monstrous motherhood.’ (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 102) Her absorption of patriarchal language and the values it perpetuates is enacted upon her own daughter in Miss Credence’s shockingly tangible attempts to stifle Rinda’s voice and deny her a language of her own:

[Miss Credence] has been metaphorically silenced in the Symbolic through her father’s oppressions, and has passed them on in the line of succession by the literal silencing of her own daughter to whom she has been (and illustratively) physically brutal and abusive in a way that parallels the not-so-visible psychological brutality and abuse imposed on her by her Father’s rule and Law. (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 67)

Rinda is the extreme embodiment of both Hero’s and Miss Credence’s traumatic alienation from language. But, coming face to face with Rinda in the attic room where they are both now locked in, trapped by and within their separate silences, Hero is forced to reconsider and recontextualize her own muteness. Despite her distrust of public, spoken language, through her encounter with Rinda Hero recognises that silence is never really what she has aspired to or, indeed, achieved. Earlier in the narrative, Hero’s knowing, older voice concedes that her conception of herself as a nameless bird girl has always been a fictionalized idea:

In *The Jungle Book*, Mowgli is brought up by wolves and talks to wolves. There really have been wild children who have lived among animals, but no girl brought up among the trees would learn to sing or fly like a bird. In real life Mowgli would have been what they call a feral child, his wolfness his human ruin. No matter how closely I pressed myself into the magical life I had invented for myself, no matter how true I forced it to be, it had never yielded, not completely. (Mahy 1997: 74)

For Rinda the absence of language has not produced a nightingale’s song, a freedom from words which allows an alternative eloquence, but has smothered her with a profound internal silence punctuated only by the occasional ‘accidental noise’ (136) and a shrieking ‘sound without meaning’ (130). However, even as Hero seems to retreat from language, into silence and her imaginary life which she feels to be liberatingly beyond discourse, ‘without any name or game’ (21), she is simultaneously, and certainly retrospectively, aware that this invented life is enriched by her textual and linguistic experience of stories. The forest itself, in which she lives her true life, becomes a metaphor for this

tapestry of narrative threads which reveal patterns and pathways to Hero from amongst its diverse miscellany of trees, some of which ‘had been planted on purpose, and many other accidental ones’ (Mahy 1997: 3), from both European and native stock. It is also resonant with numerous, synchronous intertextual voices suggested, again, in the imagery of birds: ‘The wind shook itself through leaves and bushes and I began to hear birds ... no single song but a mix of twitterings ...’ (Mahy 1997: 42). This multi-textured, reverberant landscape is in stark contrast to the blank, featureless cell in which Rinda is enclosed:

The light was pearly because it had to force its way through the white paint on the inside of the window. Not even birds were allowed to spy in on Rinda, sitting on the edge of her bed. Bars, also painted white, ran from the top to the bottom of the window frame. If she had been able to look out between the bars and through the glass, she would have seen the tops of trees, shifting and scribbling against the sky, but Rinda couldn’t look out. All she could see was whiteness ... a complete blankness. There were no pictures on the wall; there were no bookshelves. There was nothing to look at, nothing at all. (Mahy 1997: 131)

Not only does Hero note the absence of pictures and bookshelves, straightforward markers of Rinda’s imagistic and narrative isolation, but she also remarks on her separation from the birds and the ‘scribbling’ trees; having no access to stories, Rinda cannot create an imaginative life of her own.

6.4 A Wordy Silence

It is, perhaps ironically, Hero’s access to words and her knowledge of stories that allows her to construct her silent ‘true life’. Her choice to withdraw from language in the real world is possible partly because she has an alternative life into which she can retreat, one that is composed of a prolifically intertextual fantasy narrative that sustains, nourishes and exercises her inner voice throughout her external muteness. But Hero’s imaginative life, although wordy, is, nevertheless, set at an oblique angle to the dominant discourse of patriarchal language. Not only does Hero transform into a bird-girl within the branches of Squintum’s forest, with all the mythical connotations and attendant imagery of song and flight, but the chorus of intertextuality which gives the forest voice is also drawn from the frequently marginalized oral tradition of fairy tales and the potentially subversive genre of children’s fantasy, both literary forms in which women’s creative voices have flourished outside the scrutiny of the literary canon. Hero’s true life does not follow the

pattern of any one story or source, instead it flows between ideas and images, interwoven in her journey through the trees: ‘... up and down – backward and forward – branch to branch – across the ruined garden below.’ (Mahy 1997: 3) Some specific texts do, however, recur in the imagery of the novel or in direct reference and self-consciously operate as springboards for Hero’s imagination, books which, in her treetop adventures, Hero longs to embody:

Supposing I had been turned into a book back then I would have wanted to turn into *The Jungle Book*, the story of Mowgli, a boy who lived in the jungle and talked the language of the animals. Or I might just have made do with *The Secret Garden*. But I would probably have turned into *Old Fairy Tales*, which was the book everyone read to me when I was small – the book I used for secret advice ... for divination. (Mahy 1997: 6-7)

This meditation is suggestive of the link between Hero’s subjectivity and her textuality, both as a self-conscious narrator of her own story and as a character in the fiction of *The Other Side of Silence*, as Wilkie-Stibbs observes: ‘She speculates about the many other fictional lives she could have had if she had been a different kind of book which are significantly grounded in fantasy and language.’ (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 64) It is indeed significant that in all of these texts a skilled manipulation of language or unconventional forms of speech grants the protagonists entrance to other worlds and alternative means of perception. Mowgli, of course, speaks to the animals in Kipling’s stories, but this seemingly magical ability has, in *The Jungle Book*, its own system of codes, calls and ‘Master-Words’ which allows him to commune in the Jungle’s ‘many tongues’ (Kipling 1998: 24)¹¹. Mary, too, seems to speak to the robin in *The Secret Garden*, and although, unlike Mowgli, she does not have direct access to the idiom of the birds, she displays a willingness to explore beyond the limits of conventional speech: ‘She chirped, and talked, and coaxed ... and tr[ied] to make something like robin sounds.’ (Burnett 2006: 40) This vocal flexibility is embodied in the idealized figure of Dickon, whose speech patterns are adopted by both Mary and, later, Colin, who overcome their ingrained reticence by learning to speak a new language, the Yorkshire dialect. In these written texts, as well as in fairy tales, passwords, codes, shibboleths, spells and incantations are integral to the story. These are modes of speech outside normal discourse which reposition the

¹¹ Mowgli’s acquisition and mastery of the language and laws of the Jungle in Kipling’s text has much to do with power and hierarchy in ways which are problematic for its use in *The Other Side of Silence*. However, the focus in Mahy’s novel is not the specifics of Mowgli’s language use, but the central concept of a means of expression beyond the constraints of the established linguistic system. In talks and lectures, Mahy herself often refers to the extraordinary impact that this story had on her as a child, although she is careful to note that her fascination with the idea of being able to speak to animals was inspired by seeing a film version, starring Sabu, of *The Jungle Book*, rather than the text itself. (Mahy 2000: 21 & 36)

speaker in their world and often stimulate dynamic forces of magic and metamorphosis within the tales.

It is a world of this texture that Hero constructs in her voyage among the leaves. This imagined life is lived in the liminal space of the tree canopy, 'dancing between sky and garden' (4), in a forest that is a similarly ambivalent blend of the cultivated and the wild. Hero enters this space by a secret route over the wall, is met by an animal guide, and travels via pathways which reveal themselves only to her: 'Invisible paths wound from one tree to another, invisible, that is, until I had scrambled through them once. After that, those paths were as easy to see as the lines on a hand held out, palm upward, toward me.' (Mahy 1997: 12) The language here is of movement and organic patterns and the environment, literally and narratively, shifts, rustles and responds to Hero's presence. The house, too, is a mixture of the animate and the textual. Hero describes Credence house as '... watching me from one particular high white window – a milky eye' (Mahy 1997: 3), rooting it within the magical and living landscape of the forest, and as '... like a house in a story-book' (2), suggesting that it occupies an imaginative space as well as a physical one. She also refers to the house looking like a word from her vantage point on the park wall:

Every so often I'd catch a glimpse of the house, its weather-beaten tower standing at the end of the main block like an exclamation mark at the end of a magic word. Both word and sign were partly scribbled out by twigs. The window, curving with the curve of the tower, had been painted white for some reason, which made it look as if someone had been using white correcting fluid to change the exclamation into a question mark. (Mahy 1997: 12)

Again, the textuality of the house is emphasized, but here the image is an ambivalent one. The change from an exclamation mark to a question mark implies a shift from certainty to doubt, but it also suggests the possibility of multiple co-existing meanings within a single sign. It is positioned within a context of scribbling twigs which, depending on weather or season, may reveal or efface different aspects of the word/house. But it is also significant that the association between house and word foreshadows the house's function in the text as a symbol of Professor Credence's patriarchal power and as Rinda's, and, to some extent, Miss Credence's, linguistic prison.

In Hero's early, unobserved adventures the imagery is fluid, organic and diffuse and not contained by the conventional language of discourse. Although it is constructed from words and stories, within Hero's true life words do not operate as stable carriers of meaning, but, instead, they shift, transform and are redeployed to alter the world they describe. Once Hero falls into Miss Credence's sight and garden the language of this

imagined world starts to lose its pliability, gradually becoming more fixed and fixing¹². This shift is deceptively gradual; for instance, Hero still uses a code to gain entry to Credence house, but, more often it is not by the obliging branch that bends with her weight or by offering the guardian cat a password ‘miaou’, but by typing a code, which is not her own but given to her by Miss Credence, into an unyielding metal grille by the gate. The name Jorinda also takes possession of her by degrees: when Hero first hears the name it is familiar but unplaced, then Miss Credence ‘gossips’ a story around the name, seemingly extemporizing while Hero gardens, before Hero chances upon the tale of ‘Jorinda and Joringel’ in her *Old Fairy Tales* and begins to realize that, like the caged birds in the fairy tale, she is becoming trapped inside a story that is not within her control:

The two stories, old and new, melted into one another, and into me, too. It was as if, because I was hesitating to go to Squintum’s House, Squintum’s House had somehow come to me ... true life was swallowing real life in great, greedy gulps and taking its place. I felt the shadow of its huge maw fall across me. (Mahy 1997: 92)

At the start of the book, the twelve year old Hero perceives her true life as a liberating escape from the routines, expectations and limits of real life, but it becomes increasingly apparent, both to her and to the reader, that she is being drawn into and imprisoned inside Miss Credence’s story and within the conventions of a tale in which she is designated a particular role. The narrative charts her recovery of agency as a storyteller.

In *The Other Side of Silence*, as in the other texts in this study, the ability to re-write the world is the powerful magic of the storyteller who can re-define herself and re-shape reality for others through her skilful manipulation of words. But, while Hero does use her true life story to re-make herself, she does so as a divided self. The primary appeal of the ‘silent’, private language of Hero’s imagination is that it operates outside of and beyond the legitimized, authoritative, determining words which are embodied by Annie. By refusing to translate her imagined self into this conventional language, Hero attempts to elude its definitions and retain control over her invented life/self. But this act of self-denial of voice also contains and restricts her ability to actively re-inscribe the wider world beyond her imagination. The bird-girl of the Credence forest is a radically unconfined identity but this self is not made present in the real world where

¹² This moment of transition, when Hero falls from the treetops to the garden floor, is rich with mythological allusions: there are biblical connotations, as Hero falls into language and forbidden knowledge, and also echoes of Icarus dropping from the sky. However, Mahy avoids implying that Hero is being punished for her transgressive behaviour, partly because these intertextual references are never entirely pinned down. Hero’s return to earth, although painful at first, eventually allows her to transform the space below as she has the liminal world above.

Hero's alternative identity is asserted through her elected muteness, a strategy which is powerful in some ways, in resisting the expectations of her family, but is also limited in its capacity to express the wealth of Hero's creative selfhood. On the one hand, Hero makes silence her story in real life, refusing to have her words reflect Annie's, be compared to Ginevra's, or be the markers by which she is measured, while all the time constructing a private narrative of self. But on the other, this magical, marvellous selfhood remains hidden, unshared and unspoken, and her silence allows others, most dramatically Miss Credence, to appropriate her identity to become a character in a story not of her own making: 'She was referring to her story ... the one that had sucked me in.' (Mahy 1997: 44)

6.5 Tales of Entrapment

Miss Credence is attracted to Hero's silence partly because she interprets it as a kind of passivity, and a passive listener is something she eagerly desires: ' "*Can't* you talk?" Miss Credence asked me. I shook my head, which seemed the simplest thing to do. I was puzzled by her sudden, odd, eager expression, the expression of someone coming upon something that nobody else wants, and seeing a special way of using it.' (Mahy 1997: 17-18) It is a desire which is telling about the kinds of story and discourse which Miss Credence tells and privileges. Echoing a traditionally masculine model of authorship, Miss Credence apparently desires to construct a self-contained, authoritative, monovocal narrative which does not engage in dialogue or invite the listener to participate in making the meaning in the story. In practice this endeavour often collapses as Miss Credence interrupts herself, switches between voices and questions her own authority and these fractures in her storytelling suggest the poor match between the veneer of authorial control which she copies from her father and her own more fragmented and conflicting experience and suppressed imagination: 'Miss Credence had done something she did from time to time. She had brought her story to a certain point and then had somehow sprung back from it as if something had *burned* her.' (Mahy 1997: 46) Ironically, Miss Credence's refusal to tell her story as part of a dialogue parallels Hero's determination not to share her story and, while Miss Credence is attempting to imitate the vocal authority of her father and Hero to escape from the same thing from within her family, both fiercely protect their true lives from the differing perspectives, interpretations and interjections of others.

In her desire to cast Hero as a passive subject, both as a listener and a character in her story, Miss Credence overwrites Hero's own narrative, created in the marginal space

of the tree canopy, with her own tale of Jorinda, Queen of the Birds, effectively denying Hero her own agency and authorship:

Being nameless had been a kind of freedom. Now, whenever I was up in the branches I knew I was allowed to be there, and that I was casting a shadow on the kingdom below. The name was a leash that could be used to twitch me into place. And now, when I came down from the trees, in a way it was like feeding at Miss Credence's feet, along with all those other birds. (Mahy 1997: 21)

Hero's alternative bird-girl persona is gradually tamed and eventually caged within Miss Credence's ensnaring narratives. In her real life Hero has become adept at protecting her invented world, wrapping it in silence and slipping between images and expectations, but, in the already magical space of the Credence forest, she seems caught off guard because the language of Miss Credence's story is so close to her own. Within the storybook kingdom of the Credence land, Miss Credence, dressed in a storybook witch's costume and waving a long black cigarette that '...looked like a short wand, or a pencil writing on the air in letters of smoke' (Mahy 1997: 45), appears to be telling a story that merges into the landscape which Hero has already created, composed as it is of fairy tale imagery and an elusive, unfettered bird-girl who flies and sings among the trees:

I remained Queen of the Birds, for, as I gardened, Miss Credence would come out, always wearing her black cloak and hat, and make the bird jokes she had begun the moment I tumbled out of the trees at her very feet. And these jokes, which had strangely connected with my own ideas about life in the trees, turned into an ongoing story about the Bird Queen, Jorinda, and her great enemy, Nocturno the Prince of Darkness. (Mahy 1997: 21)

Not only do the stories intertwine but their relationship to the tale is similar as both seem to have slid inside the story, telling it from within. But Hero comes to realize that Miss Credence is not in control of her story: the images and values which inform it close down rather than expand both of their narrative possibilities.

Hero had imagined that her invented life was a fantasy without restriction, but, as Anna Smith argues: 'Drawn into Miss Credence's story world every time she works in the garden, Hero takes a while to register that fantasy can be as much an imprisoning experience as a pleasant escape from everyday identity.' (Smith 2005: 50) Hero begins to feel increasingly trapped, both within her silence which prevents her from sharing the story (and, in telling it, perhaps regaining control of it), and within a tale which now seems to more closely resemble a gothic nightmare:

Something scratched at a window, one corner of which was draped with cobwebs as dense as greyish rags. A tree on the other side of the glass stretched out a twig toward me, beckoning me back to a safe place among the leaves. But it was too late for that. The story I was part of now was even more famous than *The Jungle Book*. Everyone knew it, even people who didn't read. It was the tale of a bride who was allowed to go anywhere in a house except for one forbidden room. Of course, she couldn't resist going into that room, and found other brides, all strangled, hanging there. The name of the story is *Bluebeard*. (Mahy 1997: 110)

Hero's movement from the shifting, intertextual, outside space amongst the branches and birds to this claustrophobic interior suggests how not only the specifics of the story but also the generic mode it represents have become more binding and repressive. Just as Misselthwaite Manor in *The Secret Garden* is constructed, in Mrs Medlock's description, as a gothic mansion, so Credence House is presented here in recognisable stylistic codes¹³. As Hero observes, this tale proceeds towards its conclusion with a terrible inevitability, emphasized by the consensus implied in its being a tale that everybody knows. Here the bride is subject to the narrative, to forces beyond her control so that 'she couldn't resist'. In *The Other Side of Silence*, it is not simply that Hero is unable to resist Miss Credence; the decisions and compulsions – to return to the house, to seek out the code to the locked doors, to climb the stair – which Hero finds hard to explain even to herself, also signal her entanglement within the conventions and narrative patterns of the fantasy/fairy tale genre: 'I stood outside the door, trembling and thinking, Run home! Run home now! Real life, not true! But it just wasn't possible. Once begun, the story had to be fulfilled.' (Mahy 1997: 129) Although Hero has long consulted fairy tales for guidance and sought escape in their magical world, locked in a storybook situation she begins to realise that the tales do not always provide strategies for positive action. The traditional advice for a fairy tale heroine – to wait to be rescued, to rely on her beauty or goodness to bring a prince to her window – locks her in as securely as the bolted door of the tower room. As the text progresses Hero acknowledges that she may need to go beyond even these stories to make her own patterns and her own ending if she is to escape their narrative control. Such an act of authorship, however, requires Hero to rediscover her voice.

As the story lures Hero inside Credence House, the storybook gothic mansion, and her sense of entrapment mounts, she also begins to perceive the need to recover her agency and regain control of the narrative:

¹³ These Gothic conventions also recall *Jane Eyre*, which is itself a version of the 'Bluebeard' story. A more modern adult reworking of the fairytale also appears in the title story of Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (2006).

I had to go back to Squintum's House and finish twenty dollars worth of work for her. Once that was done, I thought, I would never go back again, and in time I would break free of the spell, not because some Joringel would appear to touch me with a blood-red flower and rescue me, but because I was my own magician and had the power to rescue myself. (Mahy 1997: 105)

As with Hero's other thoughts and emotions throughout the text, this desire is phrased in the language of stories and fairy tales, but although she starts to conceive of departing from the plot, she has not yet escaped its weave. Her silent, half-conscious plan to discover the mystery of Squintum's House appears to fulfil the drive to action and agency, but, within the text, it seems a more ambivalent move. Repeatedly Hero's narrative suggests that an uncontrollable curiosity is the impetus which compels her to search Miss Credence's birthday book for the codes to the locked doors: 'And in spite of everything, in spite of the fact that just being there in that study, watched by the pictures of Professor Credence and Ginevra-turned-into-Rinda, was making me feel so spooky, I began to grow inquisitive, quite against my own will.' (Mahy 1997: 112) Hero's impulses fall in line with a tradition of curious fairy tale girls, like the bride in 'Bluebeard', most of whom are punished for their inquisitiveness, as she is well aware: '... I knew I was doing something forbidden. In fairy stories the girl who goes into the forbidden chamber will meet a terrible doom.' (Mahy 1997: 128) Hero's actions are tied to the conventions of the genre, so, although she does act, it is still through a story whose patterns are already in place. Hero is not only trapped inside Miss Credence's story, but also within those she tells herself but which are not quite her own. As she plans her assault on the secrets of Squintum's House, the narrating Hero explicitly reveals the storytelling process which directs her actions:

Coralie called it an internal voice, and somewhere inside me there was a voice talking all the time, telling me my own story, making suggestions and casting spells, perhaps even the spell of silence. It was this voice that had ordered me to climb over the wall and explore the forest around Squintum's House. It was this voice that had commanded me to find the code that would open the door at the end of the hall. And now it was telling me that it wasn't enough just to be something magical. I must do something magical. I must push the story on, and then I really could close the book and leave it behind me. I must solve the mystery. (Mahy 1997: 127)

There is certainly an incentive here towards agency and self-creation, but also an ambivalence about Hero's relationship to her own storytelling. It has been evident throughout

the text that Hero envisages her life (particularly her true life) and her identity in terms of stories, as she states frankly: ‘... I was always trying to match my own life with one story or another.’ (Mahy 1997: 111) But in the quotation above there appears to be some separation between the storytelling voice and Hero herself, a slight disconnection which suggests that the story, rather than Hero, is in control. This voice ‘orders’ and ‘commands’ and demands certain narrative expectations are met, while outwardly Hero herself remains silent. When Hero mentions this storytelling voice earlier in the text she more clearly marks it as other than her own: ‘*Ginevra home!* said a voice in my head, not my own voice, the voice of some storyteller who always traveled [sic] with me.’ (Mahy 1997: 41) Although throughout the book the twelve-year-old Hero positions her true self as the one that lives her invented life, it becomes increasingly apparent that this fantasy self is constructed from and tied to a set of generic conventions. When Hero finally escapes the tower she is not only liberating herself from Miss Credence’s story but from her dependence on these codes as well.

It is only once Hero is physically locked in the tower with Rinda that she makes this leap towards agency and voice. Wilkie-Stibbs argues that in Rinda Hero is confronted with ‘... her mute, antithetical double, her Other, “waiting for me like a terrible kind of twin” [130]’ (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 66) In this sense, Rinda is the real face of silence, and through her Hero is forced to recognise the loss of agency and the loss of self that silence potentially entails. It is also through this encounter, Wilkie-Stibbs observes, that Hero begins to realize that her own silence might be defined as a kind of madness (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 66). The convergence of the themes of madness, a split or doubled self and the enclosed space of the locked attic room recalls elements which Gilbert and Gubar, in their study *The Madwoman in the Attic*, argue characterize nineteenth-century women’s writing. Employing this imagery suggestively, the text situates Hero’s personal journey to find her voice within a broader context of women’s struggle for empowerment and self-definition, a struggle which, in Gilbert’s and Gubar’s analysis, has often involved a split or displacement in women’s identities. This fracture in Hero’s sense of self is perhaps most clearly embodied in Rinda; Wilkie-Stibbs argues that her ‘... disgusting and dirty body ...’ represents the disruptive notion of the ‘abject’ through which ‘... Hero connects with the other.’ (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 72) But, in another sense, the fragmentation of Hero’s selfhood is perceptible in her subtle dissociation from the storytelling voice that guides her actions. Her anxieties about speech and authorship are not wholly displaced outside herself onto another figure in the text, so, in this late twentieth century children’s novel, the habitually silent Hero does not act vicariously through her double but speaks out for herself from the imprisoning tower:

I opened my eyes. There, on the other side of a jagged star, across a chasm

of morning light, was Sammy, staring back at me from among the nearest branches. I wished I had a great braid of hair, thick as a rope, to throw across to him. He could have tied it to a branch in the tree, and then run across into Squintum's House on a tightrope made from a living part of me.

I didn't hesitate. I spoke out as if I had never, ever been silent.

'Get help!' I called. 'She's shut me up here.' (Mahy 1997: 145)

There is a moment's nostalgia here for the fairy tale paradigm – the rescuing prince, the luxuriant hair suggestive of Rapunzel – and the image of a 'tightrope made from a living part of me' emphasizes her investment in the codes of these fantasies, but it also signals a return to the more organic imagery of Hero's early treetop adventures in which the stories grew from her rather than around her. But then Hero calls out, speaking in the imperative, altering the course of her story. It is not only significant that Hero speaks, but that she speaks to someone. When she calls out for help during the night, unheard, using her voice does not effect any change, but in speaking to Sammy, beginning a dialogue (however brief at this point), Hero decisively breaks her silence. Effective speech, the text suggests, requires a listener: it is a two-way process. Hero does not break out of the attic on her own; she does call out from the tower where she has been locked in silence, but, when her family arrive, it is telling that they do not extract her, she invites them in, giving them the code to what has been her private, secret, imagined world:

'Hero!' [Athol] yelled up to me. 'We're on our way. We're going to smash the door in.' I don't think I'd ever heard such a mixture of fear and happiness in any voice before.

...

'1108! The code is 1108,' I yelled down, heard quick voices and the sound of the front door opening. And then, immediately, voices burst out of the air around me because Miss Credence had left the intercom channel between the rooms open all night, ...

(Mahy 1997: 153-4)

As part of starting to speak again Hero has let the voices of her family and of everyday reality into her invented life.

Although it may appear that by talking Hero is abandoning fantasy and opting for real life and 'normal' speech, these first utterances are the culmination of a renewed sense of agency after her frightening and stultifying night in the attic, and this process retains

the metaphors of narrative and the imagination which have characterized Hero's internal voice throughout the text. Hero's sense of story is resolutely intact but her relationship to the story has shifted so that, instead of being guided by another storytelling voice, she now asserts her own authorial power: 'I found that I was suddenly feeling alert, more capable, more *alive*, . . . I still felt as if I was in a story, but it was my story once more. I didn't have to sit there, waiting to be rescued. I could alter the end . . . break the window . . . climb out onto the roof.' (Mahy 1997: 142-3) Hero's re-invigorated authorial agency is, however, distinguished from traditional models of masculine, authoritative control and discourse. The scene is framed with references to birds and the forest, re-establishing Hero's access to an alternative language and the fluid intertextual space amongst the leaves. She wakes to the sound of blackbirds: 'When I woke again I could hear blackbirds singing. They sounded like voices struggling through from another world on the edge of this one.' (Mahy 1997: 142) The birdsong, 'struggling through from another world', suggests both the marginal quality of this alternative language and Hero's reconnection to a voice which can be heard without simply reproducing the patterns of patriarchal discourse. When Sammy comes to her aid (and he himself is on the edge of things), it is significantly through the trees, through her own 'leafy highroads' (144), and his approach is presaged by more birdsong.

Hero's new authorial voice, however, is more expansive and inclusive than before, both in that she now speaks out loud, sharing and creating a story with a listener, and in that she engages directly with real life, recognising and incorporating its codes as well as those of fantasy. In this more active storytelling role Hero moves beyond the generic confines of fairy tales, although they remain an important component of her narrative arsenal, to experiment and mix multiple patterns and structures. To alter the course of the story in which she has found herself locked, Hero borrows from *Pharazyn Towers*, a popular day-time soap opera that she had previously designated a part of the mundane everyday world: 'Yet now I remembered seeing an episode of *Pharazyn Towers* in which Delpha, a girl reporter for *Songline*, a city magazine, was abducted and locked on the upper floor of a deserted warehouse. But she simply wrapped her stylish jacket around her hand, and smashed the windows easily.' (Mahy 1997: 143) Conventional narrative codes are still at play here but Hero is manipulating and combining them to make a story of her own. Help also arrives not only through the magical pathways of the trees with Sammy, but also via the more straightforward and everyday path leading to Credence house, as Ginevra breaks down the gates with applied mathematics. As she sits by the broken window of the tower room, Hero is poised between real and true, between narratives which, throughout the text, have been competing but which now merge. In the room with her Miss Credence wears the black hat of a fairy tale witch, while outside Ginevra is 'helmeted, too, with a black safety helmet, the hat of a *modern* magician.' (Mahy

1997: 152) Between these imperfect mirror images, Hero's sense of division between the real and true dissolves. At this point the text seems to circle back to the beginning to become the story of how Hero uses her newly acquired voice to tell the tale which has just reached its conclusion. Her process of telling the story begins as the plot ends. The focus, in this climactic scene, on Hero's development of an alternative but audible voice, and her integration of her real life and her imagination inform this process. The story has been about Hero's silence but her narrative is about her voice, about how she tells that story in a language that operates in a space between silence and the Symbolic Order and encompasses both the real and the true.

6.6 Real and True

Throughout *The Other Side of Silence* the text is sharply divided into chapters of 'Real Life' and 'True Life', and Hero herself preserves a clear distinction between these two worlds. However, as I have already suggested, the separation between these spheres breaks down in the tower room and these previously discrete aspects of Hero's life meet and merge. Locked in the tower with Rinda by the unstable and unpredictable Miss Credence, real danger has entered Hero's true life, and her real life is now threatened by the true one. Although it reaches crisis point in the tower, this seepage between the real and true has, however, been there throughout the text. On the day of Ginevra's return, Hero finds that she cannot step between the two lives with her usual clarity - 'And now I found that, on this particular day, real life was refusing to step back as it usually did' (Mahy 1997: 42) - and on her next visit to Credence House, and those after, she has the sense that real life (in the shape of Sammy it turns out) is following her, tracing her path into her alternative world: 'And, once again, I felt like someone was watching me, wanting to know where I was off to, and why. I looked over my shoulder every now and then, but I couldn't see anyone spying on me. I didn't really expect to, in spite of the spooky feeling tapping at my shoulder.' (Mahy 1997: 106) These fractures in the solid line that Hero has drawn between her two lives unsettle her but the incursions of her true life into her real one are more darkly disturbing. While initially Miss Credence's peculiarities fade in significance or can be rationalized away as she gets closer to home, Hero increasingly feels drawn back to Credence House, both imaginatively and financially, and its strangeness refuses to dissipate in the real world: 'I began to turn Squintum's House into real life, to remind myself how normal it really was. It was a house lived in by someone who, no matter how much they resisted the idea, worked in a post shop. ... Wasn't it all really ordinary? No. I couldn't force it to be ordinary.' (Mahy 1997: 85) The house and its secrets haunt real life: Miss Credence calls her back to Squintum's House from behind the post office desk and over the phone and,

as I have already suggested, the stories of her true life begin to reach out and overwhelm her. As the novel opens the separation between real and true seems fundamental to Hero's conception of both: the subjective world of the true offers marvellous and magical possibilities which are at odds with the unremarkable, mundane routine of everyday life: 'In fairy tales girls and boys leave their homes in mills or castles or hovels or whatever, and set off into the forests where they find wonders. It's dangerous, in there among the trees, but amazing things happen to fairy-tale children' (Mahy 1997: 8), whereas: 'Real life always began with breakfast.' (Mahy 1997:23) However, both the story and Hero's narrative reveal this to be a flawed premise: unchecked by the real world, true life fantasies become dangerously consuming, as Miss Credence's excesses illustrate, and the everyday is enlarged and given meaning by the imagination. Although by the end of the story Hero both desires and urgently needs to escape the trap that true life has become, quite literally, her narrative demonstrates how she transforms rather than abandons the imaginative energy from which her true life was created.

Anna Smith argues that the process of integrating the rich imaginative life which is often associated with childhood with the experiences of everyday life is part of Hero's growth and development and is present in Mahy's novels more generally:

If constructing delightful worlds of make-believe belongs to the perceptual space of childhood, adolescence for Mahy is less about putting aside childish things than it is about reconstructing them and making them richer, more subtly textured. Growing up means bringing metaphor along too, in order not to deny the power of the true, or the wondrously magical, but to enlarge the dimensions of the real. (Smith 2005: 48)

While the twelve-year-old Hero perceives her imagination as an alternative to the real world, the narrative charts how she learns to apply her creative skills to real life as part of her journey to adulthood. Rather than growing out of fantasy, Smith suggests that Hero's imagination is the force which enables her to grow up (unlike Rinda, whose lack of a language and imaginative repertoire confines her to an infant-like state) as well as being the mechanism by which she can (re)inhabit real life:

Were it not for Hero's true life in the trees, first as Mowgli of *The Jungle Book* and then as Jorinda the Bird Queen, she may have remained an elective mute. It is only because Miss Credence imprisoned her with the real Jorinda that she is forced to call out to Sammy. For Hero, the real world is entered and inhabited by means of the true. (Smith 2005: 51)

Ultimately her imagination is the attribute which connects Hero to the real world, even though, for a while, it threatens to remove her from it.

Hero's story records the collapse of her boundaries between real life and true life, but her narrative forms a self-conscious project to unite those previously disconnected aspects of her life and identity. The twelve-year-old Hero focuses all her imaginative energy into her true life, designating it as meaningful, fulfilling and the site of her true self, but, as her silence suggests, she seems unable to translate her narrative skills into the context of her everyday experiences. This is partly because, in the noisy Rapper household, silence is a more effective tool for asserting her unique identity than trying to compete vocally for space in 'the great family song' (103). But her investment in an alternative world perhaps also suggests that, raised on European fairy tales and colonial children's fiction, Hero does not perceive everyday life in suburban New Zealand as the appropriate stuff of stories.¹⁴ Her own narrative, however, suggests otherwise. Although the chapter headings speak of the divisions constructed by the twelve-year-old Hero, between real life and true life, it is worth noting that both are represented in Hero's narrative. The invention of the twelve-year-old Hero, creating for herself an imaginary life in the trees, is explicitly on display, but, more subtly, the fifteen-year-old narrating Hero is also constructing her past real life as a story as she writes: selecting events, converting them into words, shaping them into a narrative pattern, illuminating them with imagery and making sense of them in the process. Real life occupies more than half the text, but, with Hero positioned as author/narrator, it is real life transformed by her imagination and made into a story.

The narrative itself enacts the integration of the real and the true. Everyday life is not as rigid and self-evident as the young Hero once thought it to be, but instead is malleable enough to bend into multiple narrative shapes, like a fairy tale, or a gothic story, or a soap opera. There are moments in Hero's story when she overtly acknowledges the narrative potential in real events, particularly when she places herself slightly outside of them and adjusts her perspective to reveal a different view. Returning from Credence House at dusk, rather than in the morning, Hero sees her family home, which is surrounded by the builders' scaffolding, in a new way which emphasizes the multiple, interconnected stories that dwell within the house: 'But then, as a row of lighted windows showed up along the side, it turned into a comic strip.' (Mahy 1997: 116) As she crawls around the scaffolding, peering in at one window after another, Hero uses the conventions of the comic strip genre to see and interpret the familiar scenes. She collects fragments of stories which she pieces together within her own narrative, but which might also

¹⁴ In her essay 'The Dissolving Ghost', Mahy argues for the importance of local children's literature to create 'a sympathetic resonance between these inner and outer worlds', and recognizes that as a child she perceived her everyday New Zealand life as 'inadequate stuff for a story' (Mahy 2000: 34).

be put together a different way by another observer or reader, like Colin and Kevin Brett, the builders working on the house: 'I wondered if this was how the Bretts saw us ... a comic strip. Flashing up in window after window, words floating out in speech balloons, ...' (Mahy 1997: 120). This detached, alternative perspective allows Hero to read her family's story differently. She has already noted, a number of times, that the Bretts appear to be watching her family life as if it were scenes from a soap opera: 'They stood on our veranda, one holding a level, the other a saw, listening intently to the words of our private family soap opera that was squeezing out from under the door.' (Mahy 1997: 39) Gossip, snatches of overheard conversations, glimpsed tableaux through lighted windows: all have the potential to become stories with the application of a narrative imagination to fill the gaps, connect the scenes, see the pattern. Seen from different vantage points, real life can be read through various narrative forms. Athol tells parts of the same story as Hero in his soap opera scripts, but with different editing and emphases it becomes a new tale.

These self-conscious demonstrations of the crossover between real life and stories in the text work playfully to foreground its own fictionality. Despite the implied autobiographical status of the story, the switch to a third person narrator in the final section breaks the frame of Hero's narrative to insist that it is a fiction. When Hero goes on to burn the manuscript which is the story that the reader has just been reading it creates what Lisa Scally calls, 'a nice metafictional paradox' (Scally 2005: 144) presenting the reader with the troubling problem of how they can have read a book which apparently no longer exists. Of course, the shock is one of expectations confounded, disbelief recalled, rather than any real betrayal; the reader already knows that the story is a fiction, that Mahy, not Hero Rapper, is the author, as Diane Hebley points out: 'But, of course, the destruction of Hero's book is yet another illusion. In the real world, readers hold the published book in their hands, thus experiencing directly that crossing of the dividing line between the imagined story and the solid reality of print and paper.' (Hebley 2005: 200) But the oddness of reading something that the narrative maintains has been burned and deleted creates a self-consciousness about the text's fictionality and about its presence as an artefact. The effect here is one of almost Brechtian 'alienation', a making strange of the book in both its textual and physical form. Foregrounding the fictionality of that which has presented itself as life suggests that the distinctions are easily blurred; all attempts to write life inevitably encroach on the fictional and vice versa.

But for Hero this is a productive ambivalence. Being able to apply her imagination to real life and transform it into a story allows her to escape from the self-contained fantasies of Squintum's House and from the silence which sustained them. The process of writing her book, which has taken three years, is suspended not because her story is

completed, but because she no longer needs to write her story down in order to make it both real and true. Although she says more than once that she is going to finish her story, write ‘The End’, she does not, in fact, provide this kind of finality, deferring closure by writing her epilogue and then not writing ‘The End’ at all, but slipping into another story with the quotation from *Old Fairy Tales*: ‘*Tell your sorrows to the old stove in the corner*’ (Mahy 1997: 166-7), and then enacting these words with her own manuscript. Not only does her own story merge with another tale in the written text, continuing the intertextuality which has been a feature of the narrative throughout, but it also slides off the page. Burning her manuscript Hero signals an end to the painstaking process of forging the past into words and narrative, but also suggests that instead she will move forward, up and out of any single narrative, extemporizing, rapping with Sammy and telling stories in an ongoing process of invention which unites both real and true.

6.7 Speaking Silence

Writing her narrative offers Hero power over a story which had become dangerously beyond her control and threatened to subsume her. But in writing her story she is also writing herself, and in so doing she gains authorial power over her identity. Whereas the twelve-year-old Hero is always trying to match her life to a book, to some external text which resonates with her imagination, in writing her own story, book and life become one for the older, narrating Hero. However, the text suggests that writing her own book might also be a dangerous activity. Hero’s experience at Squintum’s House has taught her that stories have a way of getting out of control, and in writing down her tale, transforming it into language, into words on a page, Hero’s narrative may easily become subject to the patriarchal textual and linguistic discourses that are exemplified by Annie’s lines of books on the shelf. Hero is acutely aware that her book might become another way to define and control both the story and her: Annie’s offer to edit the manuscript for publication suggests the increasing degrees by which the story may slip away from Hero to be refined by Annie, packaged by a publisher and read by an interpreting audience. Equally significant is Annie’s triumphant announcement that Hero is a writer – ‘She said the word *writer* as if she were announcing a great victory for Hero’ (Mahy 1997: 159) – finally fulfilling a recognisable and appropriate role after so many years of bewildering silence.

To elude these definitions and strictures, Hero, in her story, keeps to the margins of language and discourse, retaining the bird-like quality of her early adventures in the forest. When Ginevra divines that Annie’s interest in having the rescued Rinda to live with them is so that she can write a book about her, Annie responds defensively:

‘ “Why not?” Annie shouted. “It’s what we should do ... *use* what happens to us. Make it all *mean* something.” ’ (Mahy 1997: 160) While the idea that experience becomes meaningful through the process of telling is central to the text’s representation of storytelling, Annie’s approach to making meaning operates within the fixed limits of her academic discipline, as her outrage at Athol’s revelation, that he is writing scripts for *Pharazyn Towers*, borrowing freely from their home life, implies:

‘*Pharazyn Towers?*’ shouted Annie. ‘*Pharazyn-bloody-Towers?*’

‘Annie, we *live* in bloody *Pharazyn Towers*, or something like it,’ Athol shouted back. ‘And we have to *use* what happens to us, don’t we? Make it *mean* something? ...’ (Mahy 1997: 162)

Athol throws Annie’s words back at her, effectively arguing that making experience meaningful is not limited to a particular form of discourse but can be inscribed in many different forms and genres. Like Athol’s soap opera scripts, Hero’s fairy tale-like narrative takes an oblique angle to making her experiences into a meaningful story, often challenging the notion that language can convey or capture meaning in any simple way. Wilkie-Stibbs argues that Hero emerges from the tower with a ‘newfound tongue’ (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 66) with which she speaks an ‘... alternative kind of language which transcends both the power of her silence and the powerfully silencing effects of patriarchal language’ (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 68), and, through her telling of her story, Hero’s voice develops to continually unsettle expectations, blurring boundaries between imagination and reality and between fiction and the world beyond, and questioning conventional notions of authorship. In aligning herself with the fairytale tradition, in terms of her use of imagery, in her commitment to the transformative power of the wondrous and the marvellous, and in the quality and style of her narration, Hero maintains her distance from controlling patriarchal linguistic discourses while still returning to a world of words.

Hero’s narrative defies easy classification. While *The Other Side of Silence* is a piece of fiction, a novel for older children (although even here there is some ambiguity as the protagonist is a twelve-year old girl but the speaking voice of the text is fifteen, making it difficult to identify the implied reader) Hero’s text is part autobiography, part therapy and, despite all the pitfalls and dangers which Hero now knows the form entails, it is still, in no small part, a fairy tale. Annie’s academic studies make the world meaningful by explanation, dissection and analysis, but Hero chooses to make sense of her experience by organizing it into a story, illuminated with metaphors and given a narrative shape so that it yields meaning for her and potentially for other readers: ‘Now I have power over the memory of Squintum’s House. I have turned it into a story.’ (Mahy 1997:

163) Angela Carter writes of the special quality of the tale in the afterword to her collection of stories, *Fireworks*: ‘The tale does not log everyday experience, as the short story does. It interprets everyday experience through a system of imagery derived from subterranean areas behind everyday experience.’ (quoted by Simpson in Carter 2006: vii) Hero’s story is not simply a record of events, but weaves from those events a pattern which both makes use of and interrogates the imagery and structure of the fairy tale form. Her imagination, as well as the physical events, is encoded within the narrative. The richly metaphoric and intertextual texture of Hero’s story allows for the play of possible meanings rather than the authoritative fixing of meaning implied by Annie’s style.

The figures and events, particularly of Hero’s true life, seem to lend themselves readily to a fairy tale retelling, partly because the characters are self-consciously employing tales and texts as models and paradigms, but this is also a function of Hero’s imagination and narrative style. Throughout her story Hero makes comparisons, interprets situations and perceives the environment through the lens of the fairy tale form. Her mode of telling echoes many of the conventions of the genre. While the first three paragraphs of her narrative begin enigmatically, setting up the central mystery of the text with the unidentified bird cry and introducing the paradox of the silent ‘word child’ and the puzzle of her double life, the fourth paragraph in which the story really begins, echoes, in structure and tone, the traditional ‘once upon a time, in a land far, far away’ opening to the fairy tale:

Every morning I would leave our house and go down the road toward a park
... not that I spent much time *there*. For along one corner of the park was
a wall, and on the other side of the wall was the old Credence house, and
the house stood in the middle of a forest. (Mahy 1997: 2)

Apart from the conversational interjection, ‘not that I spent much time *there*’, these simple sentences build incrementally, repeating the noun from the previous sentence or clause to situate the noun in the next phrase so that they appear to exist only in relation to each other, creating a complete and independent magical realm which, like ‘once upon a time’ and ‘far, far away’, is outside any specific historical moment or everyday place. Although the next paragraph returns abruptly to the Benallan suburb, it finishes by reasserting the Credence house’s disconnection from this mundane reality: ‘But the Credence house was just as it had always been. It looked like a house in a story-book.’ (Mahy 1997: 2)

Hero’s style also suggests the immediacy of oral storytelling, despite the revelation in section five that her book has taken three years to write. Implied orality is a trademark of

the fairy tale, as Warner argues, and is written in as a feature in more literary iterations of the tales:

The orality of the genre remains a central claim even in the most artificial and elaborate literary versions, of the French, or the Victorians or later inventions; it is often carried in texts through which fairy tales have circulated in writing for three hundred years by the postulation of a narrator, a grandmotherly or nanny type, called Gammer Gurton or Aunty Molesworth or Mother Hubbard as well as Mother Goose or some such cosy name, and by a consequent style, which imitates speech, with chatty asides, apparently spontaneous exclamations, direct appeals to the imaginary circle around the hearth, rambling descriptions, gossiping parentheses, and other bedside or lap-like mannerisms that create an illusion of collusive intimacies, of home, of the bedtime story, the winter's tale. (Warner 1995: 25)

Hero's narrative includes almost all of these stylistic devices. Although the main events of the story are told in broadly linear succession, the narrative ranges backwards and forwards in time, sometimes including bits of family mythology from before Hero herself was born, sometimes, as in the first paragraph, foreshadowing twists in the tale, emphasizing her narrative presence and persona as a speaking voice actively constructing the story. Syntactically, the text is characterized by an abundant use of parentheses, ellipses and words italicized for emphasis, imitating the rhythms, digressions and hesitations of speech. Narratorial interruptions and redundancies also create the illusion of spontaneity and extempore telling as Hero appears, for instance, to be in the process of working out how to describe Miss Credence, rather than having completed the thought and committed it to paper: 'She didn't even look old, but she looked – I don't know – eccentric, I suppose.' (Mahy 1997: 15) These interjections also, importantly, speak directly to an anticipated audience: 'Back then, Sap (short for Sapphira, which gives you a clue about my parents) would sometimes choose a word and find a way of using it.' (Mahy 1997: 7) Here Hero's bracketed aside invites the 'collusive intimacies' of which Warner speaks and encourages the implied reader to participate in her tale.

This markedly vocal style locates Hero not so much as the writer that Annie supposes, delightedly, that she is, but as a speaking narrator and in this role she extends rather than jettisons her earlier bird-like persona from the trees of Squintum's forest. Joining the tradition of the archetypal female storyteller, which Warner traces so assiduously in *From the Beast to the Blonde*, Hero becomes a Mother Goose figure, another iteration of the bird-girl, spinning a yarn as she speaks to an audience which includes herself. Her discovery in section five that her manuscript has been read in her absence and Annie's

immediate impulse to publication prompt Hero to re-examine the context of her tale and self-consciously consider that her storytelling proceeds from a different aesthetic. In the codicil which she then returns to the computer to write, she imagines books without names on the spines (in telling contrast to the increasing size of Annie's name on her publications) and stories which are free to transform beyond the author's control of meaning:

If things were fair, all stories would be anonymous. I don't mean the storyteller wouldn't get paid for telling. But there would be no names on the covers of books or interviews on television ... just the story itself, climbing walls, sliding from tree to tree, and stealing secretly through the forests of the world, real, but more than real. (Mahy 1997: 165)

Although this may seem a somewhat romanticized conception of stories, in rejecting the possibility of publication Hero is explicitly aligning herself with the oral fairy tale tradition which is already implicit within her narrative. Her desire to redefine the author's role more closely recalls the conventions of oral tale-telling, in which the story is remade with each iteration, passed on by an anonymous narrator to listeners who may rework and retell it in another setting, than the scribal, masculine ideal of the self-contained text which strives to contain an integrity imposed by the author.

In her introduction to *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, Angela Carter makes a similar distinction between the literary work and the folk tale:

Ours is a highly individualized culture, with a great faith in the work of art as a unique one off, and the artist as an original, a godlike and inspired creator of unique one-offs. But fairy tales are not like that, nor are their makers. Who first invented meatballs? In what country? Is there a definitive recipe for potato soup? Think in terms of the domestic arts. 'This is how I make potato soup.' (Carter 1991: x)

Carter's attribution of the fairy tale as a domestic art is particularly interesting in the context of *The Other Side of Silence*, where traditionally female household tasks and crafts are roundly dismissed by Annie and Miss Credence, whose academic ambition and pride place value elsewhere. Annie is irritated by her grandmother's attempts to share and pass on knowledge which she views as trivial: 'Annie talks rather impatiently about the way her grandmother taught her to hang out washing and dry dishes. "She always behaved as if hanging out washing was a special skill, but I suppose if you don't have the chance to do anything else you somehow make a skill out of it," I once heard her say.'

(Mahy 1997: 110-11) Hero, however, astutely observes that Annie's disdain reflects a broader disregard for the kind of 'women's work' that is not awarded any specific social value partly because, like storytelling rather than a book, it is a process not a product: 'The thing is that no one in our family had been taught to admire that particular sort of skill. Housework doesn't have your name on it, the way books do. It doesn't hold still long enough to be worth signing, or to count as art.' (Mahy 1997: 111) The state of Miss Credence's house and garden speaks of her rejection of domestic skills which she feels are beneath her superior intelligence. She is also consistently scornful or begrudging in acknowledging her mother's ability to manage the house which she takes as evidence of her intellectual limitations as is apparent in her surprise at being expected to take on these tasks after her mother's death: ' "Poor thing, she had never operated at our level, and he'd often pointed that out to me, so I can't think why he thought I'd be happy to turn into another version of her." ' (Mahy 1997: 81) Elsewhere, however, Miss Credence unwittingly reveals that her mother's domestic accomplishments include, amongst this assumed drudgery, more explicitly creative tasks: ' "Oh, it's *gypsophila* ... *gypsophila paniculata* ... it looks so ... so *light* in floral arrangements, not that I've ever been interested in flower arranging, but my mother used to love it. Well, she must have. She did a lot of it. Mind you, my father encouraged her. He liked fresh flowers in the house." ' (Mahy 1997: 46) While it may not have been her own choice of creative outlets, this apparently incidental comment does suggest the potential to develop artistic skills within the framework and confines of domestic industry. As Alice Walker argues in her essay 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens', women who are denied access to high art, for various and numerous reasons, have frequently directed their creativity into those domestic crafts which are largely unrecorded and unacknowledged outside, and even inside, the home (Walker 1984: 231-43). And, as Carter suggests, oral storytelling, often to an audience of other women or children, can be counted among those frequently trivialized and overlooked but fundamental and sustaining domestic arts that are interwoven with women's household work.

Hero takes on just such work in her job for Miss Credence, and this weeding and cleaning links directly with the development of her narrative, placing her inside the garden and house and in contact with Miss Credence's stories and secrets. It is while she is working in the garden that she listens to Miss Credence's obsessive fantasies which later become incorporated into her own tale. Hero is also alert to the value and skill of domestic work and seems to be alone amongst the Rappers in appreciating Mike's talent for household management: 'Mike is a skilful shopper. It doesn't sound much to say about anyone, but good shopping *is* a skill, and I reckon it can even become a bit of an art.' (Mahy 1997: 98) Here again there is tentative suggestion that this type of work borders on or even slides into a kind of art. While domestic work and expertise

are often coded as feminine, the text challenges fixed gender definitions and just as Annie's work suggests a more traditionally masculine approach to language, so Mike's role demonstrates that the culture of home and hearthside, which is encapsulated in the fairy tale, is not rigidly or specifically gendered.

Indeed, the figure in the text, other than the narrating Hero, who most actively participates in the tradition of popular oral culture, of which the fairy tale is a part, is male. Like Hero, Sammy is positioned on the margins. He is an outsider from both the Rapper family and his own, and from wider middle class society where just his presence in the 'trendy Benallan Shopping Center' (101) sparks accusations of shop-lifting. In these contexts Sammy is awkward and quiet, speaking very little and saying even less. However, on his own with Hero and Sap, he reveals a mysterious kind of eloquence which fascinates Hero:

He began to chant in a soft, rapid voice, bouncing the ball, clapping his hands, then bouncing it again. The claps and the bounces, mixing in with his words, made a brisk rhythm.

"Ever'boday's arguing. They're all in there abusing!

So watcha bringing home to us?

And where've you been cruising? (Mahy 1997: 56)

Sammy's free-style rapping has much in common with the oral storytelling tradition, making full use of voice, body and rhythm and improvising to a pattern in a particular context and speaking directly to a particular audience. The significance of these performance elements in giving the words meaning is highlighted by Hero who acknowledges that these extra-linguistic signifiers are lost in the transcription where Sammy's rap becomes only words on a page, a one dimensional representation of a multi-faceted linguistic experience: 'Put down like this it doesn't make that much sense, but, as he chanted and danced and bounced, it seemed like a sort of spell – an incantation!' (Mahy 1997: 57) Later, when Hero climbs into the house through the study window and notices Sammy's pack dumped in the couch for him to sleep in there, she observes that this cramped, book-lined space leaves Sammy 'no room to dance' (67), reinforcing the idea that scribal culture circumscribes Sammy's art.

In contrast to the static books on the shelf, Sammy's raps are living, moving words, like Hero's image of organic stories, 'climbing walls, sliding from tree to tree' (165), and so it is significant that Sammy is present and rapping as Hero leaves her seat in front of the computer and turns her head from the past and towards a future which involves movement and forward momentum. Specifically, this movement is a run in the park in training for the All-Comers Winter Race, but as Sammy calls for Hero his words suggest

a double meaning as he urges her forward with the phrase, 'Let's get weaving' (169). Of all the domestic tasks associated with storytelling, weaving and spinning persist in the very language which describes the activity, as Warner observes: 'Spinning a tale, weaving a plot: the metaphors illuminate the relation; while the structure of fairy stories, with their repetitions, reprises, elaboration and minutiae, replicates the thread and fabric of one of women's principal labours – the making of textiles from the wool or the flax to the finished bolt of cloth.' (Warner 1995: 23) So Sammy's use of the word here, as he calls her away from the written text, is also an incitement to a different kind of storytelling, away from the static book and towards an organic tale which continues off the page. But this is a process which Hero has already begun, in the style of her story and in burning her manuscript.

Weaving, which informs and describes the activity of storytelling, is also present within many of the stories themselves and provides a thread which joins the narrator and the heroine and which encompasses the bird-girl symbolism and the mute protagonist of *The Other Side of Silence*. In the myth of Philomela and Procne, Philomela, denied access to conventional speech, constructs an alternative voice by weaving her story into a tapestry; in Grimm's and Andersen's tales of 'The Six Swans' and 'The Wild Swans', the faithful sister, who must submit to silence in order to save her brothers from their transformation into birds, must also weave them shirts from stinging plants to break the spell which will free her brothers and allow her to speak again. In these tales the domestic craft of weaving provides the protagonists with a means of expression and a way of liberating themselves from enforced silence. As such, weaving echoes the function of the story or fairy tale itself, as these low culture, oral fantasies have often been the vessel for otherwise silenced voices to communicate experiences elided in official records, as Warner points out:

Fairy tale offers a case where the very contempt for women opened an opportunity for them to exercise their wit and communicate their ideas: women's care for children, the prevailing disregard for both groups, their presumed identity with the simple folk, the common people, handed them fairy tales as a different kind of nursery, where they might set their own seedlings and plant out their own flowers. (Warner 1995: xix)¹⁵

Warner argues that this contradiction exists throughout much of the history of women's tale telling. Despite the large numbers of mute girls within fairy tales, the form itself frequently transforms this silence into speech through the voice of the female narrator,

¹⁵ It is interesting that Warner's metaphor here is of gardening, another domestic chore which provides an opportunity for creative expression as Alice Walker attests to in 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens'. Gardening is also, as I have said, Hero's point of access to the stories of Squintum's House.

whether real or postulated. The act of narration asserts the possibility of speech even when the story seems to recommend reticence:

It is a paradox frequently encountered in any account of women's education that the very women who pass on the legacy are transgressing against the burden of its lessons as they do so; that they are flouting, in the act of speaking and teaching, the strictures against female authority they impart: women narrators, extolling the magic silence of the heroic sister in 'The Twelve Brothers', are speaking themselves, breaking the silence, telling a story. (Warner 1995: 394)

The roles of narrator and character inform one another, creating useful tensions but also sliding into one another.

Warner notes that in the long and heterogeneous history of women's relation to the tale, the figures of narrator, protagonist and even listener are frequently conflated. Mythologized storytellers such as the Sibyl and Mother Goose become incorporated into tales of their own and the roles of teller and heroine often overlap in a process of transference 'which accords the teller of the tale the characteristics of the protagonist, turning goose-footed and goose-herd heroines into tale-telling mother geese' (Warner 1995: 127). The prolific use of framing narratives and embedded tales within the folk tradition also provides multiple opportunities for characters to become narrators and listeners, anticipating the response of the audience and the effect of the tale told:

The silent princess embodies the audience of the fairy tale as well as taking part in the story itself, because the tale itself exists to excite responses, to bring to life, to assert vulgar rude health against pale misery and defeat, to stir laughter or wonder or tears or hope. Fairy tales put an end to mutism; even when they are about dumbness or dumberlings, they break the silence. (Warner 1995: 150)

Warner associates the fairy tale's power to break silence with the complex and multi-dimensional roles which women occupy in relation to the tales, relations which are in contrast to traditional models of masculine authorship in which the author stands as the singular source of meaning within the text. Women's shifting, ambivalent, often frankly paradoxical relation to the fairy tale seems to refuse any simple definition of this kind.

In *The Other Side of Silence*, Hero dramatizes this idea. The silent Hero of the story is transformed by the speaking voice of Hero the narrator. The insistently oral

style of her narrative continually unsettles her own proclaimed silence (which is itself an oxymoron). But Hero also imagines herself as the first reader of her manuscript and so is also positioning herself as the listener of her own tale, and this ambivalence about her location in the story is part of the text's challenge to the traditional relationships between author, character and reader. These jostling subject positions are brought to the fore in section five of the novel where the final pages of Hero's narrative are framed by two chapters narrated in the third person. This shift in the narrative voice highlights Hero's role in actively constructing her story by placing her at the computer and showing her hands moving over the keyboard:

She swung her chair in front of the screen, and, reaching across to the computer, she switched it on. It gave a small cry, flashing figures and messages as it checked its own systems, making sure all its different memories were in place. At last the screen turned blue. Hero touched first one key, and then another. The white print of her story leapt out from nowhere. Hero moved to the last line, and stared at it thinking for a moment. And then, at last, her fingers raced away once more. (Mahy 1997: 163)

The detail with which Hero's preparation to write is described draws attention to writing as a self-conscious activity. Hero, who within the narrative is part of the events, is here detached one step from the story, separated from it by the glass of the computer screen. Her access to and control over these events are mediated through the keyboard, through words which are not the events themselves but which she uses to represent them. From this distance she invents her younger self as a figure in the narrative, just as the twelve-year-old Hero once invented herself as the bird-girl of Squintum's forest: '...I was ... I had imagined myself into being ... a spirit of leaves and air.' (Mahy 1997: 4) The middle phrase here stands alone: in whatever role, Hero actively creates herself. She is also, simultaneously, inventing herself as a narrator and author and negotiating the implications of this role. Because, despite the implied orality in the narrative tone, these third person sections reveal the existence of Hero's story as a written manuscript, 'a block of pages, held together by a rubber band.' (Mahy 1997: 158)

It is yet another twist which works to confound the reader's conventional relation to the text and is one which, in the language and events that follow, continues to unravel. Print would seem to imply a kind of fixity which is in opposition to the orality of the style, but the language used to describe the manuscript seems to pull in an alternative direction: 'Now, it was no longer contained by the screen but sitting secretly under her bed – a pile of pages, fluttering at the top and uneven around all its edges, it seemed to be moving toward a freedom of its own.' (Mahy 1997: 157) Far from being confined by

the page there is a suggestion that the story is almost liberated by this metamorphosis into ink and paper, and this seems, at least partly, because, released from the computer screen, the story at last becomes available to the implied audience addressed throughout. The printed manuscript invites a reader, as Mike observes: ‘ “... and, after all, that’s what print is for, isn’t it? You must have meant it to be read.” ’ (Mahy 1997: 159) The movement of the ‘fluttering’ pages suggests the further transformations of meaning that readership implies. Hero seems aware of this, as part of her purpose in printing out her story is so that she can become its reader:

She had planned to hide it at the back of the bookcase (behind *The Jungle Book* and *Old Fairy Tales*, perhaps) and try to take it by surprise in a week or two. She had not imagined anyone else reading those defenceless pages until she had reread them herself, and turned them into a something both real and true, outside her own authorship. (Mahy 1997: 158)

Even in its written form Hero chooses to place her story next to fairy tales and children’s fiction, but also realizes that from this place on the bookshelf, the tale will change its meaning, even for her. The last phrase here is particularly telling, recognising that the next creative incarnation of her story happens beyond her role as writer/narrator. The story does not finish when the writing finishes as ‘outside her own authorship’ another kind of authorship begins: the authorship of the reader. Hero, however, does not put her book on the shelf, but instead destroys her manuscript and deletes her files, embracing ‘a different sort of silence, even more magical than the first’ (Mahy 1997: 165). Yet this move does not seem to be an attempt to protect her story from an interpreting audience, as her earlier silence worked to enclose her private fantasies: the narrative, after all, addresses an implied listener/reader directly. Rather her destruction of the manuscript suggests a decision to step ‘outside her own authorship’ in another sense, by eluding the ‘fame’ and authority of putting her name to the text and defying the possibility that her role as a published author might eclipse those other roles she has invented for herself within and beyond her story.

Significantly, the agent of the manuscript’s destruction is the stove in the study. Hero feeds her manuscript to the stove in response to fairy tale advice:

Once I used to pick up *Old Fairy Tales*, shut my eyes, put my blind finger blindly on a line, then open my eyes suddenly so that I could read whatever it was that fate had to say to me. *Tell your sorrows to the old stove in the corner*, I read, because true life is timeless and the story already knew what lay ahead of me. And when the story gives you good advice, there’s no way out. You just have to act upon it. (Mahy 1997: 166-7)

The line, which frames the story, like the divination that Hero once believed it to be, is taken from Grimm's tale 'The Goose Girl'. Here again, the bird-girl imagery recurs. In this tale a princess, on her way to meet her bridegroom in some distant land, is forced to swap places with her chambermaid and sworn, on her life, not to speak of this trick. Once the false bride has installed herself, the princess is sent to tend to the geese, but the king is suspicious and implores her to explain her situation. When she cannot answer he tells her, 'If you will not tell me anything, then tell your sorrows to the iron stove there' (Grimm 2004: 358). While the princess weeps her trials into the stove, the king listens at the stovepipe and, hearing her story, restores her fortunes. Here is another tale in which a vocally censored girl is able to tell her story with the help of a household tool. Speaking into the stove, the princess escapes the formal confines of her oath to remain silent. In a similar way, Hero turns away from the computer, with its connotations of modern, standardized uniformity and professionalism, and submits her manuscript to the stove, a decidedly domestic instrument, the site of kitchen work and hearthside tales. However, in giving her tale to the stove, Hero, like the princess in 'The Goose Girl', is releasing rather than destroying her story, despite burning the manuscript. The description of the pages catching light and becoming cinders is overwhelmingly positive:

By the time she closed the door of the woodburner, her story was roaring like a lion in the long throat of the stove pipe.

So Hero stood there, listening to her private lion, and to the fainter family voices coming up the stairs from below. She imagined her story, leaping up into the sky, shaking its mane of smoke, and then slowly dissolving over the city, becoming not just one but many stories. (Mahy 1997: 167)

The powerful, animate, and, significantly, vocal imagery of the lion here, applied to the story rather than the fire, works against the idea that it is being consumed and eradicated. Like an oral tale, Hero's fiery story seems to take flight from the stovepipe and continue on a kind of narrative journey, transforming and multiplying as it goes, like a phoenix from the flames. Hero can release her tale because it is the process of telling it that has been crucial to her, not producing it as a completed artefact. She does not renounce her story by burning it in the stove, but she does reject the title of author as Annie envisions it for her, and chooses instead to move forward to tell new stories off the page, with a voice which she has created and claimed for herself.

Chapter 7

‘As you read my book you alter the world’ – *The Tricksters* by Margaret Mahy

In all the texts in this study substance and form are intimately combined in the girls’ storytelling. Their ability to imagine beauty, friendship, freedom or an alternative persona is crucial to the development of their selfhood, but in each case, this effect is also powerfully intertwined with the process of telling itself. Telling focuses attention on how stories work, in a formal and an ideological sense, on the development of voice, on experiments with language, deviations from convention and on the creation of a dialogue. In this sense, the girls’ storytelling does not simply offer different stories from those prescribed by patriarchal culture, but also redefines notions of authorship. The texts frequently present an authorial model which suggests an inclusive, flexible collaboration between teller and listener and in which the story’s meaning remains multiple and shifting. This dynamic is most explicitly and self-consciously explored in *The Tricksters*. This richly metafictional text consistently blurs the boundaries between the real and the imaginary to suggest the textuality of the everyday and demonstrate how stories are profoundly implicated in constructing both the self and the real world. Harry, the seventeen-year-old middle sibling and protagonist of the text, is surrounded by stories and, in many ways, shaped by them and she is already, as the book opens, a writer. But the wild and passionate tale which she pens alone in her room works to confine rather than liberate her voice and imagination. However, as the text demonstrates on a number of levels, stories are rarely self-contained or containable, but spill into one another and real life and as her story dramatically breaks out of her secret book, Harry begins to author herself beyond its pages.

Stories are central to the themes, symbolism and texture of *The Tricksters* and Harry's storytelling is located in the context of a highly textualized universe in which there are no easy distinctions between the real and the fictive¹. The plot spins on a story, Harry's secret book, which provides the shape in which the Carnival brothers appear and the catalyst for the Hamiltons' own family drama, but alongside this there are multiple other stories – histories, secrets, myths and hidden identities – which intersect, overlap and become interdependent, to the point where all attempts to locate beginnings, separate out sources or pinpoint authenticity become an empty quest. In many ways *The Tricksters* is a narrative unfolding out of, and driven by, a web of other, internal, stories, which are not simply adjunct to or extensions of the main plot, but active in creating its shape and direction². Stories beget other stories in *The Tricksters*, and meaning is constructed within these internal stories, and to some extent in the primary narrative, by reference to other stories, rather than to any kind of objective reality, to suggest that representations of life are always mediated through a chain of other referents. The intense self-consciousness about stories and storytelling in *The Tricksters* is signalled in numerous ways. The text employs a range of metafictional devices to make visible the operation of narrative codes and generic conventions in both the primary narrative and the stories which the characters tell to suggest that reality is often structured through the same patterns and discourses. Among the most striking of these is the manifestation of the Carnival brothers.

7.1 Possible Ghosts

It is productive to unpick the ways and times that these trickster brothers cross between stories, accumulating meaning and possibilities as they traverse between layers of fictional and fictional-historical narrative³. The appearance of the Carnival brothers is a

¹ Anna Lawrence-Pietroni discusses the metafictional self-referentiality of the novel in her essay 'The Tricksters, The Changeover, and the Fluidity of Adolescent Literature' (1996)

² Although the shape of a web of interrelated stories is similar to that which I have argued is employed in *Harriet's Daughter*, this narrative matrix functions differently in Mahy's adolescent novels. The variously sourced stories in *Harriet's Daughter* create a polyphony of voices which work to reflect the plural, collective quality of Margaret's cultural identity as a black girl in the New World, whereas, although Mahy also suggests a flexible and diverse selfhood for her girl protagonists, her novels use the dialogue between stories to reveal the multi-layered, multi-textual nature of life (real and true), imagination, relationships and identity. These are not, of course, mutually exclusive positions but there is a difference of emphasis between the texts.

³ The story of the Carnivals does not appear, certainly overtly, to be based on any external/real historical events. Claudia Marquis notes that the story's and history's setting, Gorse Bay is, at least in name, not a cartographically verified real place (Marquis 2005: 65). In this sense the history in the text is fictional history, even before the contesting versions of the Carnivals' exploits reveal how the past is frequently, perhaps inevitably, fictionalized. However the (hi)story of the Carnivals does represent some of the paradigms of (post)-colonial, settler community history, as Ruth P. Feingold points out, in its presentation of Edward Carnival staking his claim to a remote piece of territory with a house, a refashioning of the landscape with forests and gardens and a son to maintain his legacy, as well as

narrative puzzle and their precise nature and identity remain ambiguous throughout the novel for, despite Felix's confession of who they are to Harry just before the Hamiltons' own secrets are uncovered (Mahy 2001: 282), both Harry and the reader are finally left unsure that this is not, after all, just another trick. While the brothers certainly defy any natural explanation, they also frustrate any easy categorization. On the one hand they are ghosts, incarnations of the troubled spirit of Teddy Carnival that has long haunted Carnival's Hide. Within the text Teddy Carnival was a real person, summoned, apparently, by the force of Harry's imagination and the trauma of past events. Although he almost returns in his own form, Harry's attempt to wish him away again by concentrating on characters from her book splits Teddy's ghost into three separate forces and beings, head, heart and instinct, which coalesce around the physical appearance, and, to some extent, the characteristics, of Harry's creations. The Carnival brothers are, then, the spirit of a 'real' man transposed into fictional bodies. This, however, is only the beginning of their ambivalence and complexity in textual terms.

Teddy Carnival makes a subtle transformation from 'possible ghost' (9) to 'possible men' (79) in a phrase used by Christobel asking Emma to evaluate the romantic potential of the approaching strangers:

... Emma moved to the window. 'Oh, they're bringing strange men with them. Where on earth could they have they have picked them up at this hour of the morning?'

Jack groaned slightly, but Christobel grew immediately alert.

'Possible men?' she asked. 'I mean, here I am, awake and fancy free, deserted, really, until Robert chooses to come home again. Well, he'd better watch out if there's going to be any other talent around.'

...

'Highly possible,' Emma reported back to Christobel just as if they were both sixteen, still at school and assessing a new boy. 'More than possible – actually *probable*. One short and two tall.'

(Mahy 2001: 79-80)

The ironies here are multiple. Emma's surprise at 'where on earth' Serena and Benny have discovered the newcomers fuels the suspicion, already present in the text, that they are not from anywhere *on earth* at all. The repetition of 'possible', echoing the earlier 'possible ghost', also links the visitors with Teddy Carnival at a stage in the text where

the equally potent tool of words – pamphlets, the destroyed book on educational theory and the poetic lament, *A Colonial Lycidas* – tying the Carnivals to the place they have constructed (Feingold 2005: 220).

their origin is still unclear, hinting at their shared identity. But also, and perhaps most significantly, in both cases the word ‘possible’ provides an important qualification to their ontological status.

Although the Hamiltons’ ‘possible ghost’ appears to gain in substance as the novel progresses, at the beginning of *The Tricksters* Teddy’s spectral presence is, in fact, highly speculative. The Hamiltons are keen to share the mythology of their holiday home with visitors and include the ghost as one of the highlights. However, it appears that, despite the mysterious circumstances of Teddy’s death, there is actually little to suggest a haunting other than the family’s own enthusiasm for one. When Anthony asks them where the ghost walks Jack answers evasively, pointing instead to the place where Teddy was said to have died, and when asked directly whether the house is really haunted Harry has to admit, ‘Well, it always feels as if it could be – it’s sort of open to haunting’ (Mahy 2001: 10). The ghost, it seems, is not a response to unexplained phenomena, let alone actual sightings, but the product of the Hamiltons’ storytelling about Carnival’s Hide. Ruth P. Feingold also notices that, even for a phantom, Teddy’s ghost comes with no real credentials: ‘The house, however, despite being introduced on the novel’s first page as “haunted of course!”, is quickly established as only “open to haunting” – there have never been any actual signs of Teddy, ...’ (Feingold 2005: 221). Despite their apparent conviction that Carnival’s Hide is haunted, the Hamiltons are self-conscious about their own role in creating the ghost.

As a ghost, then, Teddy is indeed, only ‘possible’, contingent, an effect of the Hamiltons’ collective imagination and an extension of their storytelling about the Carnivals. So even when this ghost becomes not only ‘possible’ but ‘actually probable’ with the appearance of the Carnival brothers, his materialization is already a mixture of imagination and history, even before he occupies the bodies of Harry’s fictional characters, for although Teddy Carnival is an historical figure within the novel, his existence as a ghost has always been a fiction. In her work on historiographic metafiction Linda Hutcheon (1988) outlines the history of the relationship between literature and historiography and the effect of the interplay between these two, sometimes convergent and sometimes divergent, disciplines in postmodern art. She quotes from Aristotle to demonstrate the traditionally held distinction between the forms:

To Aristotle (1982, 1,451a-b) the historian could speak only of what has happened, of the particulars of the past; the poet, on the other hand, spoke of what could or might happen and so could deal more with universals. Freed of the linear succession of history writing, the poet’s plot could have different unities. This was not to say that historical events and personages could

not appear in tragedy: ‘nothing prevents some of the things that have actually happened from being the sort that might probably or possibly happen’ (1,451b). History writing was seen to have no such conventional restraints of probability and possibility. Nevertheless, many historians have since used the techniques of fictional representation to create imaginative versions of their historical, real worlds The postmodern novel has done the same, and the reverse. (Hutcheon 1995: 73)

A postmodern interrogation of the boundaries and form of fiction and historiography is apparent throughout *The Tricksters* but perhaps what is most intriguing here is the intertextual echo (whether conscious or coincidental) of the terms ‘possible’ and ‘probable’. On the one hand ‘possible’ and ‘probable’ suggest the plausible and the likely, implying that what they refer to can actually be or happen, but on the other, these words also allow space for the indeterminate and the contingent, that to which they refer may be or happen, but it also may not: the words defer any certainty. It is telling that, while, in this quotation, Aristotle applies these terms to art, within *The Tricksters* these words are used instead in connection with the historical, in the form of Teddy Carnival. As Hutcheon goes on to suggest, the transitions between the fictional and the historiographic modes are frequently more fluid than Aristotle’s model allows as each informs the other. *The Tricksters*’ possible ghost depends, for that possibility, on the Hamiltons’ telling of history, but these tales are themselves structured by a narrative desire for coherence and possibility. Stories are embodied in the Carnival brothers, and they explicitly take their physical/narrative form from a combination of history and fiction. These ‘possible men’, who are pieced together from a collection of stories (real and imagined), suggest the textual construction of all subjects, and so frame the context in which Harry can begin to create a narrative of identity which is as reliant on her own imaginative invention as on any of the literal circumstances of her life.

Although not dealing with ‘real’ history, *The Tricksters* does tackle many of the same concerns as historiographic metafiction. There is a sensitivity to the past’s recurrence in textualized traces, which Hutcheon cites as one of the preoccupations of the genre, evident in the archive of photographs and documents which the family keep at their house, which, it is casually revealed, are only copies of the originals, subtly suggesting the dilemma of authenticity and the iteration of textual translations to which all historical evidence is subject. There are also both visible and hidden gaps in their archive, like Edward Carnival’s destroyed book on educational theory, which it is assumed would have provided some insight into his children’s lives at Carnival’s Hide, and Teddy and Minerva’s secret books, which are unexpectedly recovered, and which reveal a counter discourse to their father’s Rousseauesque rationalism. But as well as the omissions in

the textual evidence, there are also elisions created by the emphasis of their telling. In the Hamiltons' stories Ann and Minerva are almost absent; their histories are obscured by the more extravagant deeds of the men and by the selective interests of historians, in this case, the Hamiltons. Their marginalization reflects the traditional place of women in dominant historical discourses, silent and confined within the passive roles of wife/-mother or daughter/sister. Minerva's words finally rewrite this male-centred and male authored history, but the context in which they are spoken, in a private, whispered confession by an apparently senile, confused old woman, perhaps indicates the continuing difficulties for women with the acquisition and reception of their historical voice⁴.

But, quite apart from the inevitable limitations of historical sources, it is the process of telling the stories of the past that comes under most scrutiny in the text. The Hamiltons tell and retell the history of the house amongst themselves and to their visitors, appropriating it as they go. In their hands the trials of the Carnival family have been transformed, on the one hand becoming a kind of living gossip and on the other acquiring the grand dimensions of a gothic tragedy. With history, as with fictional stories, form and genre are instrumental in shaping the events and giving meaning to the narrative, so the story shifts not only with the perspective of the teller, or with the revelation of new information, but also with the mode in which it is told. If Aristotle implies, as Hutcheon notes, that history is not bound by conventions of possibility and probability because it records only what has already happened, historiography nevertheless strains towards those conventions and the structures they provide. It is an effect Mahy recognises in her essay 'Surprising Childhoods': 'Fiction then creates its own continuing stereotypes and imposes them on real life too. Certain incidents seem more real than others because they are made more recognisable by fiction.' (Mahy 2000: 69)

7.2 'Living Gossip'

Gossip provides one such structure through which the Hamiltons filter their history-telling about their house's colourful previous owners: 'Visitors to Carnival's Hide were always given its history almost as if it were living gossip.' (Mahy 2001: 21) Recounting the saga of the Carnivals as if it were 'living gossip' explicitly demonstrates how the process of retelling the past reopens the story to the present as 'gossip' suggests an ongoing act rather than a final product. Gossip is, by implication, unreliable, frequently sensationalized and open to revision and speculation; it tells a moving, changing story.

⁴Form and gender appear to be intimately interlinked here, as they are, perhaps more explicitly, in *Harriet's Daughter*. Minerva's non-linear, muddled but extraordinary personal confession lacks the authority of the more masculine, archivable museum evidence, reflecting some the gender differences in historiography noted by Chamberlain (2000).

And it is a process that the whole family engages in: the Carnivals' history is retold over and over again by a variety of family members. These repetitions are not simply reported but actually inscribed in dialogue so that the story picks up the inflections of the teller and becomes, like gossip, a communally authored tale. When Naomi innocently tells Anthony that she is expecting a relative of Minerva's to visit over Christmas, Harry observes, ' "We could even learn more gossip" ' (Mahy 2001: 48), again signalling the dynamic nature of their chosen historiographic form.

And Anthony does bring 'family gossip'. In the scene in which he reveals his identity and Minerva's shocking assertion to Naomi the dialogue between them does reflect the structure of gossip, with its secrets and confessions punctuated by exclamations of surprise and disbelief: ' "What?"' Naomi exclaimed, clapping her hands to her cheeks and staring at him rather wildly.' (Mahy 2001: 267) And despite Anthony's rather cool commitment to his great-grandmother's story, he offers this version to Naomi as nothing more than that, another 'possible' history to compete with the other gossip. Their collective taste for gossip, which fuels their fascination with the unorthodox lives of the Carnivals, also colours their interpretation and presentation of their own recent past. Serena, following Christobel's lead, cheerfully refers to the 'wife-swapping days' (18), apparently hoping to shock and/or impress their English visitor as much by this suggestion of sexual liberalism as by the boast of a 'possible ghost'. While historical distance allows the whole family to enjoy the extravagances and mysteries of the Carnival gossip, it is only Christobel and, to a lesser extent, Serena who relish the implied scandal of the wife-swapping stories free from consequences. Like the gossip about the Carnivals, the superficial sensationalism of 'the wife-swapping days' hides a darker and more unsettling secret. These parallels between past and present abound throughout the book, and by making the imposition of form visible on the historically 'real', the text then uses these echoes to show how similar structures and patterns inform the shape of the present 'real'.

The use of gossip as a mode to narrate both historical and more recent events also highlights the novel's interest in how stories operate as a dialogue. In both these examples, stories are told as part of a conversation and so highlight the reciprocal relationship between teller and listener, which might also stand for the implied contract between author and reader. As Anthony struggles to organize the various elements of his confession, Naomi asks questions, challenges his authority and gets distracted by other concerns, so that other stories and perspectives impinge on the tale he is trying to tell. In this way the novel suggests a dynamic relationship between the author/narrator, the story and the reader/listener. Similarly, Christobel's artful account of previous Christmas parties addresses multiple audiences to different effect:

‘Don’t start that wife-swapping talk again!’ Jack said wearily. This was a mistake.

‘Oh, Anthony,’ cried Christobel, giving her father a needling smile, ‘you really should have been here three or four Christmases ago. It was all barbecues in those days, with wine, olives, people being sick in the bushes and a bit of fairly discreet wife-swapping going on.’ (Mahy 2001: 60)

This exchange is loaded with family politics and power struggles but it also demonstrates how gossip is used to do more than communicate information. The stories mean differently for everyone in the room.

Stories told through dialogue, like gossip, then, emphasize the dynamics of the various relationships involved in producing any of these meanings. And this is a novel in which the characters talk a lot and tell numerous stories about themselves and about their pasts, both recent and distant. They connect, but also compete, through stories and language. Serena, still one of ‘the little ones’ (61), is eager to claim ownership of the family scandal, but it is clear that she is actually only parroting Christobel, perhaps catching the effect more than the meaning of what her sister says. Amongst her younger siblings Christobel’s words reverberate and become part of their own speech, causing Jack to remark that ‘[e]ven when she isn’t here she still has her say, because other people say it for her.’ (Mahy 2001: 19) The children directly experience the predicament of trying to express themselves through a language which is always already implicated in other utterances:

‘If he didn’t hit the log, Teddy must have been a determined drowner,’ cried Benny smugly, earning a surprised look from Anthony, which made Serena jealous.

‘He didn’t say that first – Christo did!’ she exclaimed.

‘You think Christo said every good thing first!’ Benny cried back.

‘So does Christo,’ Harry muttered, as much to herself as Serena.
(Mahy 2001: 17)

The text manages to combine here the mundane and recognizable tensions of sibling rivalry with the suggestion of the more abstract dilemmas of Bakhtinian dialogism. The language of the younger children is continually in dialogue with the speech of their older sister. When Benny quips that Teddy must have been a determined drowner, he refers back to Christobel’s use of the phrase and forward to the response he anticipates it will elicit, while the change of context and speaker makes the same words mean differently.

This kind of linguistic self-referentiality is found in Bakhtin's theories of dialogic language which argue that all utterances contain within them the previous uses of the words, as Graham Allen explains: 'For Bakhtin ... [t]he word becomes one's own through an act of 'appropriation', which means that it is never wholly one's own, is always already permeated with traces of other words, other uses.' (Allen 2000: 28) While Benny and Serena may accept (although resent) Christobel as the source of 'every good thing' linguistically, Harry's hushed remark undercuts this assertion to disturb the myth of Christobel as verbal originator. It is, nevertheless, within this wordy environment that Harry is trying to find her own voice and while her initial solution to the problem of finding all her words already spoken is to keep them separate and fixed in her secret book, this, as I shall go on to suggest, is a flawed and unsustainable project.

Attention to Christobel's clever turn of phrase also reveals another aspect of the text's linguistic self-consciousness. Christobel may be the most conspicuous wit in the family but, in fact, all of the Hamiltons, including the children, and their guests display extraordinary eloquence. The dialogue is consistently sharp, rich and multi-layered, and, in the context of the book's other metafictional strategies, this itself becomes a signal of its constructedness. The dialogue in the novel is markedly not 'real' speech; the very cleverness of the wordplay indicates its status as a function of the text and as a literary effect. Both Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh point out that metafiction not only interrogates the workings of narrative but, more radically, also examines the operation of language as an arbitrary, subjective and ideologically implicated system of signs and referents:

The simple notion that language passively reflects a coherent, meaningful and 'objective' world is no longer tenable. Language is an independent, self-contained system which generates its own 'meanings'. Its relationship to the phenomenal world is highly complex, problematic and regulated by convention. 'Meta' terms, therefore, are required in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers. (Waugh 2002: 240)

The dialogue in *The Tricksters*, which is heightened and honed, serves to remind the reader of its artificiality. The conversation is loaded with puns, literary allusions, whole arguments conducted in euphemism, private jokes and echoed phrases. Quite apart from what each of these adds to the interpretative possibilities of the text, these devices highlight the way in which the dialogue is a literary construct. These elements of wordplay also expose language at its most obviously unstable, where meanings are intentionally multiple or phrases deliberately intertextual, so that the contingency of language in more

general terms is made visible. Perhaps the most explicit example of this is Serena's and Benny's 'private' language, which consists of substituting 'moo' and 'grunt' for other words conveying pleasure and displeasure. Far from being secret, the whole family understand these random substitutions and, indeed, use them in their own conversation. The reader, too, is immediately able to understand and assign meaning to these signs when they appear throughout the text. By making these childlike, onomatopoeic sound images of animal noises bear a meaning entirely unconnected to these signs within the conventional language system, the text exposes both the arbitrariness of the signs in themselves and the operation of context and consensus in the production of meaning.

These 'variations' on the use of gossip in the novel work to emphasize the narrative and linguistic instability that is inherent in all storytelling. By demonstrating how not only the past but also the present is made in language the text suggests that reality as well as fiction is produced rather than simply experienced. While gossip is used within *The Tricksters* to illustrate how stories about the present, as well as those about the past, are formed from a dialogue of multiple voices, subject positions and contexts, mixing the actual with the 'possible' and with conventional narrative expectations, the other form through which the Hamiltons, and especially Harry, tell the Carnival history, the Gothic, is employed to suggest how imaginative and fictional codes not only reflect but also shape real life.

7.3 Gothic Dialogues

When Serena attempts to impress Anthony with the romantic potential of their holiday home, her telling becomes a parody of a gothic mystery:

'Edward saw Teddy dive,' she cried, half miming the old story. 'And he didn't come up. He vanished away.'

...

'He was never found!' Serena exclaimed, staring fixedly at Anthony, anxious that he should understand every bit of the old drama. '*Never ever found!* That's why we think he's still here.'

(Mahy 2001: 16-18)

The ghost is obviously part of this telling, a function of form and style rather than supernatural activity, initially at least. There is no suggestion that the Hamiltons are deliberately trying to mislead anyone or alter the 'facts', but as a relatively literate family, as their bookcase suggests, their representation of the past makes use of the patterns

and structures found in fiction. The historical ‘evidence’ that the Hamiltons have about the Carnivals is marked by secrecy, inconsistencies and mysteries so their telling of the story adopts a form in which secrets and mystery are part of the expectations. Focussing on particular aspects of their history - the secluded house, the grieving and tyrannical patriarch, the family isolated from normal society and its conventions, the mysterious death and the possible ghost - the Carnivals’ lives are easily organized into a Gothic drama by the imaginative, articulate and well-read Hamiltons. The imposition of this form is highlighted by the gentle parody of Serena’s extravagantly melodramatic rendition but it is present in the whole family’s relationship with the story. Although Harry is outwardly more reserved about expressing such Gothic extravagance, constrained by an adolescent awkwardness which allows her neither the unselfconscious pleasure of her younger sister nor the ironic ease of the adults, she is, the text suggests, the most attuned to the house’s Gothic potential; and although her general romanticization of Teddy is presented more seriously than Serena’s more childlike delight in the tale’s tragic drama, the details are no less lurid: ‘... Teddy wandered freely through Harry’s sleep, his face turned away from her, leaving a trail of salt water behind him, darker drops sometimes mixing with the clear ones.’ (Mahy 2001:21) And, of course, her further indulgences of form produce even more stylized (and dangerous) manifestations of this figure in her book.

The Gothic mode is, however, employed more broadly in the text as a whole and while the Gothic context of the Carnivals’ history is highlighted, and, to some extent, created, by the dramatic telling of the Hamiltons, the characters are less aware of the Gothic elements of their own setting and family crisis. Although Carnival’s Hide is by no means the medieval castle so widely used throughout the Gothic genre, it fulfils many of the same functions and occupies a similar imaginative space in the novel⁵. It is old, or at least ‘old for this part of the world’ (11), and so stands for the past’s enduring hold on the present, but it also bears the marks of the passage of time, despite the Hamiltons’ contemporary inhabitation of the building. The garden has gone to seed, the wallpaper is loose under its modern paint, the door creaks as they enter, and, from the first, the house is presented as a place of otherness: ‘... the steeply pitched, iron roof of the house,

⁵ Gothic art traditionally invokes a highly conventionalized notion of the medieval past characterized as feudal, barbaric and chaotic. Descendants of European settlers in New Zealand do not have unproblematic access to this distant history and in *The Tricksters* the past symbolized by Carnival’s Hide refers to a period that is marked, overtly, by ordered and rational imperial expansionism of the kind found in Edward Carnival’s theories about forestry and education. However, beneath this rational veneer, more primitive and recognisably Gothic passions erupt in the story of the Carnivals’ lives. Nevertheless, the transplantation of this Old World form into a postcolonial setting involves various reworkings of the genre’s images and themes, as Rose Lovell-Smith has explored in her essay, ‘On the Gothic Beach’. Lovell-Smith demonstrates that Mahy both recalls and modifies the trope of the Gothic house in her depiction of Carnival’s Hide, to resituate the genre in a local New Zealand context. Charting Mahy’s strategic inversions of the Gothic house, Lovell-Smith argues that the closed, inward facing, isolated nature of European examples of the genre is here recast, ultimately to connect both the house and the family to their wider social and natural environment (Lovell-Smith 2008: 100-105).

also green, rose up like a magician's sign' (Mahy 2001: 9). Like the mansions and castles of eighteenth and nineteenth century Gothic novels, Carnival's Hide is detached from the ordinary, mundane world by its physical remoteness but also by its new role as a Christmas holiday home, so that it represents both a space and time outside the normal codes of everyday life. Perched on the site of an old volcano and subject to the dynamic forces of the sea and the wind (and, to a lesser extent, the surrounding hills), the house also seems to operate as part of a wider, dramatically animate landscape.

In this symbolically loaded space the Hamiltons' story, just as much as the Carnivals', can be read as a Gothic plot. Fred Botting cites an interrogation of tense, sometimes aberrant relations between fathers and daughters as one of the Gothic genre's recurrent obsessions (Botting 2006 20) and this dynamic is central to the narrative of *The Tricksters* where the structure of the family is challenged by sexual-boundary crossing and a profusion of secrets. Jack's affair with Emma, his daughter's best friend, the elaborate pattern of secrets, doubles and threats that it creates, and the trauma of its discovery, relocate this apparently relaxed and open family within a classic Gothic tale of deceit and sexual transgression which borders on implied incest. Anna Jackson, Karen Coats and Roderick McGillis comment, in their introduction to Lovell-Smith's essay, that Jack's relationship with Emma in fact subverts Gothic preoccupations with incest by directing sexual behaviour unacceptably beyond the normal family structure: '... the common motif of incestuous inbreeding is reversed with the family secret having to do with adultery – sexual relations inappropriately external to the family.' (Jackson et al 2008: 6) However, both Claudia Marquis and Christine Wilkie-Stibbs convincingly argue that Emma's effective absorption into the Hamilton family as a surrogate daughter means that Jack's affair with her does, symbolically, stand for a taboo, incestuous encounter: 'At the centre of the maze stands the monster, incest. Admittedly this incest is displaced, for Emma is an adopted daughter; nevertheless that is what it is.' (Marquis 2005: 73)⁶ The open nature of the text allows for the diversity of these readings, but both self-consciously engage with a Gothic precedent.

The use of the Gothic in the Hamiltons' story, and in the text as a whole, has numerous functions. In perhaps the most basic sense, the novel's Gothic arrangement creates a strong and exciting plot structure which drives the narrative forward at the most accessible level of the text. The use, in *The Tricksters*, of mystery, secrets, the supernatural and a real sense of danger propels what is essentially a family story with

⁶ Marquis demonstrates her reading by citing the family's telling anxiety to assert that Emma is 'not quite his daughter' (324), and by analysing Christobel's reaction in a Freudian context in which Christobel seems to regard the affair as some kind of theft of her identity (Marquis 2005: 73-4). Wilkie-Stibbs also employs a psychoanalytic approach to examine the connection between language, the Symbolic Order, and the incest taboo, in which the family's naming of Emma as their daughter is as significant a prohibition as a direct biological relationship (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 53-55).

a heightened narrative force which delivers the most immediate and accessible way of reading the text. In an interview with Murray Edmond, Mahy acknowledges her conscious application of these plots of excess as a device which she regards as particularly relevant in writing for children: ‘... I tend to keep to the area of children’s or young people’s books because they seem to me areas which absorb the melodramatic exaggeration I mention quite well, where, in fact, such melodrama can be a strength.’ (Mahy 2000: 94) The melodramatic exaggeration Mahy refers to here is her metaphoric extension of the imagination into the fantastic, which is a device which allows for a whole spectrum of interpretative possibilities, depending on the reader’s skill.

Mahy goes on to expand upon this point later in the same interview with particular regard to her writing for young adults:

It is to do with the difference between writing for adults and writing for even young adults. Elements of melodrama (though I must admit I quite like them in adult books) are quite desirable in books for young adults. Partly because it’s often a more florid and melodramatic and less ironic time of life. People are looking very anxiously for something that’s going to make them marvellous. (Mahy 2000: 113)

As these remarks suggest, in *The Tricksters* the Gothic also provides a useful analogue to the extreme emotions of adolescence, and it is a recognisable metaphor for Harry’s repressed desires, both sexual and familial (as well as those of other family members). In this context, the ghosts which haunt Carnival’s Hide are spectres from the recent past as much as they are incarnations of the long dead Teddy. As I have already proposed, the Carnival brothers remain highly ambiguous figures in the text whose exact nature and origins are never entirely resolved. One possible interpretation of their appearance, which the text refuses to close down, is that they are psychological constructions of Harry’s fears, desires and even rage about her family situation, as Feingold observes:

Ghosts are generally understood to appear as the result of trauma in the past: an unavenged murder; a death that comes too soon for the departed to tie up loose ends. ... Ghosts can also be read, though, as psychologically motivated apparitions, brought to life as a result of present day trauma or disturbances. And while the troubled family dynamics of the Hamiltons prove nowhere near as dire as those of the Carnivals 90 years before, ample evidence exists to link the family’s literal haunting with the way its emotional wounds ‘haunt’ its members. (Feingold 2005: 210)

Clearly Harry is a major creative force in summoning the brothers into being, and she is the only one who really sees and experiences the more disturbing aspects of their tricks. They also appear to know what Harry knows, the hiding place of her book, for example, and the secret of Jack's affair, which supports the notion that they are projections of her subconscious. However, the brothers are also seen and acknowledged by other people, they are part of a consensus reality. In this sense they are markedly different from a phantom like Quint, from Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, a ghost story which Mahy cites as influential on her thinking about the genre (Mahy 2000: 94), who does not have an autonomous, communally verified substance. Although this makes it difficult to read the Carnival brothers as purely extensions of Harry's inner conflicts, they undoubtedly do occupy this role to some extent, as, indeed, other characters also function metaphorically as well as literally within the story. Tibby, for example, is a solid physical presence, a (fictive) real girl, but she too becomes a kind of ghost, a face that haunts the members of this anguished family:

‘*And then,*’ Christobel said with new vehemence, ‘it’s hard not to feel Emma somehow fixed me with her eye, while I was still at school, and set herself to invade me, and now she’s got my face for her baby. And I feel I’m the one who’s been possessed through Jack, and all without the chance of saying yes or no.’ (Mahy 2001: 324-5)

The language here is of a supernatural as well as a psychological encounter, Christobel feels ‘possessed’ and ‘invaded’. Indeed, there is a long tradition of psychological readings of Gothic fiction, as Botting’s account of nineteenth century Gothic writing demonstrates:

...the family became a place rendered threatening and uncanny by the haunting return of past transgressions and attendant guilt on an everyday world shrouded in strangeness. The attempt to distinguish the apparent from the real, the good from the bad, evident in the standard Gothic device of portraits assuming life, was internalised rather than explained as a supernatural occurrence, a trick of the light or of the imagination. Uncanny effects rather than sublime terrors predominated. Doubles, alter egos, mirrors and animated representations of the disturbing parts of human identity became the stock devices. (Botting 2006: 11)

It is striking how closely this description corresponds to the themes and events of *The Tricksters*. But these generic similarities are self-consciously displayed as the novel seems

to engage not only with the literary features of Gothic fiction, but also with its critical and theoretical contexts, such as this implied invitation to explore a psychoanalytic/psychological reading of the novel as one of a range of possible meanings.

Gothic texts are frequently intertextual, slippery and self-parodying and this narrative playfulness and self-reflective textuality are central to the way in which the genre translates into Mahy's text. Gothic conventions and images are deployed in *The Tricksters* with varying degrees of overt self-consciousness in different parts of the narrative. So, while the Hamiltons are apparently unaware of their own part in a Gothic plot, they use a Gothic style more knowingly to relate the story of Teddy Carnival's mysterious death, and the form is indulged in all its excesses in the torrid, purple prose of Harry's secret book, and then explicitly parodied by Christobel's scornful reading of it to the assembled family and guests. These different layers of Gothic narrative metafictionally speak to one another across the text to reveal those apparently more 'realistic' elements of the novel as also part of an artificial and highly codified fictive convention.

7.4 Intertextual Abundance

Further to this intratextual dialogue, the novel's intertextual references, both to the staple devices of the Gothic form, and in its more specific allusions to particular texts, work to situate the novel within a broader set of literary traditions and codes with which it is also in dialogue. These allusions appear both directly in the form of quotations and, often, also as more oblique references which connect the text to a chain of literary expectations and meanings. They are drawn from a broad spectrum of sources. Wilkie-Stibbs observes 'The range of intertextual references is promiscuous: classical, biblical and literary ...' (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 57) and, as well as its engagement with the breadth of the Western/European cultural tradition, Lovell-Smith points to the text's use of Maori mythology as an intertext to Teddy's history and reappearance in the trickster form of the Carnival brothers. In particular she cites connections with the legend of the Polynesian trickster, Mui, who, presumed dead, was cast into the sea by his mother and who finally returned with the tide as an ambiguous figure, somewhere between man and spirit (Lovell-Smith 2008: 94-7). Not only are these allusions drawn from heterogeneous sources, they are also deployed in diverse ways and contexts throughout the novel. As in the other texts in this study, names are a route/root to suggesting a character's literary ancestry, and the choice of name, and how they choose to name themselves, place them within an intertextual web of meaning and significance.

Harry's name, her true name, Ariadne, has an explicitly mythological context which multiplies into numerous associations. These have been traced in critical responses

to the novel: Marquis argues that this mirror ‘Ariadne’ represents Harry’s ‘Imaginary identification ... an ideal-I’ which reflects the ‘beauty and power’ (Marquis 2005 69) she desires but cannot yet embody. Ariadne, the Cretan princess, lover of Theseus, and wife of Dionysus, is the sexual adult persona towards which the seventeen-year-old Harry sometimes stretches, becoming, in her imagination and in the mirror, and in her conflict with Christobel, an enchantress. The allusion here is broadly rather than rigidly suggestive however, and both Elliott Gose (1991: 10) and Adrienne E. Gavin (2008: 58) observe that Mahy reconceptualizes this mythical figure to incorporate the heroic agency and self-determination of Theseus within her identity. Similarly Christobel’s name collects intertextual inferences. The name recalls Coleridge’s unfinished gothic poem ‘Christabel’, which, just before the poem breaks off, also tells the tale of a father dangerously enchanted by his daughter’s companion. Despite providing a clue to the family secret, the Christobel of *The Tricksters* bears little resemblance to the virginal, docile heroine of Coleridge’s poem. Indeed, the text plays with the possible expectations that the allusion creates. The name’s root, Christ, also hints at Christobel’s luminous presence while simultaneously parodying her own sense of self-importance.

While the traceable allusiveness of these names certainly does open up further layers of meaning, comparison and context, and develops the themes and symbolism of the novel, it seems of equal importance that this intertextuality also functions to place the characters within an explicitly literary context, emphasizing, again, their artificiality. This is most clearly signalled when Christobel suggests that her own family’s names spring from a similar imaginative source to those of the Carnival brothers: ‘ “Your parents certainly liked wild names, didn’t they?” Christobel remarked. “So did Jack. I’m Christobel.” ’ (Mahy 2001: 83) The Carnival brothers have just plucked their names directly, and apparently arbitrarily, from the spines of the books on the Hamiltons’ bookshelf, an act of self-christening made necessary by their highly questionable ontological status within the narrative. The brothers are, in many senses, fictional, formed from Harry’s imagination and secret writing as much as from the spirit of Teddy Carnival, and their overtly fictive names reflect this. Christobel’s observation, by aligning the origins of her family’s names with those of the Carnival brothers, is a reminder that even those more ostensibly ‘real’ characters are textual figures, fictive constructs reliant on the codes and patterns of other texts for their shape and meaning.

Despite their apparently random selection by Ovid, the names taken by the Carnival brothers nevertheless operate as part of the novel’s thematic and symbolic pattern. Hadfield, who takes his name from John Hadfield, editor of *The Book of Love*, initially seems an ironic, incongruous intertextual connection, as Harry muses after the brothers have disappeared: ‘She thought how strange it was that Hadfield, so violent, so amiable had taken his name from *The Book of Love* ...’ (Mahy 2001: 303). However, his

violent, predatory nature is, in fact, an aspect of Harry's romantic villain, Belen, whose form he takes, as well as being part of the split personality of Teddy Carnival. In this context he does stand in some skewed, perhaps rather adolescent, relation to the idea of love, or at least romance, as Belen's sexual mastery, and even cruelty, are part of a disturbingly powerful and attractive fantasy for Harry, as she realises with some alarm when she narrowly escapes a sexual assault by Hadfield ('disguised' as Felix): 'And then the thought came to her that somehow, through inventing the wicked Belen, she had laid a command on Felix so that he must come out of the dark and waylay her and refuse to set her free.' (Mahy 2001: 124) Mahy discusses this problematic but powerful fantasy in her interview with Murray Edmonds, noting how the idea of 'romantic rape' is often presented as something thrilling in fiction read mainly by women (Mahy 2000: 101-2), so the intertextual connection between the emotionally distant but sexually 'masterful' Hadfield and, specifically, writing about love, perhaps begins to unravel Harry's fantasies. The relationship between Felix and the novel from which he takes his name, *Felix Holt* by George Eliot, does not produce a particular intertextual dialogue, but instead is exploited for its potential wordplay, becoming 'Felix Halted', and perhaps also for its Latin root, connecting the brother who represents the heart to happiness. Ovid's chosen name, however, carries obvious and significant symbolic value, highlighting the novel's central motif of metamorphosis.

Not only does Ovid's name prompt direct intertextual connections between the events of *The Tricksters* and Ovid's most famous poetic work, such as Harry, Pygmalion-like, falling in love with her own creation, but the name also encapsulates the sense of change and transformation which pervades the whole novel. Everything in this book is somehow on the move, of unstable or duplicitous form, or in the process of some kind of alteration: both the year and the season turn in the course of the novel; past and present curve around to touch and reshape each other; the house itself shifts, reclothing itself in a former moment, and the very landscape resists stasis and is subject to volcanic stirrings, earthquakes and the fluid, restless interplay of beach and tide⁷:

Earth, air, fire and water had once played, turn and turn about, over the hills around them, like huge careless children, and the Hamiltons now sunbathed and swam in the ruins left by those games, baring their backs and legs on the shifting margins of sand and sea. (Mahy 2001: 96)

The imagery of the beach, in particular, is of an environment in a state of flux and it is a place where the natural merges with the supernatural and where the Carnival

⁷ Diane Hebley (2005) particularly notes how the fluctuating landscape of New Zealand's beaches and fault lines is put to metaphoric use in Mahy's Young Adult novels.

brothers are conjured. On a human level the atmosphere of persistent transformation is equally pervasive. Relationships shift among the characters so that Robert transfers his infatuation for Christobel to develop a new attachment to Emma and Tibby, Christobel is almost deliberately fickle in her romantic interests, friendships collapse and are rebuilt and sibling relations, which had appeared to assign stable roles to the Hamilton children, are redefined and re-evaluated. The repeated use of costumes, make-up and fancy dress throughout the text also suggests the characters' capacity for reinventing themselves, as they borrow identities –both Emma and Harry wear Christobel's clothes –test new roles and reveal hidden selves. Harry's age, her adolescence, also suggests a moment of dynamic transition, of her identity in the process of becoming. The text itself takes up this sense of movement and transformation on a structural level. Although the novel is predominantly focalized through Harry's point of view, the narrative perspective is not fixed and shifts, often very subtly, to reflect the position of other characters. Although it is seldom a disorientating effect, the text refuses the reader a stable vantage point and this device, along with others where characters split off to go in different directions leaving part of a story incomplete, or where conversations are only half overheard or finished, demands an active reading stance to keep pace with these fluctuations. And, of course, the normally stable boundaries between reality and fiction are collapsed as the text metafictionally reveals and unpicks its own processes of production.

While on one level many of these changes could be seen as natural or commonplace – the change in the season, the tide, the shift in family dynamics as children become adults – the text presents these transformations in the context of dramatic personal tensions that remake the world in quite profound ways. In his introduction to *Tales from Ovid*, Ted Hughes explores the enormous enduring appeal of *Metamorphoses*: 'Above all, Ovid was interested in passion. Or rather, in what passion feels like to the one possessed by it. Not just ordinary passion either, but human passion *in extremis* – passion where it combusts, or levitates, or mutates into an experience of the supernatural.' (Hughes 1997: ix) It seems to be in this spirit that the transformations in *The Tricksters* take place. Just as the natural landscape of the novel is subject to extreme forces, so the human world is metamorphosed through emotional and imaginative excess, as Naomi remarks:

'... We all got so terribly unhappy that all feelings changed under pressure like metamorphic rock – remember your geology: *rock altered after formation by heat and pressure*,' she quoted in a school-teacherish voice, looking around her at the old volcano.

‘*Metamorphoses* by Ovid,’ Harry couldn’t help saying, remembering his fingers burning into the naked wood bracing under the iron roof.
(Mahy 2001: 316)

The passion that Hughes finds in *Metamorphoses* seems something akin to Ovid Carnival’s the ‘Kingdom of Too Far’ (102), although, as Harry realises, it is not the arrival of these supernatural brothers that causes the transformations that take place within the family, rather the other way round, the passions contained and repressed in the everyday world burst through in extraordinary forms.

The brothers appear as intrusion of Harry’s imaginative energy in the real world, dissolving the boundaries between the real and the true. The literariness of the brothers’ names emphasizes the textual quality of Harry’s imagination, and perhaps even suggests the various strands of the storytelling process. Throughout the novel Ovid’s role in manipulating people and situations is compared to the role of the author. Felix directly associates Ovid’s machinations with Harry’s authorship:

‘Well, that’s something you have in common - you and Ovid,’ Felix said, squinting at her through the delicate veil of blue smoke. ‘Both being puppet-masters, I mean!’

Harry did not know what he meant.

‘Being a novelist . . .’ he explained, and his expression was not altogether pleasant. ‘You said you could rewrite me or even cross me out. It’s an Ovidish thought, because none of you is anything but fiction to Ovid. . . .’
(Mahy 2001:247)

There is a suggestion here that authorship is not just an effect of the written page, but a broader tendency to shape events, both real and imagined, into a narrative structure. If reality as well as fiction is moulded by the authorial subject around a certain narrative design, then the codes and expectations which are normally assigned to fiction also have power beyond the page. Ovid takes his name from an author and assumes the authority to construct the reality that he wants by manoeuvring the other characters to fit his narrative design. But Ovid is not the whole story. Felix, alternatively, is named after a character from a book. Of course, there is a sense in which he is exactly that, a character created by Harry in her secret book, and, as he reminds her in the above quotation, she still feels she may have some authorial control over him. Yet Harry also perceives that she and her family are being directed by Ovid. As Harry’s and Ovid’s narratives intersect and compete the fraught question of ‘Who is who’s

invention?’ (Mahy 2001: 160), becomes increasingly difficult to untangle. To author reality as well as fiction means assembling a cast of characters, so while Harry and Ovid authoritatively shape their own stories, they are simultaneously characters in another tale, as the provenance of Felix’s name implies. Hadfield’s name also suggests an integral part of the narrative process which the brothers comprise. He is named after John Hadfield, editor of *The Book of Love*, and this role of anthologist and compiler is another aspect of textual construction. Again it is Felix who illustrates to Harry that the deeply personal and private fiction of her secret book is heavily indebted to stories which came to her imagination from another source: ‘ “You can always tell Jack’s daughters and Edward’s sons. We’re Carnivals. So who was the father of your villain? Mad, old Edward – or dead Teddy?” ’ (Mahy 2001: 160) The inclusion of Hadfield’s name amongst the Carnival triplets suggests that part of story-telling is collecting other stories out of which to weave a new text; as Felix asserts, ‘Nothing comes from nothing.’ (160) Although this notion is highlighted by Hadfield’s name, all three Carnival brothers embody this idea, functioning as intertextual ghosts as they perform, in their fictional, solid bodies, the multiple crossings between history, reality and imaginary fiction, so that is impossible entirely to unpick their origins, creating an ambivalence which suggests the insoluble intertextuality of all writing.

The novel itself certainly reflects this as almost every page is haunted by explicit allusions and quotations or more subtle intertextual resonances. While Wilkie-Stibbs traces many of these extensive and multifarious references, identifying allusions to Shakespeare, *The Odyssey*, Webster and Stevie Smith among others, and expanding upon the various implications and interconnections of the ‘scraps of verse’ (Mahy 2001: 67-8) to which Harry awakes (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 57-60), the novel is so rich in textual echoes that an exhaustive account hardly seems possible. Yet this itself seems strategic. While each reference generates additional interpretative possibilities and opens up further layers of meaning, access to this allusive richness is relatively democratic, and readers are not required to recognise or unpick each and all of the allusions in order to interpret a cohesive subtext. Instead the sheer profusion of references suggests a more broadly pervasive sense of the textuality and intertextuality of the imagination and fiction generally, as Wilkie-Stibbs argues:

This novel is rich with intertextual references, which are another form of foregrounding its intrinsic concerns with textuality, and its position in what Roland Barthes has described as ‘the network of codes,’ in which the reading subject is intersubjectively implicated. (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 57)

Barthes's theories of intertextuality are less concerned with notions of influence and source and seek instead to recognise the text as comprising entirely that which is 'already-read' and 'already-written', in which language always contains within it its previous uses and its cultural connotations:

The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try and find the 'sources', the 'influences' of a work is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas. (Barthes 1999: 160)

This view of intertextuality extends beyond the use of literary allusions and direct quotations to conceive of the text as a 'tissue' or 'network' of cultural and linguistic codes, and places the emphasis not on the author's encryption of meaning but on the reader's capacity to release multiple strands of meaning from the text. The extensive, fluid and almost seamless use of allusions and references in *The Tricksters* foregrounds this sense of comprehensive and pervasive intertextuality and invites a similar reading practice.

The abundant intertextuality of *The Tricksters* is suggestive rather than prescriptive and creates a sense of the text which echoes Barthes's metaphor of a richly woven fabric (Barthes 1999:159). The narrative deploys its literary allusions to highlight the composite quality of its own textuality. The references do not cohere around an esoteric web of influence but instead reflect a magpie sensibility, emphasizing the novel's status as composed of and situated amongst a body of other texts, forms, genres and codes. The easy, fluid allusiveness within the narrative and of the characters' speech reveals how reference to other texts underpins so much of what is said, and, crucially, how it is said. The effect is enhanced both by the availability of many of the intertexts and by the characters' engagement in the process. The broad scope of allusions included is accessible, rather than obscurely elitist, and generally, although not limitingly, within the range of the implied young adult audience. References to *Metamorphoses*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Alice*, *Robinson Crusoe*, Gothic romances, fairytales and ghost stories, among many others, are recognizable on both a generic and a specific level. They are texts and styles which might broadly, even if not directly, be expected to be within the cultural repertoire of a young adult readership, and they are scattered loosely, and liberally, throughout the narrative. This arrangement does not demand that the reader connect the dots and uncover a higher level of narrative but instead continually recalls and suggests already familiar ideas, emotions and patterns of words even if the provenance of a quotation or allusion is not specifically identified, as in Felix's conversation with Harry about the brothers' origins:

‘I’ll promise you this,’ said Felix at last, ‘we’re not vampires or snarks. I think we’re here because – we were owed something, I suppose. We were owed and we were stubborn about being paid, whereas most people would have written it off as a bad debt. You see, we were sent to our account with all our imperfections on our head.’

‘Shakespeare?’ Harry asked doubtfully. It sounded familiar.

‘Forbidden reading for us. Too fantastical,’ Felix said, still cheerful. ‘We stole it and read it secretly, like a wicked book. It’s wonderful, read like that.’ (Mahy 2001: 163-4)

The operations of the intertextual here are multiple. The quotation itself, in the last clause of Felix’s first speech, explicitly relates to and develops the themes and symbolism of *The Tricksters*. The line is taken from *Hamlet*, where it is part of the Ghost’s monologue in which he reveals to Hamlet that he was murdered by his brother, Claudius (I.5. 78-79). Echoed here by Felix, the reference implies his own spectral quality and prompts Harry to ask the question explicitly: ‘... “are you a ghost?”’ (Mahy 2001: 164) The allusion also hints that Teddy’s death was, like Hamlet’s father’s, an undetected murder and locates this event in the context of family power struggles and fraught paternal-filial relations.

The particularity of this quotation, then, allows for a proliferation of additional meanings and contexts, but, beyond this, the use of allusions in general terms also works metafictionally to signal the novel’s compound textuality, as the positioning of this reference indicates. The allusion appears in Felix’s speech as an unmarked quotation – it is not identified by inverted commas – and so becomes absorbed into his general dialogue. No visible distinction is made between the attributable quotation and the other parts of his speech which, according to Barthes’s theory, are also inflected with the intertextual. In fact, one of the levels on which this particular reference operates anticipates that the source⁸ of the quotation may not be directly located by the reader. Even without placing Felix’s words as a phrase from the Ghost’s speech in *Hamlet*, the reader is invited to ‘hear’ the intertextuality, implicit in the rhythm and arrangement of the words, and respond to the familiarity of the syntax, recognising the allusiveness in a more general way. This kind of response is validated in the text by Harry’s reaction, which perhaps echoes (or is echoed by) the reader’s, both providing a clue and allowing for a certain ambiguity as she half-remembers and half-guesses at the source of the phrase. While

⁸ In the context of Barthes’s work on intertextuality the words ‘source’ and ‘origin’ become problematic and contentious as he argues that a reference does not lead back to a stable meaning in the intertext, but to a chain of deferred meanings (the intertexts of the intertext), the origin of which cannot be located. However, I use these words here to refer to the first, direct citation, Shakespeare in this instance, aware of the limits of this usage.

Felix's reply confirms Harry's guess, the narrative declines to pin down the quotation more specifically and instead allows it to stand as part of the texture of the characters' speech which bubbles with this kind of allusion, alongside other metaphors and riddles, which burst with multiple meanings. The emphasis here is implicitly on the reader's engagement with the text, inviting, but not requiring, the reader to pursue its numerous threads, or, at least, to be aware of its weave. Felix's final remark in the passage quoted above, signals the role of the reader by recontextualizing the activity of reading Shakespeare, relocating the pinnacle of the literary canon within a practice which was forbidden and subversive. The effect is one of alienation, encouraging the reader to adjust their view of Shakespeare perhaps, but it is also one which foregrounds the importance of the reader and the reader's position in making meaning in a text.

The characters, throughout the novel, present themselves and interact with each other in textual terms, inhabiting a world that is saturated by and comprehensible through reference to books and stories. Harry even wakes up to waves of textuality rising through her consciousness: 'Some people wake up to alarm clocks. Harry sometimes woke up to poetry. Scraps of verse, titles she had once seen on covers she had not bothered to open, childhood poems and mottoes rose and fell in a slow, continuous fountain in her mind.' (Mahy 2001: 67-8) Even in Harry's dreams, her subconscious, the textual persists. Here, as in her conversation with Felix, her access to this collection of textual flotsam and jetsam is not complete, so that the allusions do not exist as absolute keys to higher meaning but as possibilities. The characters' engagement with their own and each other's intertextual references works to reveal not simply the presence of this widespread allusiveness in the novel, but also its operation, to demonstrate that the intertextual does not reside passively within the text, awaiting the full disclosure of its symbolic value, but instead works in dialogue, not only with the source text, but with the reader. The characters' sometimes limited, sometimes idiosyncratic, sometimes perceptive interaction with the allusions they encounter mirrors the reader's relationship with the text; in this sense the characters operate as readers within the text. This is not to suggest that the characters are made to do the work of interpretation in the text, limiting the opportunities for the reader outside the text to actively construct meaning by monologically prescribing how the narrative should be read. On the contrary, the characters' participation in the process of 'reading' their own textual traces metafictionally engages the reader in the same activity. Far from being a passive role, reading, in the text, becomes a powerful and active position which is integral to the creative process and Harry's development as a writer is inextricably linked with her development as a reader.

7.5 Harry the Reader

Serena finds occasion to boast to Anthony about her sister's extensive reading habits as he examines the bookcase at Carnival's Hide, remarking on the unusually erudite selection of holiday reading: ' "Harry reads everything," said Serena, appearing out of nowhere at Anthony's elbow, surprising Harry with unexpected praise. "She can read upside down, or in the bath and even in the ..." ' (Mahy 2001: 59-60) Serena is impressed, apparently, not only by what Harry reads but also by her reading practices, which are prolific and integrated into the routines of everyday life. The suggestion that Harry reads everything and everywhere seems significant in the context of the novel's inference that 'real life' is also a narrative as 'Harry the Silent' (93), 'Harry, a family listener and watcher' (41), can be seen to be reading the story of her family using skills similar to those of reading a text. Amongst the Hamiltons it is taken for granted that Harry is a 'dreamer' (19), whose myopia and imagination blur the details of the real world from which she frequently seems to retreat. As the events of the story reveal, however, Harry is instead acutely attuned to the many facets of her physical and emotional surroundings and sensitive to nuances and fluctuations in the family environment. Ironically, this skill in perceiving and deciphering – essentially reading – the submerged stories in family life is a function of the imagination in which the others believe Harry spends so much of her time lost. As the reader of the family Harry engages her imagination to transform her apparently passive role as 'listener and watcher' into an act of agency. Harry's listening is neither casual nor passive, the simple overhearing of a conversation, rather it is an active attempt to decode and interpret the subtext (to continue with the textual metaphor) of her own and her family's story:

'How *did* you know?' Naomi asked at last. 'I had no idea you knew.'

'I listened,' Harry said. 'I stood outside the door, listening.' She thought this sounded shameful. 'That's what writers do – listen in,' she said. 'It's a sort of research. Not that I'm a writer now, but I was then.' (Mahy 2001: 315)

I have already argued that reading is presented as a process of interactive engagement in *The Tricksters*, but, as Harry herself recognises, reading, which includes, for her, listening, is also part of the writer's craft. Reading, it seems, flows into writing, as Harry attempts to make meaning from the overheard, observed and imagined threads of her family's narrative.

Throughout the novel Harry listens to the voices of the house from her attic space, the same space in which she writes her secret book, to suggest that reading and authorship

share an imaginative as well as physical location for Harry⁹. There are moments in the text where Harry's writing runs directly into a conversation seeping up from downstairs with such a smooth and subtle shift in perspective that it is unclear whether the visual details come from Harry's mind's eye or from an adjustment of narrative point of view. After the trauma of summoning Teddy Carnival from the space behind the cave, and the equally highly charged arrival of Christobel, Harry escapes to her loft and to her secret book, where, as she writes she 'listen[s], comforted to the murmuring voices rising up from below.' (Mahy 2001: 56) The narrative then becomes the story that Harry is writing until this is interrupted as her attention switches more directly to the drama downstairs:

Harry thought she could tell that Christobel had just come from the verandah into the room below, could tell by her step, or could sense her like an extra glitter in the light. She was opening a biscuit tin. The faint metallic twang was unmistakable. (Mahy 2001: 57)

The perspective here is obviously still Harry's, conveying both her conflicting emotions of awe and jealousy towards Christobel, and her processes of deduction as she interprets the aural clues. However, after this the narrative point of view becomes more difficult to locate; the conversation consists only of downstairs voices but this preceding focus on Harry's listening suggests that these may be the voices as Harry hears them through the floorboards, as she has done with Christobel's entrance. So when, halfway through the conversation, the narrative voice provides a visual description – 'Jack flung his arm wide. He looked very like Christobel' (57) – the continuity in the narrative perspective is unsettled. Harry, of course, cannot see this, so while, on the one hand, it seems the narrative position has now followed the conversation downstairs, on the other hand, there is still a residual sense of Harry as the focalizer and that the observations come through her. While the effect is subtle, this, in turn, suggests that perhaps these visual elements are supplied by Harry's imagination (like the extra glitter in the light when Christobel came into the room), as she fills in the pauses in the drama below with stage directions of her own. This is, by no means, definitive; throughout the text the narrative

⁹ As both Wilkie-Stibbs (2002: 50) and Lovell-Smith (2008: 106) observe, Harry's appropriation of the attic as a writing space for her passionate and turbulent tale recalls both *Jane Eyre* and Gilbert's and Gubar's study of women's writing, *The Madwoman in the Attic*. It is also in this attic space that Harry's strong imaginative connection to the house's previous inhabitants is confirmed. Although the Carnivals and their tempestuous history inhabit the house as a whole, their presence even extending as far as the beach, Harry's imaginative engagement with their story becomes most intense when she is alone in her loft room: 'Here at night, over many years, the house had groaned and murmured to her, peopling her dreams with old Edward, the builder of the house, meeting her eye and gesturing grandly at the sea, or with Minvera, his daughter, who had lived and been forgotten, and Teddy, his son, who had died and been remembered.' (Mahy 2001: 20-1) In this secret, personal space the past has undergone a transformation into the 'general weather of the imagination'(21), which Harry experiences directly in her dreams, and into her book, which takes on a new life, quite literally, at Carnival's Hide.

is not confined to a single perspective and often changes point of view mid-paragraph, but the subtlety of this shift does seem to create a certain ambiguity which reflects the general difficulty in separating the real from the imaginary in the text. As the conversation comes to a close the narrative curls round to re-emphasize Harry's silent participation in the dialogue: 'Under the light voices sounded other more fervent tones left over from midnight. Christobel heard them, but Harry was the one who recognised them.' (58) Harry's perspective becomes mingled with the omniscient narrator as she observes the scene from above, possessing the privileged access of a listener and a writer to the mysteries of her family and their narrative. The fluid movement between the presentation of Harry's upstairs, secret writing and the voices drifting up from below works to accentuate the interplay between Harry's reading/listening and her writing, as well as between the Hamilton family drama and Harry's gothic romance.

Harry's reading of the 'real world', both past and present, extends into the practice of writing. Story writing becomes Harry's way of making the narrative of life both intelligible and manageable. Her skill at reading the world around her performs a transformation of that experience which produces Harry's writing, which initially takes the form of her secret romance in which the events of the real world are displaced and transfigured into a gothic drama contained behind 'the black bars of writing' (22). Reading the events and relationships of her family life, Harry makes them meaningful by turning them into a story. The use of stories to make sense of the often confusing world of the adolescent is a recurring theme in Mahy's young adult fiction, and the relationship between experience, stories and meaning generally is a preoccupation which persists throughout her fiction and her essays and lectures. In her talk, 'Endings and Beginnings', Mahy muses on and explores the story's fundamental operation as a device for understanding both the self and the wider world, arguing that stories function as tools in the construction of meaning:

... in order to get command of many true parts of our lives and make them communicable not only to other people but to ourselves, we do turn them into stories. That is partly how we come to work out what is going on. ... We edit our stories, stretch them, shape them, emphasise useful correspondences. We choose significant events to build up our private system of clues and passwords, working our way through many calculations to fertile final equations. Energy (E) ultimately equals not m (mass) but ms (manuscript), multiplied by the speed of light squared. (Mahy 2000:15-16)

In this sense, attempting to read or comprehend the real world involves a process of (re)writing it into an intelligible pattern or form. But here reading, in the more conventional sense of reading a structured narrative, like a book or a tale, again becomes

a vital component, as the stories constructed to make sense of the real world are given their shape and context by those stories which have already been read, as Mahy goes on to say: ‘We listen to stories with pleasure because, as we work our way from beginning to ending, we are telling ourselves, moment by moment, our own tales, and we need the models. We all need the practice.’ (Mahy 2000: 16)¹⁰

In her essay, ‘Touchstones’, Mahy speculates on the nature of the imagination suggesting that it may be conceived of as an intricate structure, like a crystal or a snowflake, which develops its own unique pattern depending upon the stories that the individual imagination encounters, particularly those which are met in childhood. Giving two examples from her own childhood reading, H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books, Mahy describes how these texts continue to work on both her inner life and her outer decisions by creating possible frames of reference for her experiences, providing models for her responses and synthesizing complex ideas and emotions:

The images extend their influence very directly to my actions, though not in the simplistic way that people so often suppose. I have never been tempted to cross a desert or try to get through a looking glass. In fact, these actions are mere outer symbols of an inner state, the possibilities of which are ineluctably seductive. And I, in turn, am led to interpret possibilities and choose courses of action that match the imaginative expectations such books create. Even in small ways – the road I come to work by, the place I choose to live – I am sometimes aware of matching what I am doing with a set of images, many of which have been with me for a long time. (Mahy 2000: 89)

There is a forceful assertion here that reading not only creates the conditions for interpreting real events, but that it also defines and influences an individual’s actions in the real world. The imagination, developed through reading, gives form to the real life narrative not simply in the sense that it organizes past experience into a pattern that is both comprehensible and satisfying in the retelling, like the Gothic stories which the Hamiltons tell about the Carnivals, but also in the sense that it shapes the choices and, importantly, the desires which make things happen in the first place. Stories, as so much of Mahy’s fiction demonstrates, and as she argues again in ‘Touchstones’, have a power which extends far beyond the page: ‘I have suggested already that imagination does not decorate action so much as dictate it. In considered situations, imagination determines

¹⁰ Mahy’s use of the word ‘listen’ in this context seems to validate my argument that Harry’s listening in *The Tricksters* can be viewed as a kind of reading. See also Mahy’s description in ‘A Dissolving Ghost’ of her progress towards being a writer: ‘I began as a listener, became a teller, then a reader and then a writer, in that order.’ (Mahy 2000: 31) Listening is presented as an integral part of this process.

the sort of decision that is made and in unconsidered actions, imagination affects the interpretation.’ (Mahy 2000: 90-91) It may seem like a platitude to say that reading is integral to the development of the imagination, but Mahy’s conception of the imagination as a force active in determining the structure of real life experiences transforms this notion, so that reading is not merely a perhaps rather luxurious, escapist or even esoteric pastime, but an essential life skill, crucial to the construction of the self. In Mahy’s novels, reading and writing, like fiction and reality, blur into a continuous and reversible process, producing between them an endless dialogue and interplay.

This idea is apparent everywhere in *The Tricksters*: in the speech of the characters who communicate through textual references, in the intertextuality of the novel as a whole, but most particularly and explosively in Harry, who reads everything, and whose imagination is powerful enough to alter reality (even beyond the bounds of the physically possible). Harry’s authorship operates on numerous levels in the novel. Harry is active, through the force of her wishes, in creating her desired Christmas book, which runs into the text of *The Tricksters*, and which spills beyond the written page. This act of authorship, however, proceeds from Harry’s more conventional writing and the secret book which she pens in her attic room. But the narrative that Harry creates there is problematic in a number of ways and it seems to bear investigation why, when Serena asserts that Harry reads so widely and when all the quotations and allusions that are attributed to Harry’s imagination confirm this, she chooses gothic romance as the form of her novel. There is no suggestion in the text that Harry is a consumer of sensational fiction in particular and the bookcase at Carnival’s Hide and the family’s reaction to Christobel’s reading of Harry’s book suggest that the Hamiltons’ taste is generally rather more high-brow. But the form does seem to strike a resonance for Harry. Partly, Harry’s chosen style proceeds from the Hamiltons’ sensationalized storytelling about the Carnivals, although in her written text the excesses of this style become more serious and less knowing than in these gossipy oral accounts which are also seasoned with irony, and partly, as I have already argued, the events of the Hamilton family drama, to which Harry is responding in her book, lend themselves to this form. The melodrama of the Gothic plot is also a good match for the turbulent and intense emotions of adolescence, but Harry’s passionate narrative also speaks of her development as a reader and a writer, suggesting the dangerous power of stories and authorship, which have, as Lisa Scally observes, ‘the potential to either enslave or empower their hero.’ (Scally 2005: 144)

Harry’s gothic drama corresponds to a long tradition of sensational romance stories predominantly both written and read by women and girls. There is an equally long tradition of suspicion regarding such stories in a literary, critical and social context. In her study of the representation of women readers in Victorian fiction, Catherine J. Golden outlines the debates surrounding women’s reading habits, particularly those of

young women, observing that while genteel and improving literature was sanctioned as appropriate reading for women by some social commentators, an appetite for novels, and more specifically sentimental and sensational romances, was often presented as a social evil analogous with alcohol and drug addiction:

From an antifiction vantage point, a book of romance, sensation fiction, or sentimental fiction could arouse a female's sexual impulses, drain her vital energies, damage her mental and reproductive health, divorce her attention from her maternal and domestic duties, undermine her self-control, and rot her mind, leading to ruination. (Golden 2003: 22)

These campaigns suggested both that romance reading was a particularly feminine predilection and that women were physically and mentally more susceptible to the damaging effects of such melodramatic fantasies. These concerns are reflected, to a less extreme extent, in some of the texts in this study. Meg Woolcot's rash, inappropriate and potentially harmful preoccupations and choices in *Seven Little Australians* are associated with the novels that her flirtatious and indiscreet friend, Aldith, lends to her, and Anne's passionate romanticism is fed by a variety of literary sources which often bring her painfully, if ambivalently, into conflict with the duties and responsibilities of respectable everyday life in *Anne of Green Gables*. Although both the text and the practice of writing Harry's secret book become dangerous in a variety of ways in *The Tricksters*, it does not represent, in any simple way, a cautionary tale about the pernicious effects of certain kinds of literature. However, the novel does engage with the pervasiveness and potency of the images and desires this kind of fiction constructs.

If some of the more drastic and alarmist fears for the mental and physical well-being of female fiction readers have now abated, then romantic novels retain their low status in contemporary culture. Feminist studies in the 1980s began to reclaim and reassess popular romances from critical disdain and disregard, emphasising the sustained appeal of these stories to very large numbers of women readers and analysing how the formula and the texts themselves speak to and of the repressed or circumscribed parts of women's lives¹¹. In a slightly different but related context, Angela McRobbie has explored the components and tropes of the teen girls' magazine, *Jackie*, to suggest how this mass-produced, gender-specific publication contributes to the construction of female identity. Her study examines the various signifying systems at work within the magazine which advocate feminine passivity and isolate the young female readers from forming meaningful relationships with other girls in the determined pursuit of the heterosexual romantic

¹¹ See Tania Modleski's book, *Loving with a Vengeance* (1982) and 'Gender and Genre' in *Rewriting English: Cultural: Politics of Gender and Class* (1985) by Janet Batsleer et al. which examines the gender divisions of 'romance' stories for men (adventures) and women (romantic love).

goal: getting and keeping the boy (McRobbie 1991: 84). Valerie Walkerdine performs a similar project on comic strip stories for younger girls in a variety of popular girls' weeklies, arguing that the fantasies created in these graphic tales provide a particular set of resolutions to the problems of developing female identity within the family context (Walkerdine 1990: 87-106). While their subject is not strictly the gothic romance of the type that Harry is writing in *The Tricksters*, their analysis provides some fruitful insights about the ways in which female subjectivity is prescribed in these popular texts and about how this prepares girls' imagination and expectations for more adolescent and adult forms of romance fiction. All of these studies explore, within the context of romance, the construction of female subjectivity under the conditions of patriarchy, and while some analysts claim that the texts express the frustration that this produces in women's lives, most agree that the structures, expectations and desires which collude in women's oppression are largely unchallenged and generally perpetuated by the design and conventions of the genre.

7.6 Aberrant Authorship

The use of the gothic romance mode in Harry's secret book offers numerous possible and simultaneous readings. The narrative certainly seems to represent an expression of Harry's unconscious, as critics such as Marquis and Wilkie-Stibbs have observed: 'Her book is written more or less directly from the unconscious; writing about Belen, Harry feels him flow from her brain into "her magical writing hand" and on into a life of his own on the page. ... So Harry writes her dreams – her phantasy drives her extraordinary tale, her fantasy.' (Marquis 2005: 70-1). The descriptions of Harry writing support this reading, often suggesting a lack of conscious control, as the movement of pen over paper seems to proceed in a manner almost like automatic writing¹²: 'A moment later her pen, almost as if it had decided for itself, began scratching like a small night creature, in a busy self-absorbed fashion, while Harry listened, comforted, to the murmuring of voices rising up from below.' (Mahy 2001: 56) Indeed, when Harry pauses or rereads

¹² Margaret Atwood uses the metaphor of automatic writing in *Lady Oracle*, in which the protagonist, Joan, writes her repressed anxieties and desires in apparently random words and sentences while in a self-induced trance. Although she later fills in other words around these to form a manuscript which is eventually published, Joan's narrative voice insists that the woman who emerges from this process is 'nothing to do with me.' (Atwood 1993: 222) Joan also writes gothic romances under a pseudonym; like Harry's writing, this is a secret authorship, but, interestingly, here too there is an abandonment of conscious control as Joan's costume gothics are composed in similarly trance-like states, at the typewriter with her eyes closed or walking through a scene from the plot. As with Harry's writing, Joan's romances speak of her desires, but in both cases the suggestion that the stories write themselves is perhaps also indicative of the stereotypical and conventionalized pattern and expectations which this writing follows. The form, to some extent, dictates the action, so by writing within such a highly codified genre both Joan and Harry already have only limited control over the stories they tell. As Gavin argues, Harry's pen is guided by '... the restraints and lies of old mythological models.' (Gavin 2008: 53)

a section she is often 'shocked' (24) or 'surprised' (56) by the words which have come from her. In this sense, the events and characters of Harry's romance provide clues to her repressed desires, to be both the dazzlingly beautiful heroine of her own story and, at the same time, its powerful, selfish hero/villain, free to fly on wings which liberate him from conscience and consequence.

Within the family Harry is accepted, even valued, as the quiet, reliable, unproblematic daughter, seemingly content to get less of everything than her more demanding siblings, but, as Wilkie-Stibbs argues, her book reveals a powerful repressed desire for a space beyond the shadow of her family role where her own voice and identity can develop:

Harry's writing initially is the projection of her repressed desire for ego-recognition, a textual unconscious mirroring her own unconscious, a type of metonymical transfer in which she endows objects, the characters of her story, with her unconscious desires. . . . She longs to become something other, which is also a manifestation of her questing for the other, the feminine: to be an enchantress, to be Ariadne the mythical figure of her name-sake, to be beautiful, to be a sexual being, to be desired and desirable, to be both lovable and loved, to be Christobel. (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 48)

The Gothic romance provides the extravagant, hyperbolic, unrestrained characters that embody these desires but it also shapes the form which they take. Several critics, notably Wilkie-Stibbs, Marquis and Anna Smith, have discussed *The Tricksters* in relation to Julia Kristeva's essay, 'The Adolescent Novel', finding in Mahy's text the kind of 'open structure' which Kristeva argues is characteristic of the adolescent psyche (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 47, Marquis 2005: 63 and Smith 2005: 56). This approach yields some fruitful insights, particularly with regard to the sense of shifting marginality expressed in so many of the novel's themes and images, and also in analysing Harry's own writing as Kristeva explores the use of stereotypes and clichés in adolescent novelistic fiction:

An imaginary activity, this fiction borrows from the available ideologies or codes of representation that filter personal fantasies. The filtering here can become a repression of unconscious contents and give rise to a stereotyped writing of clichés; on the other hand, it can permit a genuine inscription of unconscious contents within language, and give to the adolescent the feeling of utilizing, at last and for the first time in his life, a living discourse, one that is not empty, not an 'as if'. (Kristeva 1990: 9)

This description fits closely both with the highly conventionalized forms of the characters Harry creates, and with her sense of engagement with a whole world behind her

words which, while she is writing at least, is more substantial to her than her immediate physical surroundings. The gothic genre allows for the melodrama of Harry's unconscious desires but its codes and conventions demand that those desires are split down stereotypically gendered lines, so that her wish to be found attractive by the opposite sex is expressed in the idealized romantic femininity of Lady Jessica, while her growing need for agency and assertion is displaced onto the powerfully masculine figure of Belen. These gender divisions at the level of the unconscious do not, however, imply 'natural' or archetypal gender definitions, rather, as the quotation from Kristeva suggests, this split represents a cultural, or more specifically, a textual effect, signalled by the high degree of stylization in the form of Harry's writing. As it is throughout this metafictional novel, the focus here is on the relationship between the story and the self: on how the story is employed to mediate the self. Harry's writing demonstrates, explicitly, how Harry's unconscious is filtered through a narrative pattern. This is evident elsewhere in the text as I have mentioned before, for instance, when Harry wakes to 'scraps of verse' (67), textual fragments which occupy the space between dreaming and waking, but also, more fundamentally, in the way that she perceives her role in the family: 'After all, in family life all the best possibilities (beauty, cleverness and the power to go out and have adventures) had been taken over before she was born and were being used up by others.' (Mahy 2001: 23) The language here is that of fairytales, suggesting that in real life, as actively as in her book, Harry is writing herself according to a pre-existent structure. Harry reads her family role and her unconscious desires through the lens of other textual codes and fictions and these patterns shape her own secret writing.

Modleski, McRobbie and Walkerdine, in their various studies of different types of romance story, argue that such fictions construct femininity as essentially and ideally passive: the heroines of these tales achieve their goal of the ideal family or the heterosexual relationship not by active pursuit but by selfless patience. The heroine is positioned as a victim, whose innocence, vulnerability and lack of self-assertion are an important function of the plot and only by retaining these 'virtues' is she rewarded with the love of the family/hero. In her novel, Lady Jessica embodies this image of femininity and signals, as I have already suggested, the adolescent Harry's desire to be 'beautiful' in men's eyes, with all that implies: it is significant that it is particularly Lady Jessica's 'helplessness' that 'provoke[s] violent passion' (68) in Belen. Harry clearly desires to be and identifies with this heroine, and can be seen to be striving after and experimenting with this role in the real world as well, in her determined efforts to lose weight, in her occasional vanity about wearing her glasses and in borrowing Christobel's red silk dressing gown: 'Harry put on her cotton nightgown, then borrowed the dressing-gown and felt herself transformed under a new silk surface. In this way, at least, she could become Christobel for a little while. She could try out what it might be like to be beautiful.'

(Mahy 2001:151) But when Harry really does become beautiful in her own right it is quite a different kind of beauty¹³, and her relation to Lady Jessica at this stage is less to do with physical appearance than a shared subject position which constructs them both as passive, pliant and dormant.

A definition of femininity as ideally passive is not, of course, confined to romantic fiction (although it has retained considerable potency in this genre), and Gilbert and Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, have traced the extreme and reductive representation of women as either angels or monsters in the patriarchal Western literary tradition at large. Central to this vision of the idealized angel-woman is her selflessness, her devotion to the needs of others and an apparent lack of personal desire, an image which, Gilbert and Gubar argue, amounts to a more radical presentation of female selflessness: ‘Once again, therefore, it is just because women are defined as wholly passive, completely void of generative power (like “Cyphers”) that they become numinous to male artists. For in the metaphysical emptiness their “purity” signifies they are, of course, *self-less*, with all the moral and psychological implications that word suggests.’ (Gilbert and Gubar 1980: 21) Examining this figure in key male literary works, Gilbert and Gubar draw particular attention to a phrase from Hans Eichner’s description of Makarie, the idealized representative of the ‘eternal feminine’ in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Travels*, in which he observes that she has ‘no story’, existing only as a ‘beacon’ for those (men) who do have a story (Eichner quoted in Gilbert and Gubar 1980: 22). The emblem of the female angel, then, denies women both self and story, transforming them instead into ‘Cyphers’ or reflections without identity or agency. Gilbert and Gubar make clear in their analysis this crucial connection between self and story, demonstrating how the selflessness and absence of personal narrative in idealized, angelic femininity work to dismiss and nullify the very idea of the female artist. Conversely, the woman who acknowledges and asserts her desires, who has and tells a story, is designated a role which is the angel’s polar opposite: the monster, the witch (the enchantress), as Gilbert and Gubar illustrate in their reading of the tale of *Snow White*: ‘An angel in the house of myth, Snow White is not only a child but (as female angels always are) childlike, docile, submissive, the heroine of a life that *has no story*. But the Queen, adult and demonic, plainly wants a life of “significant action,” by definition an “unfeminine” life of stories and story-telling.’ (Gilbert and Gubar 1980: 39)

¹³ As the novel progresses and Harry grows in confidence, it becomes apparent that her beauty does not reside in an image of angelic vulnerability, but is instead manifest in her powerful act of self-creation: ‘Suddenly Harry felt certain she was beautiful, not as Christobel was, for her face was too round, her eyebrows too straight, but like an enchantress who could make people think she was beautiful simply by declaring herself so.’ (Mahy 2001: 218) This beauty is not bestowed by or dependent upon the male gaze, but is forged and controlled by Harry herself as an active subject, as she tells Ovid, ‘“I can *seem* beautiful” ’ (219).

It is tempting to see Harry as positioned, and as positioning herself, in the role of selfless daughter, as a character without a story of her own. As 'Harry the Silent' (93), she is the watcher/reader of other people's stories, the keeper of their secrets, and even in her writing she reproduces the codes, symbols and structures of other texts, of stories which are not her own. It is particularly telling that, '[o]ften when she was most pleased with something she had written, she found herself believing that her industrious writing hand is being used to tell someone else's story.' (Mahy 2001: 23) As Wilkie-Stibbs observes, Harry's early writing creates a paradox, for although the act of writing suggests agency, the text itself is restricted to gender stereotypes and a romantic formula:

Harry believes herself to have been liberated through her writing, but, in fact, at this stage of its development, she is paradoxically circumscribed by the male-inspired images she uses. As another form of female entrapment she writes in the words and images already available to her: 'the already said' of literature. Her attempts at self-definition are, as Gilbert and Gubar have pointed out, complicated 'by all those patriarchal definitions that intervene between herself and herself.' (Wilkie-Stibbs 2002: 50)

While the characters within her tale enact passionate desires the imagery describing the writing itself speaks of boundaries and confinement. The allusion to automatic writing, as well as implying the book's connection to Harry's unconscious, also suggests the limits that the form itself creates, defining what can be said by the 'black bars of writing' (22) which rigidly contain and define her expression. But, as Wilkie-Stibbs points out, these apparent contradictions are part of the female artist's struggle, and despite Harry's quiet and self-less position at the beginning of *The Tricksters*, it is clear that that is exactly what it is, a position, a role, and not the extent or totality of the character. Harry's story may be muted like Hero's in *The Other Side of Silence*, suppressed and untried within the context of her family life, but it is not absent, and part of her journey towards adulthood involves the process whereby she transforms herself from the character in someone else's story, to the author of her own. During the course of the novel Harry breaks out of her confinement within an 'anti-story' (Gilbert and Gubar 1980: 23), vividly dramatized by her characters breaking out from behind the 'black bars' on the pages of her book, and it is significant that the character who emerges in the real world is not Lady Jessica, but Belen.

Belen is the powerful, assertive, selfish, sexual, unrestrained winged man, the hero/villain of Harry's book. The slippage here between the terms is symptomatic of the frequent confusion in romantic fiction between these roles and the problematic conflation of abuse, and even sexual violence, with male desire and love. Modleski observes that in

traditional Harlequin Romances, '[t]he heroine is confused by the hero's behavior since, though he is obviously interested in her, he is mocking, cynical, contemptuous, often hostile, and even somewhat brutal' (Modleski 1984: 36), while in gothic romances the blurring of roles is even more pronounced: 'Russ . . . divides the men in the novels into two categories: the Super-Male and the Shadow-Male, the former almost always the apparent villain but the real hero, the latter usually a kind, considerate, gentle man who turns out to be vicious, insane, and/or murderous.' (Modleski 1984: 79) The very traits which seem to define Belen as the villain are therefore also those which make him powerfully attractive as a hero in the scheme of the romance. Indeed, Harry perceives her feelings about him in terms of romantic love, although she is self-conscious enough not to be entirely comfortable with the implications of this fantasy relationship: 'What am I describing? Harry thought uneasily,' (Mahy 2001: 68). But generally the language suggests a more subtle and complex connection between herself and Belen and it seems to be far more the case that Belen represents not that which she desires in a lover, but that which she has repressed in herself: 'Yet being haunted by Belen left her a little guilty, for somehow this romantic villain had become a secret lover. A wild part of herself was set free in him. She was thrilled by the things she invented for him to do, and also ashamed of them.' (Mahy 2001:23) Although she identifies him as a 'secret lover', the energy with which she endows this character and her mixed excitement and shame are focussed on Belen's freedom from inhibition and self-restraint rather than specifically on the sexual encounters with Lady Jessica. The confession that he has 'become a secret lover' seems actually to be a cover for the more revealing admission of the next sentence: that he gives expression to 'a wild part of herself'. If Harry's fantasy serves to distance Harry's repressed emotions and desires, then it seems some desires require more distancing than others, both because they are the most dangerous and difficult to acknowledge, and because the form itself produces those desires in a particular way.

In her examination of comic-strip fantasies for young girls, Walkerdine notes that, in the production of selfless heroines, all negative, or, indeed, simply assertive emotions are relocated in another, 'bad', character:

If the heroines are displayed as passive victims of circumstance, all bad and difficult actions and emotions are invested in others. The heroines suffer in silence: they display virtues of patience and forbearance and are rewarded for silence, for selflessness, for helplessness. Any thought for the self, any wanting, longing, desire or anger is in this way produced within the texts as bad. (Walkerdine 1990: 95)

It seems significant that these feelings are not here displaced onto a villainess, another female character, but onto Belen where these desires and acts can be presented as more

acceptable partly because they are already considered to be a masculine prerogative, but also because, as Walkerdine says, '[b]eing a naughty boy and a naughty girl is a very different matter.' (Walkerdine 1990: 102) Walkerdine sees the function of these comic strips as providing resolutions for the struggle over achieving a feminine identity, and suggests that one of the reasons such stories are necessary is that unitary identity is not simply or naturally acquired:

Contrary to some classic approaches to feminine role models, I shall not argue that young girls passively adopt a female role model, but rather that their adoption of femininity is at best shaky and partial: the result of a struggle in which heterosexuality is achieved as a solution to a set of conflicts and contradictions in familial and other social relations. That the girl appears willingly to accept the position to which she is classically fitted does not, I would argue, tell us something basic about the nature of the female body, nor the female mind, but rather tells us of the power of those practices through which a particular resolution to the struggle is produced. Girls' comics, because they engage with the production of girls' conscious and unconscious desires, prepare for and proffer a 'happy-ever-after' situation in which the finding of the prince (the knight in shining armour, 'Mr Right') comes to seem like a solution to a set of overwhelming desires and problems. (Walkerdine 1990: 88)

While Harry's book attempts to deal with her repressed desires by displacing them onto Belen, an alter-ego who is definitively Other, and who can act upon those desires without implicating Harry herself, as she defines her relation to him as one of romantic love rather than identification, the conspicuous lack of the kind resolution of which Walkerdine speaks signals the limits of this fantasy.

Structurally, Harry's story seems to comprise a series of vignettes which echo the design of the romantic comic strips that McRobbie analyses in her study of *Jackie* magazine. These picture stories, like Harry's entries in her exercise book, are arranged in a pattern of static scenes which, McRobbie suggests, isolate significant moments around the organizing principle of romance: 'From these clips we can see clearly that the emotional life is defined and lived in terms of *romance* which in turn is equated with great moments rather than long-term processes. Hence the centrality and visual impact of the clinch, the proposal, the wedding day.' (McRobbie 1991: 96) Harry's story, in the way that it is presented in the text of *The Tricksters*, also takes the form of a string of set pieces, a series of episodes which dramatize moments of desire and consummation. But whereas McRobbie observes that, in *Jackie*, '... the stories rise

to a climax and resolution,' (McRobbie 1991: 96), Harry's writing does not appear to be progressing towards any clear conclusion. There is little sense of a cohesive plot or any narrative direction or, indeed, any coherent links between scenes. As Lisa Scally points out, Harry's story has stalled, merely repeating the clichés of the genre to no clear end: 'Harry's novel is stuck in such a loop, with her hero and heroine "eternally ravishing one another among flowers and jewels" [68-9], and this evidence of the story's wounded nature justifies the manner in which she ends it.' (Scally 2005: 145) Although Harry had once thought of finishing her book and publishing it, completion is no longer the focus of her writing: '... she had started it with the vague idea that she might write it wonderfully well and have it published some day, but, once begun, the story had twisted and changed.' (Mahy 2001: 23) On the one hand this signifies the centrality of the writing *process* for Harry, which has overtaken her original thoughts of her creative endeavours as a product: writing, as an activity, has become more important than the story itself. However, Harry's inability or unwillingness to move her story forward also implies her dissatisfaction with or resistance to the resolutions offered by the form, as Gavin argues: 'Harry comes to realize ... that her following of standard patriarchal romance patterns is treacherous and misguided.' (Gavin 2008: 53) After fighting off Hadfield's sexual assault, Harry surprises herself by mourning the loss of a particular possibility, of being the passive, raped heroine, which is really to say the heroine at all within the context of a dominant, masculine mythology and literary tradition, as the reference to Leda and to Yeats implies: 'There was a poem she had once read about Leda assailed by the god Zeus in the form of a swan. Leda had been "caught up and mastered by the brute blood of the air". Crossing out her story, Harry might be saying goodbye to her chance to be Leda all over again.' (Mahy 2001: 135-6) Nevertheless, she actively chooses to reject this role and with it the possibility of finishing her story as she has been writing it. Increasingly, she realizes that her story is 'faulty' (135), her characters 'crippled creatures' (170), and Gavin suggests that, having rejected the models of masculine myths, Harry is able to contemplate a new kind of female mythology: 'She has also learned that writing old myths does not present truths for women, and, dare she write again, a new form must be found.' (Gavin 2008: 56) But this conscious recognition is prefigured and precipitated by a more dramatic and spectacular collapse of the story's boundaries.

7.7 Beyond the Boundaries of the Text

While the writing process evidently does afford some catharsis for Harry's pent-up desires and frustrations – 'She wrote until she felt empty of words, light and free enough to go properly into the day' (Mahy 2001: 69) – these, ultimately, cannot be contained within

the limited and limiting form of the romantic story. In this sense Harry's novel recalls the tension between form and content apparent in *Seven Little Australians*, where, despite Turner's frequently subversive irony, the genre of the domestic, family story does not provide the language, images or expectations with which to write about the unrepentant wild girl. However, whereas in *Seven Little Australians* these limits make themselves felt only in the gaps, silences and deferrals, in the displacements of Judy's voice, in *The Tricksters*, Harry's story literally breaks out of the confines of the form and the text itself. While, as I have already suggested, the incarnation of the Carnival brothers in the real world operates as a multivalent device, their appearance in the bodies of Harry's characters is evidence of the written story's incapacity to contain and express her imaginative, creative and emotional energies in its current form.

That what breaks out of the story is, to some degree, Harry's desires is signalled by an early clue that something extraordinary emerges in the real world as a direct effect of Harry's writing, not yet in separate bodies, but in Harry herself. Enthralled by her description of Belen, Harry looks up from her writing and surprises herself with her own reflection:

Standing up, she suddenly caught sight of an owl in a copper-coloured hedge – her own face, glasses on nose, staring out of her reddish-brown hair. Harry's fringe came all the way down to her strong, straight eyebrows, her hair flowed past her shoulders. She had turned herself into her own hiding place. Yet, unexpectedly, she caught the trace of a vanishing expression that surprised her; as if, only a moment earlier, she had been not a fugitive, but an enchantress. She tried to make the expression come back; it wouldn't be ordered around. (Mahy 2001: 24)

This moment hints at the dissolving lines between Harry's imaginative life and the real world, while simultaneously suggesting that the boundary between them is illusory anyway. While the magical, supernatural face Harry sees in the mirror seems to be a reflection of the fantastical story she has created to submerge her enchantress-self, the mundane, real world face she wears is revealed to be itself only a disguise, another kind of fiction that Harry has invented. It would be misleading to try to talk about either of these as Harry's true self. Although she is still in the process of acquiring the skills to do so, it seems more relevant to consider these as different ways that Harry might tell herself. Marquis astutely observes that Harry is 'always her own invention' (Marquis 2005: 76), but Harry herself only gradually becomes aware of this. Just as her novel has stagnated, to use Scally's term, so the story she tells about her real life self has become stuck, and Harry's struggle with form in her writing echoes her struggle

to gain control of the telling of herself in the wider world. At this stage she may not be able to summon her enchantress-self at will, or even recognise her, but, as the novel progresses, she becomes more adept at manipulating these different versions of herself, both in her negotiations and interactions with others and in developing a sense of the potential multiplicity of her identity.

When, at the novel's climax, in her explosive truth-telling, Harry wears her Ariadne face, she has reclaimed or, perhaps, re-possessed, those desires which she had displaced in her writing, and specifically in Belen, and so the Carnival brothers disappear as discrete entities. While she has become increasingly aware of this potential self, Ariadne had previously remained a secret, private identity over which she has only limited control. Gavin suggests that in this enchantress figure, Harry realizes her magical, supernatural power as a woman, an identity which, up until this point, she has been hesitant about inhabiting. However, having confronted the Carnival brothers and finally Christobel, Gavin argues that she is ready to reveal this marvellous, powerful self to her family: ' "Harry the Silent" ... speaks out, becoming an apparition before her family and demanding that they recognize her own special powers' (Gavin 2001: 144) Significantly, it is Felix who first calls Harry Ariadne, after their first kiss, and while here Jack scoffs at this naming of his daughter, the growing emotional and sensual relationship between Harry and Felix is symbolic of Harry's acknowledging, accepting and even loving those elements within herself which she had previously labelled villainous.¹⁴ Although by now she has stopped writing about her fantastical characters, the text continually returns to them. It seems that Harry cannot simply reject them, hiding them away in a yet more deeply buried secrecy in a dusty corner of the attic, she must instead transform them, and so herself. Thus, Belen and Ariadne are revealed to her family simultaneously. Having made love to Felix, who is Belen, her own creation, but changed by their dialogues, Harry has reincorporated Belen into herself, so when she returns to the house to find her spent hero/villain displayed to her family she uses the energy that was once invested in him to metamorphose herself into Ariadne, her own creation: 'Even without a mirror before her, she knew she was wearing her enchantress face. She could see it, as if she had caught fire and was reflecting a hot light on all the other family faces turned towards her. She let her book fall heedlessly.' (Mahy 2001: 208-9) Able to confront her family as Ariadne, Harry can now let go of her book.¹⁵

¹⁴ By the final pages of the book Jack, along with other members of the family, perceives Harry's developing complexity and consolidates this by recognizing both her names: ' "Oh Harry!" said Jack. "I gave you the right name after all. Ariadne is a beautiful name, and you grow into it more every year." ' (Mahy 2001: 326) The power of naming is also emphasized when Ovid performs the opposing action, using her family name to reduce and subdue Harry back into her familiar role at the moment when he realizes she is about to move beyond it: ' "But Harry, sister Harry, Felix is mine. He is *me*, and if you threaten me by making him want you too much, I promise I'll destroy your family, and I'll use you to do it." ' (Mahy 2001: 224)

¹⁵ When, later, she burns her novel, it too is transformed, like Hero's manuscript in *The Other Side of Silence*, dissipating into the world beyond Harry's imagination and into other possible stories: 'The

This is not a simple act of swapping Harry for Ariadne however, and Marquis argues that Harry and Ariadne ‘merge’ (Marquis 2005: 77), as the margins between these identities remain fluid and permeable. It is not the case that she must be one or the other, she can be both Harry and Ariadne, and much more besides, because identity is not presented as an absolute, intrinsic quality, but as a collection of possible stories, demonstrated again and again throughout the text in various characters; in Anthony’s disguises, in Emma’s evening as Cinderella, in Jack and Naomi’s marriage, even in the apparently inflexible character of Christobel. Returning to Carnival’s Hide for New Year after the traumatic revelations of Christmas, Christobel explains to Harry how she is beginning to rebuild her friendship with Emma: ‘“I’ve *conned* myself into it,” ’ (Mahy 2001: 321), she confides, and both agree that ‘it’s trick, not truth’ (322). The trick is choosing how to tell the story, rather than being told by the story. Christobel illustrates the principle with a comic and, knowingly, intertextual metaphor:

‘No, but the really funny thing is this,’ she persisted. ‘I had to force myself to ring her. My hand had to be made to dial her number, but by the end of our talk I was so – I don’t know – so enchanted with myself that I got all sincere. I really meant it. I’m nothing but another Toad.’ (Mahy 2001: 323)

Deciding to present a particular face to the world, Christobel finds that, rather than being only a facade, it is, instead, another facet of herself, another possibility: a possible Christo. Identity, the text suggests, is just that: a possible self.

Creating and telling these possible selves involves an act of authorship, one which is intertextual, but not fixed or limited to a single form or story, one which constructs a dialogue with reality in which not only the self, but the world too, is engaged in a continual process of re-invention. Lisa Scally makes a case for the particular emphasis on authorship in Mahy’s work, arguing that: ‘Story, in Mahy’s novels, is a metaphor for coming to terms with the world and one’s own place in it, and for gaining power and mastery over the world and the self.’ (Scally 2005: 131) I would like to suggest that, in *The Tricksters*, story is not simply a metaphor, but actually the means by which the characters are able to understand, express and direct themselves and the world around them. Stories, as I have attempted to demonstrate, are powerful in all the texts examined in this study, but in Mahy’s work they are especially potent, intense, and often dangerous, such is their power to operate with immediate, unpredictable and

easterly wind lifted the ash beside her and tumbled it off into the night. Some flakes whirled away and were lost in the dark. Some fell to powder. Idly, Harry turned on her side and banged the words that were left with a piece of charred driftwood until they became part of the sand and the sea and the air. They could be breathed in like pollen, could fertilize or give hay-fever, make people dream or sneeze.’ (Mahy 2001: 206-7)

uncontainable force on the real world. While I argued earlier that Mahy does not present a cautionary tale in any simple sense, her novels do, however, explore what this power of authorship entails, how it might be used and misused, and how it can entrap as readily as it can liberate the storyteller, as Scally has observed (Scally 2005: 144). Scally's essay focuses on Mahy's novel, *The Changeover*, because, she says, it is in this text that the dangers that come with the power of authorship are most apparent. Indeed, as Scally demonstrates, Laura's struggles are not only with the lemur, Carmody Braque, who is consuming her brother's life force, but also with her desire for revenge. Overcoming the lure of this extraordinary and dizzying power, 'Laura renounces her author-ity over her enemy' (Scally 2005: 137). But Harry, too, engages in a struggle with the effect and possible consequences of her authorial power, the potential of which frightens her as she articulates it, warning Felix: ' "Maybe you don't realise it yet, but you're only a sort of invention of mine. I wrote you and I can probably rewrite you, or even cross you out if I have to." ' (Mahy 2001: 159) Harry, however, does not entirely renounce or postpone her authority (she is older than Laura), but she does redefine her power.

The writing of Harry's gothic romance is defined by secrecy and control. In this context, authorship is positioned as a solitary, even clandestine endeavour which occurs only in the seclusion of Harry's attic room, and, by implication, within the isolation of her imagination. While the text continually undermines this notion, demonstrating how Harry's fantasy borrows from and is coloured by the stories all around her, those she has read, the dramas which are played out within the family, and the mythology of the house and the Carnivals, Harry maintains a view of her text as a separate world, and guards it fiercely: '... she felt she was looking between the lines and seeing a whole world beyond the black bars of writing' (Mahy 2001: 22). This determined secrecy and Harry's conviction that the book is unsharable suggests, on the one hand, her lack of confidence as a writer and the intensely private nature of the desires which her novel describes, but, on the other hand, it also signals Harry's attempt to retain absolute control over her story. I have argued that the form and genre of Harry's book act as a limiting structure imposed on her desires and her imagination (which eventually break free), but it should also be noted that for Harry herself, containment is, paradoxically, part of the project of her writing. From the moment her book first appears in the text, it is shielded and enclosed: 'Then, at last, sitting on her stretcher-bed, she took from the very bottom of her pack an old peacock-blue scarf folded around a heavy, square book. She unwrapped it and opened it very carefully, as if guilty secrets might fall from between the pages like pressed flowers.' (Mahy 2001: 21) Buried at the bottom of her pack, encased in a scarf, it may seem that Harry is anxious just to protect her book from prying eyes, but the last phrase in this quotation suggests that she is equally concerned to confine and constrain the contents of the book itself. The imagery applied to her text,

of the ‘black bars of writing’ (22) and ‘the wild feelings locked into lines of handwriting’ (301) implies not only the restrictions of the form, but also Harry’s determination to hold on to and contain her story.

Despite all the impositions of structure and genre, Harry feels, in writing her story, a sense of control and agency which she rarely experiences in the real world, but she also seems aware that this can be sustained only by the text’s complete secrecy. She deliberately excludes any wider audience from her book, recognizing, as a reader herself, that once her story is read by someone else it will slip from her grasp. This is dramatized explicitly when the novel is finally read aloud by Christobel to a room full of people. Not only does Christobel’s arch, mocking voice alter the tale, but the differing responses of the various people gathered, Charlie’s disapproval, Jack’s amusement, Serena’s awe, all work to disassemble Harry’s text into multiple stories, providing different meanings for each listener. Again and again throughout *The Tricksters*, reading/listening and storytelling are presented as a dialogue, often literally a conversation, but Harry steadfastly resists this for her novel, refusing to allow her story to grow, develop, or change in dialogue with a reader. This is another sense in which Harry’s book has stalled; denied a reader, the story is a fixed monological ‘product’ in which all ongoing process has ceased. This is not simply predicated on Harry’s embarrassment, but seems to represent a deliberate authorial stance. When Harry admits to Naomi that she discovered the secret of Jack’s affair by listening at doors, she justifies her eavesdropping by asserting, ‘That’s what writers do – listen in,’ (315). As I have argued, listening/reading is indeed integral to writing in *The Tricksters*, but, tellingly, Harry’s listening here, as so often in the family where she is known as ‘Harry the Silent’ (93), is a one-way process and so her authorship, ironically, lacks a voice as it does not speak *to* anybody.

Anna Smith suggests that: ‘Put simply, *The Tricksters* is about the pleasures and dangers of that lost hand, and of Harry’s struggle to recover her now miraculously charged hand, and own it.’ (Smith 2005: 55) The ‘lost hand’ is the one that became trapped in the cave, the one which reaches through to pull the Carnival brothers into existence, and which, Smith speculates, is also Harry’s writing hand, arguing that Harry’s adolescent journey involves integrating her desires, her body and her imagination. The focus here is, appropriately I think, on Harry’s hand as the agent of her writing, her creativity, but it is intriguing that joined to this image in the novel is another of Harry’s lost and disconnected voice:

Shouting furiously underwater, she snatched her arm back out of the tunnel with no trouble at all, though she was uncertain if her hand had actually come with it. Her cry would not be heard, but rose in silver bubbles before her eyes, just as if she were a girl screaming in a comic book. “Eeeeeeeek!”

would be written in the heart of each bubble, but it would stay unheard until the bubble burst on the surface of the sea. (Mahy 2001: 37)

In her secret novel, Harry's writing and her voice are detached, and part of the redefinition of her authorship is to reconnect her hand and voice, to frame her writing as a dialogue in which she makes her voice heard. By the end of the text, Christobel notes Harry's progress in this task: ' " I'm a good listener," Harry said. "You can say plenty, too, when you put your mind to it," Christobel added ruefully.' (Mahy 2001: 323)

In writing her romantic novel Harry employs her authorship not to navigate the world but to escape real life. Her fantasy is a retreat, a hiding place, and although the act of writing makes her feel exhilarated and powerful – 'Suddenly, her true life was lived in the moments when the tip of her pen met the white paper' (Mahy 2001: 23) – the story she produces is a deflection, a displacement not just of unmanageable desires, but of her whole self and imagination. Instead of becoming a process through which she can comprehend and negotiate with her lived experience, in the writing moment the real world slides away from her: ' ... once again it seemed that Christobel, Emma, Anthony, Jack and Naomi became the ghosts of her imagination. The little ones barely existed. Once again her true life was being lived through the beautiful lovers of her story' (Mahy 2001: 68). Harry's authorship is founded on the separation of the real and the true, to use terms from *The Other Side of Silence*, a separation Harry finds necessary to sustain her mastery of the true life of her book. In this model of authorship, there is an emphasis on control, on authority, not only over the characters but also over the text's meaning, and on a distinct and singular imaginative space, features which recall Gilbert's and Gubar's account of the trope of literary paternity which they argue dominates the Western literary canon. Gilbert and Gubar demonstrate how these characteristics are embodied in a conception of the author as a God-like father figure presiding over a fictive universe of his own creation: 'But of course the patriarchal notion that the writer "fathers" his text just as God fathered the world is and has been all-pervasive in Western literary civilization' (Gilbert and Gubar 1980: 4). This is a tradition with which *The Tricksters* explicitly plays and which it ultimately challenges.

Fatherhood, of course, is central to the plot of *The Tricksters*, but it also profoundly implicated in the metaphors and instances of creative writing in the text. To some extent it is Jack's aberrant paternity of Tibby that inspires Harry's secret book, as the erotic gothic genre speaks not only of Harry's own emergent sexuality, but also of the loss of innocence that Jack's affair has precipitated and the collapse of the ideal family structure that it implies: 'Somewhere, waiting to be found again in the approaching season, was an old, innocent self, sexless as a tennis racquet, living in a time before Jack and Naomi wept at each other late at night, and before she had made Belen a

body and wings of words or allowed Prince Valery to joke at the expense of innocence.’ (Mahy 2001: 113) Here Belen and Prince Valery proceed directly from Jack’s infidelity. Harry’s story, then, is from the start invested with a flawed and over-reaching paternity. Her authorship also parallels another imposing father figure, Edward Carnival. Both, to some degree, attempt to write the story of Teddy Carnival. Felix directly compares their tasks in response to Harry’s claims that she has invented the brothers: ‘ “My father – now there *was* an author! Wrote us in. Wrote us out” ’ (Mahy 2001: 162). Edward’s determination to direct the narratives of his children’s lives, to the exclusion of any other social or counter narrative by their isolation at Carnival’s Hide, provides another example of a faulty story that breaks out, violently, from its author’s control. Ovid, who is, among other things, Edward’s son, also declares himself ‘the creator of the universe’ (103), claiming his father’s authoritative title, but he is, at the same time, a product of Harry’s imagination and, made into a real man of sorts, with whom she must ‘wrestle’ (152) for control, he seems to reflect back to her the flaws and pitfalls, as well as the power, of her own authorial choices and style.

But increasingly this authority seems like empty showmanship. When on Christmas Eve, Ovid paints Christobel, remaking her as a mineral girl, Harry watches, aware that he is somehow fossilizing her sister, securing her as his own artistic creation with no story beyond the one which he constructs for her:

She had become the marionette of his dreams, a toy of precious but lifeless treasure. Harry thought this was Ovid’s triumph.

‘You’re nothing less than a work of art,’ he said to Christobel.

‘Nothing more, either,’ Harry muttered, ... (Mahy 2001: 241)

Ovid’s art reduces Christobel and so, for all his astounding and fantastical tricks, the effect is to limit rather than extend reality. Harry, however, has gradually been releasing absolute control over her creation, Felix, and, where Christobel becomes fixed by Ovid’s artistry, Felix begins to lose the sharp edges of Harry’s invention and transform: ‘Harry thought again that he looked both softer and more startled than when she first saw him. His face seemed to be changing, struggling against the outline her villain had imposed on him.’ (Mahy 2001: 243) Felix is no longer bound by Belen, becoming a new and more flexible character. In the struggle for power between Ovid and Harry, Harry’s triumph is decided not by a display of mastery, but in her ability to work in collaboration with Felix, to enter into a dialogue. In her conversations with Felix, Harry engages with her imagination to explore, experiment and test both herself and the real world, even though in these discussions she is sometimes asked to abandon clarity (in one exchange Felix takes her glasses), accept mystery, and embrace change. Within this model of authorial

dialogue, Harry herself becomes the subject of invention as Ovid tells her that Felix, Harry's imaginary man, now imagines her: ‘ “ He gives his pillow your name in the dark – reinvents you out of the shadows and sleep so he can have you there with him.” ’ (Mahy 2001: 220) Authorship has become a reciprocal process, as Harry's imaginative energy is no longer ‘locked’ ‘behind black bars of writing’, but returns to reinvent her.

Yet Harry has already envisioned this kind of authorship, even before she has learnt its tricks, in the magical book that forms her Christmas wish. Articulating her spontaneous desire, Harry wishes for a book that ‘would make something happen in the real world by the power of its stories.’ (Mahy 2001: 35) Her secret book does this in unexpected ways of course, but what Harry longs for, in the shape of this magical book, is the action of her imagination applied to everyday life, not narrowly confined to an alternative world of fantasy. This marvellous text figures a direct and ongoing dialogue between the imagination and the real world so that reading stories and telling stories collapse into a continuous process, informing, modifying, reflecting and reinventing each other:

‘... when you got to the end of the book, you'd feel there was a face watching you through the last page, and when you turned the last page, you'd find you were a book yourself,’ cried Harry, suddenly delighted with her own invention. ‘You were a book, and someone else was reading you. Story and real would take it turn and turn about, you see.’ (Mahy 2001: 34)

Here again dialogue, a reciprocal relationship with the text, is central, and when Harry begins to write again at the end of the novel, both this magical book and this notion of dialogue create a new context for her authorship. Instead of being the solitary activity it once was for Harry, Harry's new book is clearly situated in the context of a community, specifically, a community of sisters: the book itself is given to her by Christobel, optimistically implying that encouragement may now at least sit alongside competition in their relationship; and before she starts to write, Harry invites Serena to be her reader, to share in the creative process.

The idea of authorial dialogue is not, however, confined to the explicit relationships between author, text and reader, but extends to Harry's broader imaginative engagement with the world. In her previous mode as the writer of her romantic fantasy, Harry positioned herself as an author remotely above her material and reality. Her attic writing space allows her to listen without having to contribute, to eavesdrop and to observe without having to place herself in the scene. However, at the very end of the book, after the Carnival brothers have departed and Harry has burnt her spent narrative, she experiences a kind of epiphany, not in the enclosed confines of the attic room, but on the shifting, marginal, open space of the beach: ‘The tide marked its furthest reaches

with a line of seaweed and shells that went on and on around the world, and she had been on one side, the sea on the other. Now she felt there was no longer the same separation between them.’ (Mahy 2001: 329) The detachment and isolation which she had previously seen as essential to her writing dissolve here. All of Harry’s senses are engaged in an experience of intensified connection with the world as she walks into the sea:

Harry took off her morning clothes and walked into the sea. Once in it, it flowed over her, warm and cool at once, if that were possible, more sensuous than Christobel’s silk dressing-gown. The ripples wrote lines of light around her, until Harry felt she might begin to shine. When she spoke, glowing words came out of her mouth. (Mahy 2001: 329)

In this image, Harry herself becomes the text, inscribed by the water as she was by the grass on the hillside where she and Felix made love: there is no separation. And Harry’s voice is present in this wondrous transformation, the bubbles of the earlier image have reached the surface and Harry’s voice and imagination are united.

This new vision of authorship resists the paternal model which demands control and certainty and celebrates the isolated imagination. Replacing this, Harry constructs a new kind of authorship as a dynamic process, engaged not in controlling, but in releasing the story and embracing contingency: ‘The page was pure and certain, words were uncertain, but their uncertainty was what made them magical.’ (Mahy 2001: 332) Harry begins her new book not with a rigid plan, but with the promise of a magical phrase: ‘Once upon a time’, and the novel’s final words are a starting point, offering not closure and resolution, but the possibility of a new narrative.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Our cultures provide models not only for the contents of what we say but also for the forms. We use these forms unwittingly; they create the means by which we interpret our lives. We know ourselves via the mediating forms of our cultures, through telling, and through listening. (Gergen 1997: 204)

Telling and listening: stories are the medium through which the self is constructed and expressed in the texts studied here. As Gergen observes, stories are powerful not only for what they tell, but also for how they tell it, and the narrative patterns which inscribe female identity as desirably passive, silent and selfless have retained a remarkable cultural cachet (particularly in popular genres, amongst which children's literature might be included) despite the considerable changes in women's social position over the twentieth century. The persistence of these forms and archetypal images in genre literature continues to provoke conflicts in the definition and development of female identity. But in self-consciously telling and listening to stories the girl protagonists in these texts begin to expose how prevailing cultural narratives and genres have operated to contain or elide certain kinds of experience by prescribing particular roles, relations and plots, and often go on to challenge the limits of a form to reveal hidden stories and alternative narrative routes.

The girls in the texts considered here engage with and manipulate stories to construct selves which defy or extend the models offered by the dominant narratives of patriarchal discourse. They re-interpret, adapt, subvert and combine the stories they hear and read to make room within the narrative for a broader and more fluid conception of female identity. In this sense all the texts are transgressive to some degree even if, as in the early twentieth-century books, these possibilities are suspended or postponed as the novel closes. In their tale-telling the girls are adept at eluding the narrow constraints

of established patterns and forms by adopting multiple subject positions, switching between different stories and genres and creating identities which are slippery, plural, and difficult to pin down, define or control. Disguises operate in all of the texts as a signal of the girls' skill at moving between identities as they employ self-dramatization and role-play to occupy alternative personas, test possible roles and articulate and give shape to diverse aspects of themselves. Judy uses a variety of quotations and accents to confound the adults around her and deflect any stable definition of her identity, while Mary tactically deploys a range of voices and registers to secure the garden and engineer Colin's recovery, switching between her imperious Indian voice and more sympathetic tones which include her self-conscious use of the Yorkshire dialect. Anne's extravagant self-dramatization is often comic but it also allows her both to manipulate the less imaginative adults of Avonlea and to transform her own experience by encoding her actions within various narratives to meet both her own and others' needs without committing to a single persona. In the later novels too, Margaret puts on both the name and the costume of Harriet in her Underground Railroad game to explore part of her cultural heritage and embody her own feelings of entrapment. Hero becomes, in the early mornings, the bird-girl of Credence forest, and Harry dramatizes or reveals herself in so many alternative identities – Belen, Lady Jessica, Ariadne the enchantress, Christo in the silk dressing gown, even the Carnival brothers – that her subjectivity is represented as almost endlessly complex and dynamic. This elastic conception of selfhood deviates from traditional masculine models of stable identity which are orientated towards the achievement of individuation and coherence. Instead, all of these texts play with the possibility of a plural flexible, shifting selfhood which retains the potential for transformation.

The expansiveness of these identities is directly related to the girls' imaginative energy. Throughout the texts in this thesis the imagination is presented not as a frivolous, pejoratively escapist or indulgent caprice, but as a transformative resource with which the girls actively and self-consciously engage as an expression of their agency. This creative power enables the girls to occupy various subject positions and perceive the world from alternative perspectives, allowing them to enter into different relationships with people and events and to fashion selves beyond those prescribed by social and narrative conventions. Repeatedly in these texts, the girls construct their own imaginative space and story over which they exercise a control which, as children and girls, they normally lack in the 'real', adult world. Foster and Simons observe how these secret, fantasy realms recur in classic girls' fiction, arguing that these persistent metaphors suggest a shared subtextual narrative of escape and independence:

Many of these novels depict the fantasy world which the heroine creates for herself and other children – Katy's imaginary queendoms, Anne Shirley's

mysterious forest, Mary Lennox's secret garden. These are places of make-believe, autonomous and with their own set of rules and talismans; they are also protected from intrusion by the dominant (adult) world.

(Foster and Simons 1995: 29)

The girls in the modern novels considered here produce similarly hidden and guarded imagined worlds – Margaret's Underground Railroad game, Hero's enchanted forest canopy and Harry's gothic romance – in which they are free to shape the landscape, direct the plot and bestow meaning and significance. These secret worlds provide opportunities for the girls to explore and test their creative powers, but while their position outside adult control means that the girls can develop their linguistic and authorial skills autonomously, it also makes them limited and temporary in their scope and effect. However, while these concealed fantasies are important arenas for trying their voice, the girls' imagination is not contained within these secret domains and breaks through to alter the real world as well. Indeed, in the late twentieth-century texts, transferring the creative energy of their private worlds into their real lives becomes central to the project of growing up. Kathleen A. Miller is one of several critics to observe that *Green Gables* and *Avonlea* become reflections of Anne's vision of them in *Anne of Green Gables*, noting '... the power of Anne's dreams to impose themselves upon domestic spaces and relationships to conform to Anne's desire' (Miller 2008: 47), but I have argued here that all these girls are able to make things happen in the real world by the force of their imaginative projection. Their imagination acts on the real world, rather than merely embellishing it or distracting from it, transforming reality and unsettling what appears to be fixed and absolute. In *The Tricksters* Harry's imagination bursts into her real world in an alarming physical way, but, to some degree, all of these books blur the boundaries between the solidly 'real' and the imagined in ways which empower the protagonists to shape their own worlds.

The emphasis on clandestine spaces and the metaphors of disguise and mystery signals the subversive potential within these texts. Lissa Paul notes that guile and deceit have long been the survival tactics of the weak and powerless, and thus women and children in patriarchal culture, where wiliness and trickery are the only defence against the weight of power: 'What makes these characters so engaging is that, despite being small and weak, they win over the powers that be. The story is familiar. It is Jack-the-Giant-Killer and David and Goliath. It is the trickster's story. It is the heroine's story, and the child's.' (Paul 1990: 153) She argues that in literary texts this craftiness is apparent in the small-scale, private, secret stories of women and children in the domestic sphere in which the disempowered protagonists twist the world to their advantage by sleight of hand or silver-tongue. Telling stories, so often regarded with suspicion and euphemistically

conflated with deception, can easily be counted among these ploys. However, Paul goes on to suggest that when the dominant culture conspires to normalize, even idealize, the confinement of women and girls, these trickster tactics are more ambivalently presented: 'Although 'froda' [fraud] is a traditional female survival tactic, it is not successfully deployed in times and places in which women are supposed to like being trapped. In the nineteenth century, for instance, girls might start out using guile, but growing up was regarded as a process of civilizing guile out.' (Paul 1990: 154) She cites *Anne of Green Gables*, *Little Women* and *The Secret Garden* as examples of texts in which the creative artfulness of the protagonists is quashed or controlled by the end of the narrative. It is certainly the case that, in the early twentieth-century texts considered here, the imagination and storytelling of the girls is represented more hesitantly and cautiously towards the end of the books. Alternatively, within the postmodern and postcolonial context of the later novels explored in this thesis, verbal dexterity and imaginative resourcefulness remain qualities to be valued and celebrated as the narratives close, as the title of Mahy's book, *The Tricksters*, perhaps indicates. This, then, is one of the central differences between the early and late twentieth-century texts, for although, as I have argued, they share much in the way of themes and strategies, they depart in how the narrative is resolved.

The vitality, imagination and subversive energy of Judy, Mary and Anne is presented, in these turn of the century texts, as a phenomenon of girlhood. This can be explained partly as the influence of the Romantic idealization of the child as a symbol of Imagination and Sensibility, which informed constructions of and responses to childhood throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. However, girlhood is also represented here as a period when it is possible, albeit temporarily, to elude or extend the boundaries which socially acceptable womanhood imposes, even if, paradoxically, it is also the time when these constraints are learned. I am not suggesting that this is part of the lived experience of young women in the early 1900s, but that textually girlhood provides a space in which female identity can be explored and articulated before the narrative constraints of the romance plot close down women's stories more decisively. Stories, in these texts, grant the protagonists access to alternative worlds and roles and allow them to reposition themselves in their environment. However, the texts do not supply an effective strategy for translating these self-determining narratives into an adult identity. Judy dies, alleviating the need for any such problematic transition, Mary slides into the background of the story as Colin assumes his proto-adult male role as heir to the manor, and Anne abandons a university career to care for Marilla and Green Gables, apparently responding to the conventional calls of duty and domesticity. Although *Anne of Green Gables* particularly dramatizes the conflicts and compromises involved in adopting a

traditional model of femininity, so destabilizing the authority and authenticity of the image, these texts do not offer alternative adult roles.

The vital, vocal girls in these books seem to go into hiding as the narrative closes, but they do not disappear entirely. Judy and Mary do not grow up within the text (Judy, of course, cannot), so although the demands of conformity press on their narratives, the girls do not, explicitly, step into a standard role. Judy does not reform, even on her deathbed, and while Mary does become prettier and more selfless, the text does not consolidate these more conventional aspects of her identity by returning her to the house with Colin in the final scene. Anne is undoubtedly quieter and more restrained as she approaches adulthood, but she is also insistent that other possibilities lie around the bend in the road, signalling a refusal to completely fix or conclude her story. More significantly however, the narrative energy of these unorthodox girls persists beyond their somewhat limited resolutions. The dynamism and determination of the heroines throughout the texts are more enduring than the compromises which complicate the later part of the books, and perhaps account for the texts' continuing appeal to readers, as Paul observes: 'But I would be willing to bet that one of the reasons that *Anne of Green Gables* and *Little Women* [sic] remain such favourites is that readers intuitively understand the tension between the vital girl and the repressed woman. Even if the guile gets civilized out, its traces remain.' (Paul 1990: 154) Even though the surface stories seem to recommend conformity, there is, in all of them, an undercurrent of approval and admiration, so that the voices of these expressive girls echo beyond the silence of their endings.

However, in the late twentieth-century books examined in this thesis, the transition to adulthood and the development of a mature identity are integral to the narrative. While the earlier texts dramatize the conflict between the spirited, inventive girls and the restrained and self-effacing women they are expected to become, the modern novels present the maturing identity as a continuum, an ongoing process of becoming which extends beyond the end of the text and into adulthood. It seems significant that in both *Harriet's Daughter* and *The Tricksters* the names of the protagonists are not fixed as the book closes; Margaret contemplates a further change of name which links to other aspects of her cultural heritage, and Harry remains poised between her androgynous family self and her seductive enchantress identity, Ariadne. In contrast to models of mature identity which prioritize separation, stability, rationality and objectivity, the protagonists in these modern texts retain the relationality, fluidity and imagination which characterize the girlhood identities of all of the heroines in this study. In all three books, although family relationships are renegotiated and reframed, cultural and relational ties are strengthened rather than severed by the end of the text. In *Harriet's Daughter*, for instance, the mother-daughter bond is positively redefined and enriched

with mutual insight, and the sisterly dynamics in *The Tricksters* are adjusted but also re-valued. As the girls grow in self-awareness and self-confidence they actually move beyond the desire to isolate or distance themselves from these (sometimes overbearing) relations, as they develop a voice which speaks their unique sense of self but operates in concert with these other relationships. Hero no longer seeks individuality in silence, but can modulate her voice to be heard within the 'family song' (Mahy 1995: 103). These more assured, resonant voices are achieved by incorporating the storytelling of the girls' imaginative lives into their everyday speech. While their imagination initially provides a space in which the girls can play with possible selves, growing up involves translating this personal, interior narrative into a dialogue with the real world. In the Mahy texts both Hero and Harry burn the manuscripts of their private, compulsive fantasies and apply their creativity to constructing a dynamic imaginative engagement with their real lives. Margaret's story, too, finishes with the unusual experience of a simultaneous shared dream with Zulma, suggesting that imagination is no longer an entirely personal or solitary vision. The ability to shape narrative and invent possibilities, which the girls honed in their private fantasies, becomes the means by which they can author themselves and their own stories in the real world and into adulthood.

Central to the development of identity, in all of these texts, is an emphasis on voice. Not only are the stories which the girls create subversive imaginative spaces, but the art of storytelling, in itself, is a defiant and empowering enterprise. In the early twentieth-century texts, the vocal confidence with which these young girls increasingly speak is in contrast to the idealized silence of traditionally defined femininity. The texts challenge this culturally prescribed passivity and ineloquence by claiming a voice for their young female protagonists. Although the girls' speech is sometimes presented ironically, even comically, by a knowing adult narrator, the texts, nevertheless, consistently demonstrate that their words are purposeful and influential, often yielding direct material results. Telling stories allows the girls to develop voices which combine artistry and artfulness to appropriate language and assume the authority to designate meaning, as Foster and Simons argue:

Like women in the alternative system proposed by feminist critics, the children in these stories produce their own world of meaning by ordering and naming, creating identities opposed to pre-existing ones offered them in the Symbolic order and in whose establishment they play no part. Girls and women also adopt the role of storyteller, replicating the position of author as they use narrative as a means of empowerment. Usurping the authority

of linguistic definition, they give shape and meaning to their personal visions, in the process gaining control over their own psychological landscapes. (Foster and Simons 1995: 30)

The need to claim the right to speak is less imperative in the late twentieth-century novels which proceed from a cultural context in which women's, and even children's, voices are more readily recognized and given space. Certainly in Mahy's texts, loquacious daughters are tolerated, encouraged and prized by the modern families which they depict. However, from this late twentieth-century perspective, alert to the critical insights of feminist and postcolonial theory, the modern texts instead suggest an anxiety about how to speak when language and narrative forms, the raw materials of stories, are inscribed with patriarchal and colonial assumptions and values. The texts are explicitly more experimental, employing devices such as metafiction, intertextuality and polyphony, and self-consciously explore the possibility of constructing an alternative discourse or voice through the girls' storytelling. The focus on oral storytelling and dialogue positions the girls as creative participants in the tales they weave while resisting monologic claims to authority, stability and originality that are implied in traditionally masculine models of authorship.

These devices are deployed knowingly in the late twentieth-century books but echo the strategies of the earlier girl storytellers where talk, conversation, allusions, parodies, spells and incantations are woven more implicitly into the texture of the girls' tales. This continuity of vocabulary and approach stretches back further to tie this alternative feminized style to the domestic artistry and linguistic invention of the teller of fairy-tales. As a form, this oral tradition of female tale-telling gives value and attributes creativity to the domestic crafts, work, relations and spaces which have been, and often continue to be, central to the lives of children and women. Derided and distrusted by authorized culture and excluded from the sanction and approval reserved for literary, written texts and published, named authors, the figure of the woman storyteller is, nevertheless, testimony to a long history of feminine creativity which persists not only in the contents of the tales but also in what Alice Walker calls 'the notion of song'¹ (Walker 1984: 237). The texts considered here invest the storytelling of their protagonists with the characteristics of this resilient, vocally inventive female culture. The tales use the materials of their daily lives, blending the fantastical and the everyday, to create stories which are recognisable and real for both teller and listener, while offering magical possibilities and wondrous transformations. The emphasis on the spoken word throughout the texts draws attention

¹ Walker uses this phrase in relation to Phillis Wheatley, an eighteenth-century slave and poet. Although her poetry reproduces the imagery of her oppressors, Walker argues that the creative act itself, surviving such adverse conditions, is more significant than the content of the poem: 'It is not so much what you sang, as that you kept alive, in so many of our ancestors, *the notion of song*.' (Walker 1984: 237)

to the immediacy and, sometimes, the physicality of the girls' performance and this orality also foregrounds the pliability of the style. As the girls narrate their tales they adapt and improvise, responding to their audience and the context in which they speak so that the stories change shape and multiply in the process of telling. This flexibility and responsiveness in the form allows the girls to articulate identities which are similarly elastic and relational. Conceptualizing storytelling as a situated, spoken dialogue, the girls' authorship is released from the controlling authority associated with masculine texts, instead producing inclusive and dynamic narratives.

The emphasis on dialogue as a narrative form, apparent in the girls' storytelling within the novels, extends more broadly to the texts as a whole. While the protagonists develop vibrant and resourceful voices within the texts, this eloquence remains, inescapably, the construction of the adult writer. The child is still spoken for. However, the focus on how to speak, rather than just on what is said, shifts the emphasis away from the stories the adult has created for the child and onto strategies for storytelling with which the young reader can also engage. While the girls within the texts listen to and play with stories to re-create and re-tell them for themselves, these books offer readers a dialogue in which they are encouraged to enter into their own process of narrative reconstruction. Marah Gubar argues that this kind of exchange is evident in E. Nesbit's books for young people, in which the child protagonists' inventive play is inspired by a selective pilfering of other texts which the children then reshape and re-interpret to meet their own needs:

By simultaneously lampooning and propagating literary conventions . . . Nesbit models for her readers the kind of balancing act she wants them to master; even as she encourages children to take pleasure from and make use of texts, she coaxes them to become more critical readers. Keenly aware of the power that adults and their narrative wield over children, Nesbit incites young people to commandeer more completely the scripts they are given, to revise rather than simply re-enact them. (Gubar 2001*a*: 411)

Gubar's argument resists the idea that children need to be passive consumers of the models which texts provide, and instead perceives in Nesbit's work a practice of resistant reading by the fictional characters within the text which invites the reader outside the text to adopt a similarly interactive reading stance. Tatar makes a similar point in her analysis of childhood reading, arguing that, although the impact of these narratives can profoundly affect the development of identity, this is not based on a simple process of identification or emulation, a desire to copy or become a character from a book, but involves a more active and complex engagement through which readers become skilled in narrative, transforming images and manipulating words to create stories for and of themselves:

... we invent responses to texts in ways detached from the moral, educational, or aesthetic agendas advanced by their authors. As we read, we engage, interpret, and improvise, creating new narratives with the same catalytic power and transformative energy of words on a page.

...

As they appropriate and internalize words, readers use those same words to construct their identities, changing them in ways so subtle that they often escape conscious attention. (Tatar 2009: 89-90)

This sense of continuum between the activities of listening to or reading stories and telling them is apparent throughout the texts explored here. At the beginning of the books in this study the girl protagonists are all, to some degree, caught inside someone else's story, either determined by words and stories imposed by the dominant adult, patriarchal society, or more subtly confined by their attempts to fit and follow the patterns and conventions of a pre-existing tale. Their development as storytellers is dependent on their ability to redefine their relationship to the stories which they read and hear, to interact rather than passively receive or reproduce, to read the silences within the text and to combine images and forms into new patterns. As Gubar suggests, 'reading enables writing' (Gubar 2001a: 413). The blurring of the boundaries between these two activities does not completely dissolve the power imbalance between adult writer and child reader but it does conceptualize the text as a dialogue in which the reader has a creative role in making meaning. Although the adult writer cannot help but speak for the child, this emphasis on the shared activity of story-telling hints at a creative process which extends beyond the limits of the written text.

These texts offer an intricate web of narratives, genres and forms, varied uses of and relationships to a tale, different ways of telling and listening, and alternative authorial positions and reading stances. Layering stories within stories, these texts work to destabilize any notion of a single authoritative narrative, providing instead a profusion of tales, jostling, competing and recontextualizing one another. While some stories threaten to overwhelm the protagonists, these girls become skilled at manipulating narrative, at telling and listening, unpicking established plots and fashioning new tales to create their own imaginative design. As the girls exercise their artistry as storytellers to (re)invent themselves, to imagine themselves into being, they do so amidst this multiplicity of narratives, so that self-authorship is presented as an exchange or dialogue, rather than an authoritative statement of selfhood. In sharing their imaginative vision and extending the boundaries of their creative selfhood, to mix their own stories with others, these girls construct supple, complex identities which cannot be contained within a single narrative thread but which weave a multi-textured pattern.

Appendix A

‘Discourse On The Logic Of Language’ by Marlene Nourbese Philip

On the next two pages is a reproduction of ‘Discourse On The Logic Of Language’ taken from *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature*, 1996, edited by Smaro Kamboureli, Toronto, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The poem is laid out over two sets of facing pages and although it has been reduced and rotated here to fit two single pages, the relative positioning of the stanzas has been retained.

DISCOURSE ON THE LOGIC OF LANGUAGE

English
is my mother tongue.
A mother tongue is not
not a foreign lan lan lang
language
I/anguish
anguish
—a foreign anguish.

English is
my father tongue.
A father tongue is
a foreign language,
therefore English is
a foreign language
not a mother tongue.

What is my mother
tongue
my mammy tongue
my mummy tongue
my monsy tongue
my modder tongue
my ma tongue?

I have no mother
tongue
no mother to tongue
no tongue to mother
to mother
tongue
me

I must therefore be tongue
dumb
dumb-tongued
dub-tongued
damn dumb
tongue

WHEN IT WAS BORN, THE MOTHER HELD HER NEWBORN CHILD CLOSE: SHE BEGAN THEN TO LICK IT ALL OVER. THE CHILD WHIMPERED A LITTLE, BUT AS THE MOTHER'S TONGUE MOVED FASTER AND STRONGER OVER ITS BODY, IT GREW SILENT—THE MOTHER TURNING IT THIS WAY AND THAT UNDER HER TONGUE, UNTIL SHE HAD TONGUED IT CLEAN OF THE CREAMY WHITE SUBSTANCE COVERING ITS BODY.

EDICT I

*Every owner of slaves
shall, wherever possible,
ensure that his slaves
belong to as many ethno-
linguistic groups as
possible. If they can-
not speak to each other, they
cannot then foment
rebellion and revolution.*

Those parts of the brain chiefly responsible for speech are named after two learned nineteenth century doctors, the eponymous Doctors Wernicke and Broca respectively.

Dr Broca believed the size of the brain determined intelligence; he devoted much of his time to 'proving' that white males of the Caucasian race had larger brains than, and were therefore superior to, women, Blacks and other peoples of colour.

Understanding and recognition of the spoken word takes place in Wernicke's area—the left temporal lobe, situated next to the auditory cortex; from there relevant information passes to Broca's area—situated in the left frontal cortex—which then forms the response and passes it on to the motor cortex. The motor cortex controls the muscles of speech.

but I have a dumb tongue tongue dumb father tongue and english is my mother tongue is my father tongue is a foreign lan lan lang language/ l/anguish anguish a foreign anguish is english— another tongue my mother mammy mummy moder mater macer moder tongue mothertongue tongue mother tongue me mothertongue me mother me touch me with the tongue of your lan lan lang language l/anguish anguish english is a foreign anguish	<p>A tapering, blunt-tipped, muscular, soft and fleshy organ de- scribes</p> <p>(a) the penis. (b) the tongue. (c) neither of the above. (d) both of the above.</p> <p>In man the tongue is</p> <p>(a) the principal organ of taste. (b) the principal organ of articulate speech. (c) the principal organ of oppression and exploitation. (d) all of the above.</p> <p>The tongue</p> <p>(a) is an interwoven bundle of striated muscle running in three planes. (b) is fixed to the jawbone. (c) has an outer covering of a mucous membrane covered with papillae. (d) contains ten thousand taste buds, none of which is sensitive to the taste of foreign words.</p> <p>Air is forced out of the lungs up the throat to the larynx where it causes the vocal cords to vibrate and create sound. The metamor- phosis from sound to intelligible word requires</p> <p>(a) the lip, tongue and jaw all working together. (b) a mother tongue. (c) the overseer's whip. (d) all of the above or none.</p>
<p>EDICT II</p> <p><i>Every slave caught speaking his native language shall be severely punished. Where necessary, removal of the tongue is recommended.</i></p> <p><i>The offending organ, when removed, should be hung on high in a central place, so that all may see and tremble.</i></p>	
<p>THE MOTHER THEN PUT HER FINGERS INTO HER CHILD'S MOUTH—GENTLY FORCING IT OPEN; SHE TOUCHES HER TONGUE TO THE CHILD'S TONGUE, AND HOLDING THE TINY MOUTH OPEN, SHE BLOWS INTO IT—HARD. SHE WAS BLOWING WORDS—HER WORDS, HER MOTHER'S WORDS, THOSE OF HER MOTHER'S MOTHER, AND ALL THEIR MOTHERS BEFORE—INTO HER DAUGHTER'S MOUTH.</p>	

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