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**DISPOSABLE OBJECTS: CONTRIVED TRAUMA AND MELANCHOLIC  
SACRIFICE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
ADULTS**

by

**ERIC L. TRIBUNELLA**

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2005

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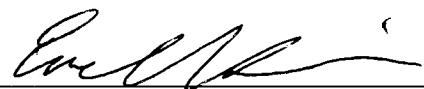
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## Abstract

DISPOSABLE OBJECTS: CONTRIVED TRAUMA AND MELANCHOLIC  
SACRIFICE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
ADULTS

by

Eric L. Tribunella

Adviser: Professor Steven F. Kruger

My dissertation explores the ways American children's and young adult literature turns repeatedly to a narrative in which a child is compelled to sacrifice or renounce a loved object. The striking recurrence of this pattern suggests that children's literature relies on the contrived traumatization of children—both protagonists and readers—as a way of representing and promoting the process of maturation. My project seeks to explain the resonance and utility of this narrative in American culture. I find that the experience of loss functions as a catalyst for maturation and that the psychological fortification needed to sacrifice and live without the object is taken to be a sign of accomplished maturity. Through the shared experience of loss, survivors can form social bonds, and thus this narrative involves not only psychological but also community and national formation. Repeatedly, the child is validated as mature by becoming like the disposable object, which undergoes the experience of being physically disciplined prior to its sacrifice. The child is vicariously disciplined by identifying with what is lost in order to achieve a distinctively national, gendered, sexual, and ethical adulthood. My project provides a psychoanalytic account of this cultural-political and literary phenomenon. I draw on

queer and feminist revisions of Freud, who explains melancholia as a way of dealing with the loss of a loved object through the incorporation into one's own ego of an identification with that object. Such identifications not only alter the ego in ways that represent maturation, but also provide the bases for the faculty of self-criticism and for the formation of social bonds through shared identifications with those who experience similar losses. This narrative can be read as staging the experience of childhood embodiment and bodily development. It externalizes and reenacts this process to assist children with mastering their relationships to their own bodies, which are perpetually being lost to them as they mature. Novels studied include *Johnny Tremain*, *My Brother Sam Is Dead*, *A Separate Peace*, *Bridge to Terabithia*, *Old Yeller*, *Number the Stars*, *The Upstairs Room*, *The Outsiders*, and *That Was Then, This Is Now*.

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supportive and invaluable friend and teacher, just as his work and demeanor continue to be models for my own. I cannot thank him enough. I also remain very much indebted to my intellectual roots at the University of Florida, where as a young undergraduate I took my first course in theory, my first course in gay studies, my first course in children's literature. If not for the exciting work being done in the English Department there I might not have decided to pursue a Ph.D. in this field.

During my time in New York City I have been very fortunate to be employed at Queens College. I am genuinely appreciative of the supportive and collegial environment there created in large part by Professors Glenn Burger, Duncan Faherty, Carrie Hintz, and John Weir. All of them have played key roles in both my professional development and personal well-being.

One of the tasks I have looked forward to the most is acknowledging the group of friends who have been right there with me throughout this often stressful and uncertain journey. I think about them constantly, I treasure every second of our time together, and I value them more than I can say. My thanks to Maya Dodd, Emily Garcia, Meg Norcia, Nishant Shahani, and—arriving on the scene a bit later—Greg Young. These people have helped keep me sane and happy, and my relationships with them have been some of the most significant things I've gained from being in graduate school.

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## Introduction

### Sacrifice, Trauma, and Childhood Embodiment in American Literature for Children and Young Adults

#### Melancholic Sacrifice and Contrived Trauma

This project examines a common narrative in twentieth-century American literature for youth: that of the child-protagonist's love for some cherished object (a dear friend, a dog, a possibility, an ideal), the loss of that loved object, and his or her subsequent maturation through the experience of loving and losing it. I want to explore why this particular narrative recurs in some of the most widely read and honored novels for children and young adults, and I want to consider what we can learn about children and childhood by studying both what these narratives mean and how they work. Why do we feel that such an experience is useful for ushering children into adulthood?

Irrevocable loss, especially of something dear, is experienced as a trauma, so American children's literature turns time and again to that which is traumatic, to the traumatization of children, as a way of provoking or ensuring their maturation. The striking recurrence of this pattern suggests that children's literature relies on the contrived traumatization of children—both protagonists and readers—as a way of representing and promoting the process of maturation. My project seeks to explain the resonance and utility of this narrative in American culture and to consider how love and loss works as a catalyst for maturation.

We might imagine the loss of loved objects in children's literature to function as a kind of sacrifice. Throughout history the ritual act of sacrifice has been believed to have

transformative effects for those who perform it and for those on whose behalf it is performed. In some cases, the sacrificed object was thought to bear the sins of those for whom it was offered, thereby making them, for a time, pure. In other cases the act of sacrificing or giving up valued objects—food, precious metals, animals, humans—as an offering to the gods was performed as a test of faith, as a way of demonstrating one's subjection to a higher being. It both proved one's commitment and further reinforced it, creating a material or symbolic connection to the gods via the sacrificed objects in addition to creating bonds amongst a community whose members made sacrifices to the same god or gods.<sup>1</sup> Along these lines, the act of sacrifice also represented an ascetic practice that promoted a more disciplined life. To give up the object was to prove that one could do without it, that one could master one's desire for the object by voluntarily relinquishing it, and thereby master one's very self more fully.

It is perhaps from these meanings associated with the tradition of ritual sacrifice that its reappearance in more covert forms draws its continued utility and appeal. The sacrifice had proved itself to be a crucial way to mark a developmental milestone. It works, however, not simply as a way of marking what has already occurred, but as a way, in fact, of reaching that milestone in the first place through a rite of initiation that must be performed in particular ways. Anthropologist Walter Burkert concludes in his study of ritual sacrifice in ancient Greece,

Sacrifice transforms us. By going through the irreversible 'act' we reach a new plane. Whenever a new step is taken consciously and irrevocably, it is inevitably connected with sacrifice. Thus ... when passing into a new age group or on entering an exclusive society, there will be sacrifice. Before the sacrifice there is

a period of abstinence, and if, after it, new barriers are erected as a sort of reparation, their limits can give new definition to life. If it is followed by a predetermined βίος, or lifestyle, the sacrifice becomes an initiation. (40)

What the practice of sacrifice makes clear to us is the sense that the experience of loss is transformative, whether that loss is voluntary or not. In cases of ritual sacrifice, the loss is contrived in order to effect a transformation deliberately, but while the child-protagonists in children's literature rarely sacrifice a loved object voluntarily, the repeated turn to this narrative device on the part of adults who write, publish, and purchase these books suggests that the representation of loss also functions as a kind of contrived traumatization of children. Represented loss is chosen on behalf of children as a way of providing a guidebook to maturation. If children are to be made subject to a higher authority, if they are to be brought into a national community of citizens, if they are to be trained in order to function as proper and productive adults, they must first be disciplined, and thus compelling children to sacrifice loved objects, or to read about such sacrifices, functions as an ascetic practice that helps children achieve maturity and recognition as mature beings. Therefore, the act of sacrificing loved objects works to purchase subjection, community and national membership, maturation, and thus adult citizenship. How, though, might the act of sacrifice work to transform children into proper adult and mature citizens? How might it work to form or reinforce community bonds and to subject children to authority and the law?

Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* points to a way of thinking about how notions of sacrifice and loss might work in relation to children's development. Butler suggests that subjection "signifies the process of becoming

subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject.” She looks to Freud’s theory of the psyche, particularly to his examination of melancholia and ego formation, as a way to understand the “the psychic form that power takes” (*Psychic 2*). In “Mourning and Melancholia” Freud hypothesizes that one way of dealing with the loss of a loved object is through the incorporation of the object into one’s own ego in the form of an identification, which preserves the lost object internally in a way that fundamentally alters the psyche. In contrast to mourning, through which the libidinal investment in an object and its memory-traces is slowly withdrawn, melancholia preserves the object as an identification in a move that averts the experience of or need for grief. Freud later builds on these formulations in *The Ego and the Id*, where he speculates that rather than a pathological outcome of mourning gone awry, melancholia might be understood as a normative process whereby the character of the ego is formed. This process of melancholia, he claims, “especially in the early phases of development, is a very frequent one, and makes it possible to suppose that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices” (24). Butler, exploring the implications of Freud’s theory, describes the character of the ego as “the sedimentation of objects loved and lost, the archeological remainder, as it were, of unresolved grief” (*Psychic 133*). It follows that identifications made during childhood are particularly influential and lasting in their effects. Such a formulation therefore makes the process of melancholia central to the development of the subject, and the child in particular. The act of identification, Freud ultimately speculates, may be the only way in which an object can be given up, and with this move he effectively generalizes the experience of melancholia as a model for childhood development.

One of the ways identifications with lost libidinal objects come into psychical play is through their role in providing the foundation for the faculty of self-evaluation and for “social feeling.” Freud attributes what he calls “the most important characteristics of the development both of the individual and of the species” to this process of loss and melancholic identification, through which the ego ideal is formed. It is this ego ideal, the “residue of the earliest object-choices,” that produces the demands of conscience experienced as guilt, which makes self-judgment possible. “Social feelings,” Freud continues, “rest on identifications with other people, on the basis of having the same ego ideal” (*Ego* 30-33). Clearly melancholia is crucial not only to the development of the individual ego but also to the production of social bonds. Understanding the loved objects of childhood, how and why these objects are lost, and the ways children negotiate their identifications with these lost objects proves critical to comprehending how social subjects and the relations between them are formed.

These formulations of the psychic process of ego formation and development provide a way of theorizing how the sacrifice of loved objects works as both a catalyst for and process of maturation. Not only does the incorporation of lost objects through an identification alter the character of the ego, but incorporation of shared or similar objects leads to the formation of a sense of community and conscience, the internal and internalized effects of the law. These are precisely some of the effects anthropologists have identified of ritual sacrifice, and thus Freud provides a way of thinking about the psychical manifestations of a cultural practice. Part of what Freud’s theory of the psyche makes clearer about the work of sacrifice is that it is in fact crucial to civilization, to the making of civilized social subjects. To submit to the law and to participate in collective

life one must practice a renunciation of one's instinctual, selfish impulses. It is the function of the superego to assist in this renunciation, the giving up of something desired in order to form and maintain a harmonious life with and around others in the context of finite resources and possibilities.

It is not surprising given these formulations that the novel of development would turn over and over again to a narrative of love and loss. These novels allegorize the felt centrality of death and loss to children's maturation, and by narrativizing loss they produce not only a record of various scenarios of attachment and identification, but also a manual for how their readers can and should respond in similar circumstances. Such loss is not merely inevitable, but also crucial for "proper" development. It becomes necessary then for love and loss to be ensured, and in cultural contexts that purportedly minimize danger and maximize the opportunities for life, love must be promoted and loss sometimes compelled. The represented rewards of melancholic sacrifice and the implication of its very necessity function as the practical inducements to certain kinds of loss, which assume the form of a contrived traumatization of children through the ritualization of this "necessary" loss. The effect of the sacrificed object on the one who loses it, the process of identification, is also not simply a matter of conscious mimicking. Rather, these identifications and their effects on the ego, or self, often take place without deliberation and without conscious knowledge of how the process is working. It is not as though the child says, "I loved the object that I have lost, so I will try to be like it in order to keep it with me in some way." This process of melancholic sacrifice occurs without such an awareness, even perhaps for those who reproduce this narrative through their fiction.

Susan Mizruchi notes that in turn-of-the-century literary and social scientific writing, sacrifice is imagined as “necessary to the maintenance of social order, the achievement of a certain level of culture, and the perpetuation of a certain kind of economy. Sacrifice, according to these authors, is not only necessary to modern Western society, it is basic; it makes society what is it” (23). Given the ways in which the development of children has been thought to recapitulate the development of civilization, and the ways in which the perpetuation of that civilization is tied to the civilizing of children themselves, we can see how central a notion of sacrifice is to understanding how we think about children, children’s culture, and the construction of each.<sup>2</sup> Sacrifice, loving and losing, is one of the primary tasks of the child. “The social,” writes Mizruchi, “is defined by what is *given up* in order to reproduce it” (23). Since it is children who are thought to embody the reproduction of society, they are poised to enact its most important sacrifices of objects whose loss will reverberate throughout the lifespan and will purchase what is called civilization. Indeed, the child will make the ultimate sacrifice by itself being what is sacrificed. Children are compelled to give up being children; they must sacrifice themselves.

### Children’s Literature and Childhood Embodiment

Leslie Fiedler’s controversial and yet significant 1960 study, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, explores the centrality of sexuality and death to American literature, and hence American “character” itself. Fiedler suggests that the evasion of love and responsibility he sees in American literature evidences the attempt of American men to avoid abandoning childhood. “It is maturity above all things that the American writer

fears,” notes Fiedler (338). Yet, children’s literature is very much about the struggle towards maturity and the abandonment of childhood, not so much the reveling in it as we might expect. Along with that abandonment is the assumption of adult responsibility, competence, and “proper” love relations, precisely what Fiedler sees the American novel as avoiding. Apart from *Huckleberry Finn*, which has been studied by children’s literature scholars, Fiedler’s book is focused decidedly on adult literature. My project, in examining *children’s* literature, comes to a rather different conclusion about the representation and construction of sexuality, the relationship of literature to social institutions like marriage, and notions of adult responsibility in the American novel. Although Fiedler claims to identify “the failure of the American fictionalist to deal with adult heterosexual love and his consequent obsession with death,” what I show is that American children’s literature is rather highly invested in “adult heterosexual love” and, indeed, that death works as a way of achieving it—the death, that is, of those loved objects of childhood that would be improper for the adult one must grow into to love (12). Whether or not Fiedler is correct in his reading of adult American fiction, we might say that what he finds absent from it is located in abundance in the literature of children.

We might also consider how the sacrifice of loved objects by the child-protagonists in children’s literature is linked to their embodied experience. Children’s bodies and the anxieties surrounding them are very clearly put on display in each of these texts examined here, and through the ascetic effects of melancholic sacrifice, the children demonstrate a greater comfort with and mastery over their developing bodies and bodily sensations. In several of the novels examined here, these anxieties manifest themselves as actual physical injuries and deformities, while in others they are expressed with

regards to the limitations imposed by physical size or by the lack of athletic prowess. In *A Separate Peace*, the boys attempt to master their developing bodies through an intense physical regime that includes running and swimming, and they explicitly associate their “training,” as they call it, with a burgeoning awareness of their selves and each other. Finny comes to act as trainer, since his shattered leg prevents his continued participation as trainee. In fact, Finny’s very injury and the loss of mobility and status it occasions represent the central crisis of the novel, which is therefore built around how this bodily injury occurs and what it means about Finny’s relationship with Gene and his own future as a man. In *Old Yeller*, a key event that cements the relationship between Travis and his dog is their near-fatal encounter with a pack of angry hogs. As in *A Separate Peace*, it is Travis’s leg that is most severely injured, and it is this injury that requires the neighbor-girl Lisbeth to come stay with the Coates family. Injury is also central to *Johnny Tremain*, since it is the maiming of Johnny’s hand that sets the series of events in motion leading to his participation in the American Revolution. His maimed hand is one of the novel’s primary symbols, which again connects the protagonist’s experience of his body and its limitations to the development of his character and his achievement of maturity. As with protagonists in these novels, the physical bodies of Annemarie in *Number the Stars* and Annie in *The Upstairs Room* come to bear physical marks of their endangerment in Nazi-occupied territories, and in Annie’s case that entails her literal deformity resulting from the confining space of her hiding place. Finally, before Johnny is lost in Hinton’s *The Outsiders*, he is first terribly burned and crippled in a church fire, while Ponyboy worries that his body doesn’t appear tough enough in a context where appearing tough is crucial to survival.

In each of these cases the novel hinges on the experience of embodiment and the developing bodies of youths, and these concerns are dramatized through the occurrence and management of bodily injury. They connect physical wounds and their associated limitations with the experience of losing a loved object and the formation of sexual-gendered, national, and ethical character, thereby suggesting that the loss of an external object replicates the loss of particular bodily qualities or even the childhood body itself. We can therefore study what these novels tell us concerning how ideas about and experiences of childhood embodiment impinge upon the composition and reception of children's literature and its recurrent structures and tropes.

While the themes of sexuality and death in children's literature have been studied before, what my project does is seek to account for how and why they have been represented in particular ways. As Roberta Seelinger Trites suggests in her study of adolescent literature, "Carnality: sex and death, death and sex. They are cultural and biological concepts that are linked inviolably" (122). Indeed, it is precisely the linkages between sex and death and their affective elaborations, love and loss, that I am interested in exploring. Trites suggests that sex/sexuality and death both function as key rites of passage, but while she treats them separately, we might consider how a distinctive repetition of the association between sexuality and death or loss in children's and young adult literature functions with regards to the frequent emphasis on maturation. In the novels I examine here, loss is presented as a condition for the development of proper sexuality, and it is the experience and management of loss that prepares the child for adult citizenship. While Trites argues that death in children's literature represents the process of separating from one's parents and that death in adolescent literature represents

the possibility of maturation for the protagonist who accepts him or herself as “Being-towards-death,” by shifting the focus slightly from death to loss I want to suggest rather that the bodily experience of development is always already experienced as loss.

Furthermore, since sexual-gender maturation is imagined as one of the key markers of bodily and social development, sex and sexuality cannot also help but be associated with loss.

Trites is correct in noting the carnal—that is, bodily and corporeal—connection between sex/sexuality and death. It is precisely the child’s experience of his or her own body and its development, I am arguing, that largely accounts for the frequent invocation of death in children’s and young adult literature. So naturalized has the association of loss with maturation—and sexual-gender maturation in particular—become that we have perhaps lost sight of how the staging of the experience of loss operates as the externalization of embodied development itself. Rather than simply the loss of an external Other, or the final loss of oneself in death, the frequent invocation of death and loss represents the perpetual and banal loss of the self that is always in flux. Trites notes that experiencing or acknowledging death functions as a mark of maturity (135). Maturation is a process of development, and achieving maturity involves crossing some communally recognized threshold of development. Both cases, I am suggesting, involve loss and are occasions of loss. The repetitive use of loss as a marker or rite of maturation really reveals how development itself is experienced as loss.

To mature into adulthood cannot itself but be the loss of an ideal kind, the loss of that which the child is currently imagined to be the privileged repository: innocence, play, protectedness, irresponsibility, value, futurity, potential. To sacrifice a loved object,

to introject that object as a way of ensuring maturation through the alterations effected by the process of identification, is also to identify the lost object with the child or childhood itself as what is lost. In this way, the act of sacrifice, of losing and becoming, reproduces through the ritual act what the developing child experiences vis-à-vis his or her own body. Perhaps then this ritual represents an attempt to hold onto what one already is, or some aspect of oneself, or the privileges of being what one was. The body in process is both had and not had. It is as though the child can never quite get a hold of itself, and thus constantly feels itself slipping from its own hands—had, loved, and lost over and over again. The quintessential lost object, then, is the child's own body and self as that which must be ritually lost and introjected as the only way it can be had and experienced. In other words, this ritual of loss and identification in which a loved object is sacrificed so that it can be made available for an identification that catalyzes or ensures maturation just might function as the externalization, or acting out in explicit terms, of physical and psychological processes of development.<sup>3</sup>

In Freud's discussion of the fort-da game, in which a child tosses away an object and pulls it back again, he suggests that this act functions as the child's attempt to gain control over a difficult or frightening situation through a staged repetition of his or her trauma. In the case Freud actually observed, his own grandson was seen playing the game on occasions when his mother would leave the home. The object, which the child tossed away and retrieved, represented his own mother, over whose actual comings and goings he had no control (*Beyond* 13-14). Similarly, I want to suggest that this repeated ritual and narrative of love and loss might work as a way to gain a sense of mastery over the frightening process of development, which necessarily involves the loss of

possibilities, including embodied ways of thinking and being in the world. In growing older, something about the child is being lost, and thus that loss is reenacted in the world through the sacrifice of loved objects. An identification with those objects, given the alterations in the ego that ensue, makes it possible to achieve some “control” over what one develops into.<sup>4</sup>

The maturing child stands to lose any number of objects and possibilities by growing up. Thus, these narratives represent reenactments of embodied experience and the losses and anxieties entailed by physical development and growth. Encounters with such narratives of love and loss help children master their relationship to their own bodies. Since through development, one’s body is, in a sense, perpetually being lost to oneself, the process of love, loss, and introjection, which results in the formation of the ego and its character, reproduces that process. Thus, bodily development effectively occasions ego development. As Freud notes, in what is an often-quoted statement from *The Ego and the Id*, “the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego,” which he goes on to clarify: “the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body” (20). The growth and development of the body is accelerated and therefore most obvious throughout childhood and adolescence; thus, the sense of (bodily or embodied) loss will be particularly acute during these periods. This accounts, in part, I believe, for the preoccupation with and resonance of love-loss narratives amongst and for youth. Given the ways in which I’ve suggested melancholic sacrifice works as a mechanism for the formation of *social* subjects, their positioning as subjects

within a network of social relations, we can see that self-loss functions paradoxically as the occasion for gaining entry to the social.

My project therefore explores the ways in which children's experience of embodiment and embodied development affects the occurrence and repetition of certain conventions in children's literature. Many of the most widely read and highly honored novels for and about youth—works such as *Johnny Tremain*, *A Separate Peace*, *The Outsiders*, *Old Yeller*, and *Number the Stars*—are stories that involve a compelled coming of age in the context of traumatic loss. These novels repeatedly turn to this narrative not simply because of a need to lend gravity to the otherwise ordinary process of maturation, but because the experience of losing a loved object is central to that very process. What these texts do is allegorize one way of understanding the development of the self as the cumulative experience of relations, and specifically relations of love and loss, with various kinds of objects, ranging from other people to concepts and ideals, especially during the critical years of early childhood and adolescence. In each of these texts, the child-protagonists survive the loss, which functions as a catalyst for their attainment of maturity, through a melancholic identification with the lost object. The particularities of the events surrounding the loss and the qualities of both the attachment and the loved object produce a variety of developmental possibilities. The larger significance of the project is in how it points to a reliance in the United States on contrived trauma and melancholic sacrifice as a way of (re)forming social subjects.

Since identifications with lost objects collectively work to constitute the “character of the ego,” we can trace the ways salient dimensions of the self and social relations are formed through the losses of particular objects. The literature of youth can

therefore be read as both recording and prescribing this process of losing and incorporating loved objects in order to ensure proper development along culturally legitimated lines. The novels I examine here are noteworthy not only for their celebrated status, but also for the ways they provide an index to the development and inducement of children's distinctively national, gendered, sexual, and ethical character. What can we learn about this national/sexual/gendered character by examining the kinds of objects—and relations between children and objects—that are ritually sacrificed in order to build up the ego and shared cultural identifications? How do different children navigate this process of melancholic sacrifice differently? What is the range of outcomes for these distinctive developmental trajectories?

### Chapter Sketches

Chapter 1, "Losing and Using Queer Youth," explores two novels whose protagonists suffer the loss of a queer friend. John Knowles's *A Separate Peace* (1959), a coming-of-age tale set against the backdrop of World War II, centers on the passionate friendship of two boys at a New England prep school. Gene's violent reaction to a poignant demonstration of affection by his buddy Finny eventually leads to Finny's death, and Gene is able to come to terms with this loss only by remaking himself in Finny's image: dressing like him, taking up his interests, and enacting his aspirations. By the end of the novel Gene attains manhood through his identification with Finny and prepares to leave school in order to fight in the war. Gene's response to the loss of his queer friend can be read as allegorizing the melancholic process of incorporating an

object loved and lost. In this case, Gene's manhood is purchased at the expense of an intensely affectionate boyhood friendship.

Published teacher rationales for this frequently assigned book describe it as useful for imparting democratic values in the service of educating productive and ethical adult citizens. Focusing on Gene's efforts to come to terms with the guilt he feels for causing his friend's death, these rationales applaud the novel for its representation of how a young man transforms his guilt into a motive for contributing to his country and community. The novel's pedagogical guidebooks fail to acknowledge what many readers recognize as the erotic friendship between Gene and Finny, the homophobic motivation for Gene's panicked reaction to Finny's affection, the significance of the loss of the boys' passionate friendship, or the way in which Gene's social contribution and heterosexualized maturity are coded in gendered terms. What is interesting about these rationales is how they connect the sacrifice of passionate, same-sex friendship to the explicit instruction of civically minded, adult citizens.

Katherine's Paterson's Newbery Medal book, *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977), complicates the dynamics and uses of *A Separate Peace* by focusing on the cross-sex friendship between a sensitive and artistic boy named Jess, whose father is concerned about his son's potential homosexuality, and a tomboyish young girl who moves in next door. When Leslie is killed in a tragic accident that results in part from Jess's negligence and selfishness, Jess must confront this loss, which occasions the timid and anxious boy's discovery of his capacity for the courage and bravery that had been modeled for him by his queer friend. Jess is able to deal with this bewildering tragedy by going on "for both of them" by *being* both of them.

*Bridge to Terabithia* has proved extremely controversial. It was one of the top ten most frequently challenged books of the 1990s by those seeking to have it banned from libraries, and it continues to be challenged in the new millennium. As a result of both its controversial nature and award-winning status, the book has also inspired a number of teacher rationales. Defenders tout the novel, just as with *A Separate Peace*, as useful for what is read as its lessons in transforming loss into productive citizenship.

In the second chapter, “A Boy and His Dog: Canine Companions and the Proto-Erotics of Youth,” I examine how the narrative of love and loss represented most clearly in Chapter 1 is altered when the loved object is not human. The relationship between a boy and his dog has proved to be a persistent motif both in children’s culture and in American culture more broadly. It has even appeared as a psycho-therapeutic intervention into the lives of “troubled” youth in programs that encourage school attendance and improve student attitude by pairing them with a dog during school hours. This chapter considers the enduring popularity of the boy and his dog narrative by thinking about it in light of psychologist John Bowlby’s theory of attachment and loss and Freud’s theory of melancholia. The popular resonance of this image and the stories that popularize it can be attributed, I claim, to their work in representing and promoting certain proto-erotic relations and sexual trajectories for readers through the depictions of a young protagonist’s attachment to, and frequent loss of, his canine companion. The stories repeatedly involve children who are themselves “troubled” or in danger, often orphaned or abandoned by the adults who are supposed to care for them, and these children come to learn about and experience the formation of libidinally charged bonds

through their relationships with their dogs instead, whose often violent loss compels the child's development into an ethical and properly gendered and sexualized adult.

In Fred Gipson's *Old Yeller* (1956), Travis, whose absent father is replaced by a helpful stray dog, is able to survive the hostile Texas frontier and care for his mother and brother only with the dog's help. The boy comes to be passionately attached to Old Yeller in a relationship of reciprocal care and affection, and only when viewed in the context of Freud's theories of childhood sexuality and the intensely erotic language common in such stories does the otherwise obscure erotics of the boy-dog dynamic come into view. Old Yeller, which Travis already identifies with his father, mates with the dog of young neighbor-girl, thereby modeling Travis's appropriate developmental course. In the absence of satisfactory human-human attachments, the boy forms an erotic bond and later an identification with his dog, whose violent loss—the novel tells us—propels Travis into manhood when Travis must kill his rabid companion in order to successfully protect his family and himself from the threat of madness and death, the risks apparently associated with such a bestial love.

Like *Old Yeller*, Kate Di Camillo's *Because of Winn Dixie* (2000) is a Newbery Honor book. A girl-and-her-dog story that clearly plays on the conventions of the sub-genre, *Because of Winn Dixie* focuses on Opal, whose mother has abandoned her and her father. Just as for Travis, a dog replaces her absent parent. Through both her relationship with this dog and its temporary loss, Opal is able to confront the absence of her mother, construct a surrogate family, contribute to her new community, and attain young womanhood.

In Chapter 3, I turn to S.E. Hinton, a writer whose work has been credited with marking the maturity of young adult (YA) literature. The publication of *The Outsiders* in 1967 represents a turning point in the development of a genre, which therefore enables us to think about how this generic development both affects and is affected by the way it represents the development of children into adolescents and young adults. Emerging during and after World War II, YA literature is, moreover, one of the few literary genres first conceived in the United States, and thus the foundational YA novels function as a useful index to the similarly emergent notion of the contemporary American teenager in the 1950s and 60s. It was in the context of the significant economic, educational, political, and social changes following the Second World War that a prolonged and distinct developmental period marked out between childhood and adulthood proper fully crystallized.<sup>5</sup> Hinton, herself a teenager at the time *The Outsiders* was written and published, quite deliberately responded to these new events and their ramifications for American youth. She makes clear in her work the ways in which the social networks and experiences of the young adult, which are almost prototypes of adult relations, are linked to the strategic management of knowledge—knowing when and what to know and not know in order to function and be recognized as a proper social subject.

What *The Outsiders* and Hinton's follow-up novel, *That Was Then, This Is Now* (1971), demonstrate is that the achievement of young adulthood and the proper state of knowingness/unknowingness it represents are effects of the kinds of sacrifices children are forced to make in terms of particular objects, including objects of knowledge and ignorance. In both novels, the sacrificed objects are marked by their actions or affiliation as delinquent or troubled teenagers. In *The Outsiders*, an overtly didactic novel that

relies on the convention of didacticism to gain legitimacy for YA literature as a new undertaking, Ponyboy learns through his experiences as a Greaser, and through his experiences losing his parents and friends to violent deaths, what exactly he must know and not know in order not only to survive, but also to survive as a model youth. Johnny's deathbed instructions to Ponyboy, which Ponyboy converts into the novel itself as its "author," address Hinton's young adult readers, who are both implied and interpellated by the novel, encouraged to emulate and be evaluated by Ponyboy's ideal young adult, to practice knowing and not knowing what young adults should and should not know.

*That Was Then, This Is Now* further refines Hinton's conceptualization of young adulthood as a period during which one embraces being "mixed up" and alternatively knowing and not knowing certain information about oneself, others, and the relations between them. Bryon, the novel's protagonist, achieves maturity by sacrificing his boyhood friend Mark in the repetition of a familiar pattern. In this case, Mark is sacrificed by being rejected after becoming enmeshed within a set of social problems and socio-legal discourses that define him as a criminal juvenile delinquent. This experience of loving and losing his friend to and by the law is what triggers Bryon's awareness of how he must strategically manage his own state of knowingness.

The final two chapters suggest the ways childhood and children themselves are imagined as the very objects that American culture sacrifices to generate a sense of progress and potential and to construct an adult citizen characterized by melancholia. In Chapter 4, "Melancholic Development and the Revolutionary War in Literature for Children," I look at not only how represented losses in the context of war, particularly one of national formation and independence, function in relation to children's

development, but also how the structure of the narrative itself and its conception of historical events reproduce the sacrifice of loved objects and promote the formation of national character and civic engagement. Both *Johnny Tremain* (1943) and *My Brother Sam Is Dead* (1976) are novels whose narratives of melancholic sacrifice equate the individual development into adulthood of their protagonists with the founding of a new nation. Evolutions into good men, good soldiers, and good citizens are coincident and precipitated by the loss of men/boys to whom the protagonists are passionately attached. Similarly, the birth and development of the new nation is founded on the loss and identification with the men/boys who die in the service of the Revolution, the ideals they espouse, and the mother/father country against which the Colonies rebel. The young boy-protagonists of *Johnny Tremain* and *My Brother Sam Is Dead* clearly figure the nation in these novels, and so understanding the distinct outcomes of their maturation also illuminates expectations of the nation itself.

First published in the context of World War II, *Johnny Tremain* received the 1944 Newbery Medal. The novel traces the development of its young protagonist from silversmith's apprentice to American patriot and soldier. A proud and earnest young boy of European parentage who breaks with his unscrupulous family of loyalists and sides with the Colonial Rebels, Johnny Tremain embodies the emergent nation for which he struggles. On another level, Forbes's structuring of the narrative itself evokes the notion of melancholic sacrifice by repeatedly introducing narrative arcs and failing to provide their closure. I argue that the failed expectations produced by this narrative structure function as a kind of loss that compels the reader to enact, psychically if not actually, the expectations of national and gendered citizenship *Johnny Tremain* promotes.

A 1975 Newbery Honor book published as the Vietnam War was coming to a close, *My Brother Sam Is Dead* (1974) portrays a far more ambivalent view of America and war. Like *Johnny Tremain*, the novel focuses on a young boy whose experience of loss compels his early maturation. Timmy's father is a Tory loyalist, but in the confusion of war he is arrested and dies in a British prison ship. Timmy's brother, Sam, however, joins the Connecticut militia to fight on behalf of the revolution, but is convicted and executed by his own army for a crime he does not commit. Timmy at first finds himself uncertain about which side to choose, but the ironic deaths of his father and brother only further complicate Timmy's ambivalent loyalties. Departing from *Johnny Tremain's* unproblematic outlook on American ideals and resonating with what Freud understands as the significance of ambivalence felt towards the lost object in cases of melancholia, *My Brother Sam Is Dead* prompts a far more uncertain investigation into the conflictive and perhaps tarnished principles on which America rests. By the end of the novel Timmy becomes an American citizen/man and figures the far more explicitly melancholic "American" of the post-Vietnam era.

Chapter 5, "The Holocaust in American Children's Culture," follows with a consideration of what is, along with the American Revolution, one of the most frequently represented historical events in American children's literature of the twentieth century. I explore how and why the Holocaust has resonated so strikingly in the United States given the significance and foundational roles of racism, genocide, and utopian objectives within American history itself, and I argue that the felt utility of love-loss narratives for the encouragement of children's maturation has provided a crucial precondition for the implantation of the Holocaust within American children's culture in particular.

Considering the phenomenon scholars have called the Americanization of the Holocaust, I look at how this process of Americanization—simplifying, sanitizing, and moralizing atrocity and genocide—is largely an effect of the impulse to position children as the primary audience for Holocaust texts. The United States has seen, in fact, what amounts to the childization of the Holocaust, which has then been redistributed across the globe. Since the 1970s, it has been constructed as a useful pedagogical case study for providing lessons about such things as courage, racial and ethnic tolerance, and civic participation. These lessons are made available to American school children through novels and curricula that promote a set of identificatory practices in relation to other children lost during the genocide of European Jewry.

Lois Lowry's 1990 Newbery Medal winner, *Number the Stars*, is about how a young Danish girl named Annemarie helps rescue her Jewish friend Ellen and Ellen's family during the German occupation of Denmark. Annemarie's explicit maturation into a young woman and a Danish citizen is occasioned by Ellen's jeopardy, Annemarie's naïve courage, and her identification with her endangered Jewish friend. The development of Annemarie through her relationship with Ellen exemplifies precisely the kinds of effects promoted by Holocaust curricula used in public schools throughout the United States. In fact, many schools use Lowry's book and others like it in order to encourage the same kind of process experienced by Annemarie, which is made possible by the events of the Holocaust and the losses it involved.

The way in which the Holocaust is constructed as for and about children also reveals certain assumptions about the nature of children and childhood in the United States. One of, if not *the*, most widely read Holocaust narratives is that of Anne Frank,

whose diary has sold millions of copies worldwide. Frank popularized the image of the “secret room” as one of the central ways of representing the Holocaust in the United States. In 1973, Johanna Reiss’s *The Upstairs Room*, the story of a Jewish Dutch girl in hiding during World War II, was designated a Newbery Honor book. I examine these narratives of young girls hiding in “secret rooms” and how they function as representations of childhood itself. I argue that the image of the child in hiding, one who seeks to outwait danger, operates as an extreme of the generalized experience of childhood given its current contours in the United States. Understanding the conventions of these hiding narratives tells us about how childhood is imagined as a time and place of temporary danger, and it also points to the ways children might themselves be the inevitably lost objects of a people and a nation.

## Notes

1. Burkert writes in *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* that ritual sacrifice “creates and affirms social interaction,” (23). He sees it as an opportunity for collective aggression to give rise to a sense of community (35). In *Human Sacrifice: In History and Today*, Nigel Davies paraphrases the argument by W. Robertson Smith that “sacrifice was aimed at cementing the bonds between man and god” (23). See also Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss’s *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*.

2. The theory of recapitulation was first proposed in 1866 by Ernst Haeckel, whose claim that “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny” fueled comparisons between the child and the “savage,” or childhood and “primitive” cultures, which underlay both theorizations of child development and popular thought on child-rearing and education well into the twentieth century. This theory also influenced Freud himself, who writes in his essay on infantile sexuality,

It is noticeable that writers who concern themselves with the characteristics and reactions of the adult have devoted much more attention to the primaeval period which is comprised in the life of the individual’s ancestors—have, that is, ascribed much more influence to heredity—than to the other primaeval period, which falls within the lifetime of the individual himself—that is, to childhood. (Three 39)

See, for instance, Stephen Jay Gould’s *Ontogeny and Phylogeny*.

3. This possibility is one suggested by the texts under discussion here, and it is an instance, I think, of what Kenneth Kidd argues might emerge by putting psychoanalysis *in dialogue with* children’s literature in order to move “away from a one-way and applied mode, in which psychoanalysis discovers its own truths in the literary text” (“Psychoanalysis” 110). In other words, I do think an examination of these texts contributes to Freud’s theories of melancholia and ego formation by demonstrating the ways the novels’ child-protagonists and child readers function as lost objects both to themselves and to American culture at large.

4. In fact, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud’s observation of the fort-da game leads to his “discovery” of repetition-compulsion, the impulse to repeat events, even those that cause distress. Since this seemed to conflict with the pleasure principle, or the notion that human beings are fundamentally motivated by pleasure, Freud claimed a need to consider the existence of a death drive, a highly controversial notion that in conflict with the pleasure principle is an instinctual drive to return to a state of the least possible stimulation, to the earlier state of inorganic inactivity. The death drive, connected as it is with the impulse to repeat, especially loss and trauma, might therefore be understood as a resistance to both ontogeny and phylogeny, development of both the individual and the species. So Freud’s theory of the death drive suggests connections between repetition, trauma, and development, such that the death drive might be understood as a resistance to and anxiety about that development.

5. The usage of terms like “adolescent,” “teenager,” and young adult” are not always synonymous, and scholars disagree about the emergence and widespread recognition of each of them. Frank Musgrove dates the invention of the adolescent to Rousseau in the early 1760s (Musgrove 33). French historian Philippe Ariès writes, “Until the eighteenth century adolescence was confused with childhood. In school Latin the word *puer* and the word *adolescens* were used indiscriminately” (25). Alleen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson suggest that in practice adolescence emerges as separate period of life in the United States after the Civil War as the nation became increasingly industrialized (Cart 4). G. Stanley Hall’s *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* stands as the first landmark psychological study of adolescence, but substantial further research was not conducted until the 1940s (Cart 5). The word “teenager,” of U.S. origin, was not coined until 1941, although terms like “teen” and “teen age” (occurring with or without the hyphen and as one or two words) had been in use since the 1920s and 30s, by which time a shift to compulsory education and the legal restrictions on child labor had redefined the period between childhood and adulthood (see Dalzell and Aytö). While in 1930 the number of teenagers graduating from high school was equal to 29% of seventeen-year-olds in the U.S., that figure doubled to 59% by 1950 (Schaller 28). This tremendous demographic shift, along with intensified commercial attention to young people between the ages of 12 and 20, marked a significant moment in the re-conceptualization of the teenager, or young adult, in the 1940s. It was in this context that YA literature was beginning to emerge. In 1941, the American Library Association (ALA) established the Association of Young People’s Librarians, which split into the Children’s Library Association and the Young Adult Services Division in 1957.

## Chapter 1

### Losing and Using Queer Youth: *A Separate Peace* and *Bridge to Terabithia*

If works of fiction can be said to lead double lives, John Knowles's *A Separate Peace* would be the quintessential example. On the one hand, the novel is widely regarded as what some would call "homoerotic." It gets sold in gay bookstores—appearing in the "queer classics" section of one chain—and it has even been featured in an advertisement for a gay nightclub in New York City. On the other hand, *A Separate Peace* is widely assigned in high school English classrooms, and published school curricula and teacher rationales regard the novel as useful for teaching young people about democratic values and ethical citizenship. These materials make no mention of *A Separate Peace* as a "queer classic." Katherine Paterson's 1978 Newbery Medal winner, *Bridge to Terabithia*, is similar to *A Separate Peace* in that it is frequently read in schools and highly regarded by educators, and as with Knowles's novel, the book's concern with issues of gender and sexuality has been almost entirely overlooked in critical and pedagogical publications.

As with *Billy Budd* and *A Picture of Dorian Gray*, the potential of a book like *A Separate Peace* to be read as homoerotic constitutes a kind of open secret—something a reader knows, intuits, feels vaguely, denies, rejects, or perhaps remains oblivious to—that cannot help but impinge on the experience of the reader reading it. These books are the textual equivalent of a multi-channel hologram in which different images are recorded on the same surface to give the appearance of movement or change depending on the viewer's angle of perception. In the age of blogs and internet message boards, one can

find pages and pages of chatter about whether *A Separate Peace* is or isn't "gay," and the energies generated by the tension between its youthful protagonists, between the novel and its readers, between the teachers who assign it and the students who read it, and between those who think it "is" and those who think it "isn't" no doubt fuel its continued popularity as a mainstay of high school reading lists *and* as a "queer classic." It provides a lesson on what alternatively might be called ambiguity or subtext, on the need to be attentive to subtlety, on the dynamics of the closet, on the possibilities of pleasure in "knowing" a sexual secret or solving its mystery, on the potential/need for homosexuality to be anywhere, everywhere, or nowhere. All of these acts of reading and discovery surrounding sexuality, violence, and citizenship seem particularly suited to the instruction of young people imagined to be in the process of their own sexual and civic explorations and discoveries. Indeed, the novel no doubt works to prompt precisely such explorations and discoveries without evoking the kind of hysteria that has surrounded other more explicitly sexual or gay-themed literature in schools. And although the dynamics of the closet that *A Separate Peace* seems to embody might be thought characteristic of an earlier moment in the history of sexuality, one that perhaps required more discretion, the novel that leads a double life might in fact remain especially relevant at a moment when same-sex desire can be both sanctioned as content for television sitcoms and simultaneously reason for the vehement denial of civil rights. Culturally, homosexuality itself seems to lead a double life.

Both *A Separate Peace* and *Bridget to Terabithia* center on the intense friendship of two youths, and in both novels one friend is tragically lost, providing the critical event that catalyzes the survivor's maturation. Both texts deal with questions of sexuality and

gender that indicate how crucial these dimensions of identity and practice are to the development of the protagonists. *A Separate Peace* involves the passionate friendship of two boys, and *Bridge to Terabithia* focuses on the cross-sex friendship between a sensitive and artistic boy named Jess, whose father is concerned about his son's potential homosexuality, and a tomboyish young girl who moves in next door. As a result of the popularity of these novels and the potentially controversial nature of their subject matter, they have been repeatedly challenged by those seeking to have them banned from schools and libraries. *Bridge to Terabithia* was the ninth most frequently challenged book of the 1990s, and *A Separate Peace* has been similarly embattled and in some cases even removed from classroom use. Given, though, what others recognize as their literary merit and pedagogical usefulness, the attacks have been resisted by educators and librarians, resulting in the publication of rationales composed to defend their use.

In this essay I examine both how the surviving boy uses the loss of a queer friend to achieve certain developmental accomplishments that signal maturity and how teachers have been encouraged to make use of the novels themselves, either explicitly or by implication, to instruct students in a number of lessons regarding proper adult gender, sexuality, and ethical conduct. In both cases, the attachment to and subsequent loss of a queer friend in childhood or adolescence is presented as a useful means by which to construct productive adult citizens. Knowles has written that his novel is "a story of growth through tragedy" ("My Separate" 109). My purpose here is to understand what exactly these children grow into and how the qualities of their tragedies enable that growth. I argue that these important coming-of-age novels for youth represent a process

of melancholic development in which a child loses and introjects a loved object as a means, Freud suggests, of (re)forming one's character.

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*A Separate Peace* follows in the tradition of the school story, a genre supposedly established a century earlier by Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857).<sup>1</sup> According to Beverly Lyon Clark, school stories are "so marked by gender that it becomes vital to address questions of both the instability and potency of gender in the school story" (11). Clark recognizes that while schooling, and hence stories about schooling, are implicated in various social hierarchies, they also allow "some possibility of subversion, some possibility for giving one perspective on the marginal, on class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality." School is, she suggests, a site for working out contrary impulses (8). Kathy Piehl argues for consideration of *A Separate Peace* as school story in her comparison of the novel with Hughes's own children's literature classic, and it is suggested elsewhere that one of the "ideal" types of contemporary adolescent fiction focuses on the burgeoning of one's sexuality, frequently in the school setting (Roxburgh 249). Given both the importance of gender and sexuality to the school story, a genre to which *A Separate Peace* seems clearly to belong, and the persistent use of this novel in the secondary-school classroom, an understanding of how it reinforces or potentially resists the social hierarchies of which Clark writes is crucial to deciphering its pedagogical function.

The social significance of novels taught in school is manifested by the contention that surrounds many of them.<sup>2</sup> *A Separate Peace* has not escaped controversy. It has been the object of attempted censorship in several cases throughout the U.S. brought by

parents who for various reasons have found its content objectionable (see Foerstel 1994, Sova 1998). Parents, who before the late nineteenth-century “were ready to accept the most ardent degree of affection between boys [in school stories] if it involved no physical expression (except a chaste deathbed kiss),” eventually came to be horrified by the mere possibility of same-sex genitality (Quigly 126). The availability of *A Separate Peace* to a queer reading was understood by the parents of a Vernon-Verona-Sherrill (New York) School District student who in 1980 contested the use of the novel because of its “underlying theme” of homosexuality. They claimed that the book actually encouraged homosexuality, and as a result, it was removed from classroom use (Sova 213).<sup>3</sup>

Although educators have touted the novel as a useful tool for imparting patriotic and ethical values, teaching *A Separate Peace* involves a potentially troubling application vis-à-vis same-sex desire. To the extent that *A Separate Peace* reinforces hegemonic mechanisms of marginalization, such as homophobia and heterosexism, its usefulness for imparting “democratic ideals” cannot be understood without examining how these mechanisms and their effects in fact constitute those ideals. The book does, however, present possibilities for readings that resist such a use, as the complaint of the plaintiffs in the 1980 case attests.

In a 1983 edition of the *Connecticut English Journal* devoted to rationales for commonly challenged books used in the classroom, Diane Shugert writes that these rationales set out to explain how *A Separate Peace* “relates to the democratic ideal of the educated citizen, prepared to make her own decision” (2). Richard Hargraves, author of a course outline entitled *Values*, suggests that a system of values “should encompass recognized universal but functional ethical codes and modes which provide a basis for

conduct in contemporary, American society” (4). *A Separate Peace* figures as one of the primary texts in this curriculum, which seeks to foster a personal value system including positive self-images, the ability to differentiate between tolerance and intolerance, a sense of the centrality of freedom and personal independence, and the importance of truth and reconciliation. W. Michael Reed proposes that *A Separate Peace* “offers adolescents some important perspective upon the nature of human experience” (102). In Reed’s view, students should value *A Separate Peace* because of its insights concerning methods by which adolescents interact with one another. Other apologists cite the novel for its “universal” lessons about moral development and the human ideal.

I would argue, however, that the rhetoric of ethics, values, and patriotism in which rationales for this book are steeped masks its potentially more troubling use as a tract for inscribing the “appropriate” gender and sexuality in adolescent males.<sup>4</sup> These rationales, written in part as a response to attempts to censor the novel’s use, represent reaffirmations of its potential to inspire normative development. The novel’s pedagogical guidebooks fail to acknowledge what many readers recognize as the erotic friendship between Gene and Finny, the homophobic motivation for Gene’s panicked reaction to Finny’s affection, the significance of the loss of the boys’ passionate friendship, or the way in which Gene’s social contribution and heterosexualized maturity are coded in gendered terms.<sup>5</sup> Gene’s “maturation” throughout the novel represents his movement away from an effete intellectualism and “adolescent” homoerotic relationship. His “moral” progression involves abandoning the queer possibility and accepting a hegemonic and necessarily heterosexual masculinity that adolescent readers of the novel are tacitly encouraged to emulate and valorize. The novel has been recruited as

representative of universal adolescence in part because of its heterosexist developmental narrative, which does not simply reflect adolescent experience but contributes to the discourse compelling that experience. The themes of *A Separate Peace* do indeed represent American cultural values, including, quite significantly, heterosexuality and masculinity in men.

The novel is framed by the narration of Gene, who returns to Devon School fifteen years later to reminisce about his coming of age. By beginning and concluding the novel with the insights of an adult Gene, Knowles pre-establishes the inevitable culmination of the story's movement – Gene as a man. The reader is allowed to glimpse who Gene will become, and the story told as a flashback provides the map of the course Gene follows. Hence, the process of gendering the boy to “be a man” lies at the heart of *A Separate Peace*, and the conflicts and actions it details serve to further this process as its central project.

Finny and Gene's relationship is characterized by a subtle homoeroticism in which Gene eroticizes Finny's innocence, purity, and skill, and Finny eroticizes the companionship provided by Gene. With World War II serving throughout the novel as the backdrop against which the “peace” of Devon is contrasted, the boys initially engage in the ritual of taking off their clothes and jumping from a tall tree into the river below as practice for the possibility of having to jump from a sinking ship in battle. Jumping from the tree acquires special significance for Finny and Gene; it serves as a sign of loyalty and as an act that cements their bond and stands in for sexual play.

To describe their relationship this way is not to cite a germinal or inchoate homosexuality or to suggest that either Finny or Gene has simply failed consciously to

admit an essential homosexual status. It is, however, to note, as Eve Sedgwick does, “that what goes on at football games, in fraternities, at the Bohemian Grove, and at climactic moments in war novels can look, with only a slight shift of optic, quite startlingly ‘homosexual.’” It is not, she continues, “most importantly an expression of the psychic origin of these institutions in a repressed or sublimated homosexual genitality. Instead, it is the coming into visibility of the normally implicit coercive double bind” (*Between Men* 89). The “coercive double bind” of which Sedgwick writes is the simultaneous *prescription* of intimate male homosocial bonds and *proscription* of homosexuality (see *Between Men* 88-89 and *Epistemology* 185-186):

Because the paths of male entitlement, especially in the nineteenth century, required certain intense male bonds that were not readily distinguishable from the most reprobated bonds, an endemic and ineradicable state of what I am calling male homosexual panic became the normal condition of male heterosexual entitlement. (*Epistemology* 185)

The boys’ very presence at a school like Devon not only underscores their access to a specifically classed and gendered entitlement, but the school itself also serves as a space in which to prepare them for claiming that entitlement. It is a space in which this double bind is particularly highlighted since boys will make their earliest connections to other boys here, as well as perhaps their first sexual explorations. In order to make visible fully this double bind, it is necessary to shift the optic whereby the homoeroticism of the boys’ relationship comes into view: “For a man to be a man’s man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being ‘interested in men’” (*Between Men* 89).<sup>6</sup>

Finny demonstrates his interest in sharing intimate moments with Gene when he encourages him to skip class and spend a day at the beach. Finny reveals in his characteristically honest way that Gene is the “proper” person with whom to share such moments as they settle down to sleep on the sand. Gene considers such a naked emotional expression to be next to suicide at Devon, and he remains unable to reciprocate Finny’s admission. Gene does, however, notice Finny’s physical attractiveness even if he must project this sentiment onto the anonymous passers-by: “I noticed that people were looking fixedly at him, so I took a look myself to see why. His skin radiated a reddish copper glow of tan, his brown hair had been a little bleached by the sun, and I noticed that the tan made his eyes shine with a cool blue-green fire” (39). Gene notices Finny’s appearance, though Finny is the first to say about Gene, “Everybody’s staring at you. It’s because of that movie star tan you picked up this afternoon ... showing off again” (39). While Gene reciprocates Finny’s feelings, he cannot bring himself to admit them as Finny does. Gene’s self-preserving silence allows him to resist both the possibility and the threat of consummating his platonic friendship with Finny, whereas Finny’s willingness to expose his emotional vulnerabilities predicts his eventual expulsion from a context that forbids such expressions.

Gene allays the confusions that result from his affection for Finny and the tumult of emotions such forbidden feelings arouse in him by first causing the accident that forces Finny’s disappearance from Devon and then incorporating Finny into himself. Following their trip to the beach, the night they spend alone there, and Finny’s intimate expression of his fondness for Gene, Gene finds himself growing increasingly suspicious of Finny and attributes this reaction to the possibility that Finny plans to sabotage his grades.

Finny and Gene later return to the tree where, after undressing, Finny suggests that they jump together hand-in-hand, he later recalls, an act that could substitute for a strictly forbidden sexual act between the boys (163). They climb the tree and prepare to jump, but in a moment of panic, Gene jounces the limb and sends Finny crashing to the ground, thereby setting a series of events in motion that culminates in Finny's death. His realization that Finny's intentions are not dishonest after all, coupled with Finny's suggestion that they take the jump together, ignites the moment of homosexual panic. Gene responds to Finny's advances with an act of violent separation. Finny's attempt to jump side by side with Gene (and take Gene's hand, if Finny in fact fulfills this intention) triggers the need in Gene to conform to the heterosexual imperative that forecloses the possibility of same-sex desire by forcibly detaching himself from Finny.<sup>7</sup>

Judith Butler suggests considering gender as a kind of melancholy, the unfinished process of grieving a loss that cannot be acknowledged. The lost object is incorporated and preserved in the ego as a constitutive identification in order to defer suffering the loss. She proposes that this melancholic identification is central to the process by which a subject's gender is constructed. She quotes from Freud's *The Ego and the Id*:

an object which was lost has been set up again inside the ego—that is, that an object-cathexis has been replaced by an identification ... when it happens that a person has given up a sexual object, there quite often ensues an alteration of his ego which can only be described as setting up of the object inside the ego. (“Gender” 22)

The internalization of the object offers an alternative means of possessing the object without violating the codes that prohibit and prevent its external possession. The act of

jouncing the limb, which causes Finny to fall, represents a literal acting out of Gene's rejection of Finny as an object of desire. The injuries Finny incurs ensure his separation from Gene and the loss of the prohibited homosexual attachment. Gene's refusal, however, to acknowledge the loss translates into the installation of Finny, the barred object of desire, as part of Gene's ego. The loss is refused and Finny is preserved by this process of internalization, which involves Gene's accessibility to penetration by Finny in such a way that avoids the repercussions of a genital contact:

I decided to put on his clothes.... When I looked in the mirror it was not a remote aristocrat I had become, no character out of daydreams. I was Phineas, Phineas to the life. I even had his humorous expression on my face, his sharp, optimistic awareness. I had no idea why this gave me such intense relief, but it seemed, standing there in Finny's triumphant shirt, that I would never stumble through the confusion of my own character again. (54)

When Finny does return temporarily to Devon, he attempts to aid Gene in completing the transformation. Since Finny had been a star athlete prior to the fall, he sets about attempting to train Gene to take his place and actualize the element of himself that Gene internalizes. Gene initiates the process whereby he establishes the idea of Finny at the core of a reconstituted self, and, in this instance of initiative, already demonstrates a quality originally belonging only to Finny. As Gene approaches his goal, Finny gradually fades until his death coincides with Gene's ultimate success.

In Butler's view, masculinity and femininity are accomplishments that emerge in tandem with the achievement of heterosexuality ("Gender" 24). Gene's homosexual panic might then be ascribed not only to the prohibition of homo-desire but also to the

related fear of being feminine or feminized, as Georges-Michel Sarotte argues. His rejection of the external possession of Finny represents not only a rejection of the homosexual attachment but also his desire to achieve a heterosexually-defined masculinity by which he can bring himself into accord with the ideal of the proper man. The “I never loved him, I never lost him” uttered by a man forms the core of his tenuous heterosexuality and hence his masculinity (“Gender” 27). Moreover, renunciation does not abolish the desire but establishes the desire as the fuel for its perpetual renunciation. If masculinity is achieved through a heterosexuality predicated on the renunciation of the homosexual attachment, then homo-desire serves as the necessary possibility that allows for its renunciation:

The act of renouncing homosexuality thus paradoxically strengthens homosexuality, but it strengthens homosexuality precisely *as* the power of renunciation. Renunciation becomes the aim and vehicle of satisfaction. And it is, we might conjecture, precisely the fear of setting loose homosexuality from this circuit of renunciation that so terrifies the guardians of masculinity in the U.S. military. For what would masculinity “be” were it not for this aggressive circuit of renunciation from which it is wrought? (“Gender” 31)

A heterosexual man thus becomes the man he “never” loved and “never” grieved, and his masculinity is founded upon the refusal to acknowledge this love and its incorporation as an identification within his ego (“Gender” 34). Gene becomes a man through his repudiation of the consummation of his relationship with Finny—“holding hands in a jump.”

By killing Finny, Gene assumes his own place in this “aggressive circuit of renunciation.” Following Finny’s first departure from Devon School and Gene’s incorporation of the loss as an identification within his own ego, Gene determines along with Brinker to enlist in the war effort and, in doing so, the masculine environs of the military and battlefield. The war propels the boys forward, away from their adolescent shelter and towards the final phase of their initiation into manhood. The return of Finny forestalls Gene’s entrance into the war, and the reemergence of the queer possibility effectively suspends Gene’s enlistment and the verification of his masculinity. The threat posed by Finny becomes evident. His presence, in fact, his continued existence, defers indefinitely Gene’s “ascension” to a proper manhood. Finny must therefore die to prevent any further return and to allow Gene to claim finally his masculinity and complete the gendering process that is ongoing throughout *A Separate Peace*.

Mark Simpson has described the buddy war film as a compilation of lessons about masculinity and how to take one’s place in patriarchy (214). Simpson’s analysis of such films can be used to examine Knowles’ novel, since the lingering war provides the context for Finny and Gene’s homoerotic friendship. Simpson describes the intimate relationship between same-sex desire and death established in the war film as the necessary condition for any expression of homo-desire:

In war films of the buddy type the deadliness of war is not glossed over. But it is portrayed not in the death of the enemy, who are often faceless or even unseen, but in the death of the comrades and buddies. Classically, the moment when the buddy lies dead or dying is the moment when the full force of the love the boys/men feel for one another can be shown.

And, for all the efforts of the conscientious film maker, the deadliness is thus attached not as much to war as to the queer romance of it all. (214)

Paul Fussell similarly suggests also that the connection between war and love assumes a distinctly homoerotic form on the battlefield:

Given this association between war and sex, and given the deprivation and loneliness and alienation characteristic of the soldier's experience – given, that is, his need for affection in a largely womanless world--we will not be surprised to find both the actuality and the recall of front-line experience replete with what we can call the homoerotic. (272)

Fussell even makes the direct connection between the homoerotic desires of English officers during the Great War and their experiences at English public schools: “It was largely members of the upper and upper-middle classes who were prepared by public-school training to experience such crushes, who ‘hailed with relief,’ as J.B. Priestley remembers, ‘a wholly masculine way of life uncomplicated by Woman’” (273). Fussell reports finding in soldiers' recollections of front-line experiences “especially in the attitude of young officers to their men ... something more like the ‘idealistic,’ passionate but non-physical ‘crushes’ which most of the officers had experienced at public school” (272).

According to Simpson and Fussell, the battlefield is a place in which queer love can be expressed, albeit in an indirect way, because it occurs alongside and in the context of death. Gene allows himself to admit his tender feelings for Finny only as Finny lies broken on the marble steps following Gene's trial. Seeing another student wrap a blanket around Finny, Gene recalls, “I would have liked very much to have done that myself; it

would have meant a lot to me” (170). That Gene’s expression of tenderness fails to find a more explicit articulation attests to that very impossibility. According to Simpson, the cathartic deadly climax satisfies the audience and allows for the homoerotic impulse of the characters while reinscribing a heterosexual economy that calls for the unattainability of the queer attachment. The desire is expressed for only an instant, and even then, it is a love that is never truly acknowledged. Its full actualization is staved off by death. In *A Separate Peace*, the possibility of consummation is canceled by Finny’s death, ensuring that their “boyish love” remains eternal and unsullied by the transgression of a compulsory heterosexuality. Simpson writes: “They live by love, but one of them, the most ‘sensitive’ and the ‘queerest’, must die to save the others and the world from the practice of it, also to demonstrate the ‘proper’ way it should be sublimated: ‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends’” (227).<sup>8</sup> Finny is, surely, the queerest of the Devon boys.

Thus, desire and violence each provide conditions for the other. Simpson writes, “But pain and death are not just a price that has to be paid—it is as if the caress, the kiss, the embrace *were the fatal blow* itself” (214). If the jounced tree limb is read as the act that ultimately kills Finny, then it is Finny’s attempt to grab Gene’s hand and to jump with him—this symbolic moment of touch—that incite the homosexual panic in Gene. As Sedgwick explains, in a legal context “the ‘homosexual panic’ defense for a person (typically a man) accused of antigay violence implies that his responsibility for the crime was diminished by a pathological psychological condition, perhaps brought on by an unwanted sexual advance from the man whom he attacked” (*Epistemology* 19). In this case, Gene’s almost reflexive movement that jounces the limb is a reaction to that

moment of touch, which to Gene is too explicit a demonstration of affection, and thus constitutes a kind of unwarranted advance. Or is unwarranted? As Sedgwick continues, “After all, the reason why this defense borrows the name of the (formerly rather obscure and little-diagnosed) psychiatric classification ‘*homosexual panic*’ is that it refers to the supposed uncertainty about his own sexual identity of the perpetrator of the antigay violence” (*Epistemology* 20 [emphasis in original]). This is not to suggest that Gene is somehow *really* gay, or that only a closeted gay man will commit violence against gay men. Rather, it alludes to the double bind discussed earlier in which any affection or desire of one man for another might also implicate the recipient-object himself as homosexual, requiring, so it goes, a potent demonstration of denial that cannot help but look excessive and self-implicating. Nothing but feigned or real indifference, perhaps, can extricate the recipient-object from this double bind. In any event, Gene is very clearly caught up in it. Perhaps then Gene’s guilt, which according to the teacher rationales he must confront and overcome, is not only the violent act itself, but also the possibility of same-sex desire that act suggests.

Hallman Bell Bryant calls *A Separate Peace* “an allegory about the causes of war” (10), and so given Simpson’s and Fussell’s observations about the intimate connections between male-male bonding and the battlefield, perhaps it should be no surprise that this “allegory” of war cannot help but be enacted through an intensely passionate friendship between boys that is marked by same-sex desire. In being *about* war, *A Separate Peace* can’t help also being *about* same-sex desire. Gene’s participation in the war effort is fueled by this disavowed loss of the homosexual attachment, and if Gene’s development is taken to represent a collectively experienced process by which

boys are made men, then it might be said that the war itself is predicated on the ungrieved loss of homosexual attachment. On the battlefield, men can place themselves in positions to be killed by the enemy such that death comes from without, and mourning one's comrades in war can stand in for mourning the homosexual attachment that was lost. The trauma of war as a purely masculine pursuit serves as a pretext for the grief that cannot be experienced at home during peacetime. One can love one's comrades and grieve their loss with the displaced love and loss "never" felt for the original same-sex object. Any resistance to the imperative that demands such an oppressive masculinity formed on the disavowal of homo-desire can be directed towards the enemy, and any guilt suffered over one's own compliance can be transformed into a hatred of this enemy. War might be described as the only appropriate place for experiencing this grief, and the possibility of eliminating *this* motivation for war (as it certainly is not the only motivation) presents a useful rationale for refusing the loss of homosexual attachment and for changing the conditions that initially demand its loss.

The context of Devon School during wartime conflates the school and the battlefield. Seeking to act out the war, Finny invents the game of Blitzball in which the boy with the ball must run from one side of the field to the other without being tackled. At any point in the game, the player holding the ball could pass it on to another player who would then become the object of attack for the other boys. One *must* pass the ball according to Finny, who invents a game with no teams. Each player is simultaneously an adversary and an ally, so these terms effectively have no meaning in the context of Blitzball in which players fluidly shift between roles never fixed in relation to other players. One can never identify allies or enemies in Blitzball, making it a queer game

resisting the fixity of identities.<sup>9</sup> Rather than enforcing the strict dichotomization of sides, Finny rejects this fundamental attribute of competition, thereby creating a space from which to expose it as not inevitable. Finny also adopts this resistant tactic during a snowball fight when he again begins switching sides so that “loyalties became hopelessly entangled” (146). A classmate follows suit, leading Gene to describe him as a eunuch (146).

Finny repeatedly produces the central symbols of the novel. He initiates the practice of jumping from the tree, a practice that acquires significance as a site for both the sealing of Finny’s friendship with Gene and their separation. During Finny’s temporary return to Devon following his injury he begins training Gene for the Olympics in which he himself had wished to participate. Despite the impossibility of such a goal, Finny’s encouragement persists in maintaining it as a realistic possibility in their minds, again demonstrating his authority over the boys’ fantasies. Finny also determines the symbolic value of the pink shirt, which he dons as an emblem ostensibly to demonstrate his pride in the Allied victories over Central Europe. Gene expresses concern that Finny’s pink shirt might cause others to “mistake” him for a “fairy,” a concern to which Finny responds “mildly ... I wonder what would happen if I looked like a fairy to everyone” (17). Finny’s lack of concern is itself queer in the homosocial context of a boys’ school where, by the 1940’s, such a label might incur a significant cost to one’s social status, if not physical safety. The pink shirt, moreover, proves central to Gene’s attempt to become Finny. Wearing the shirt completes Gene’s incorporation of Finny into his own self following Finny’s first absence from Devon. That Finny originates each of these symbols signifies a phallic authority ultimately claimed by Gene as the story’s

narrator.

In contrast to Gene, his schoolmate Leper fails to undergo the same process by which Gene achieves manhood. Leper is—as one might predict from his name—an outsider, never fully participating in the boys' society, never playing their games, preferring instead to wander alone in the woods. He finally leaves Devon to enlist, “escapes” from the army, and returns to school to testify in Gene’s mock trial. In this allegory of gender construction, Leper represents the boy who neither refuses the loss of homosexual attachment nor consummates a potential union. He therefore never incorporates the possible object of desire within his ego, thereby proving malformed and dysfunctional as a result of his failure to adhere to the normative developmental trajectory followed by Gene. When Finny first jumps from the tree Leper refuses to join in the ritual with the other boys. In response to Finny’s insistence on Leper’s participation, Gene recalls that “Leper closed his mouth as though forever. He didn’t argue or refuse. He didn’t back away. He became inanimate” (9). Leper simply watches, and so bears witness to the symbolic attachment created as an unrealized possibility between Finny and Gene. At the crucial moment when Gene jounces the limb and sends Finny crashing to the ground in a violent moment of homosexual panic—the refusal of the queer possibility—Leper stands by as the only witness to the event, silently observing the mechanisms by which Gene undertakes to assume his masculinity. Although the other boys work clearing snow from the railroad yard to permit trains carrying new military recruits to pass, Leper abstains from this contribution to the war effort, choosing instead to keep his distance and explore the forest trails. Ultimately Leper enlists in the army only to suffer a mental breakdown and go “psycho.”

Leper, psychologically crippled by the Army and hence by the nation, knows that Gene knocked Finny out of the tree, the way that Finny himself, crippled by Gene, knows. Finny's physical injury prevents his participation in sports and games, which the boys enact as simulations of war, and Gene's instability prevents his continued service. The novel therefore establishes an equivalency between Finny and Leper. When Gene confronts Leper about the fact that he is home when he should be performing his military duties, Gene says that he knows "what's normal in the army" (135). Leper's being home strikes him as abnormal and as requiring an explanation, a position against which Leper reacts strongly: "Normal.... What a stupid-ass word that is.... You're thinking I'm not normal, aren't you?" (135). Leper tries to explain that he has deserted in order to escape a Section Eight discharge, and his explanation of this situation takes the form of a confession, which cannot help but look like a coming out: "But in the last few weeks...I admitted a hell of a lot to myself. Not about you. Don't flatter yourself. I wasn't thinking about you. Why the hell should I think about you? Did you ever think about me? I thought about myself, and Ma, and the old man, and *pleasing* them all the time" (137). His denial about having thought about Gene seems unprovoked and excessive, suggesting that he might in fact have been thinking about Gene, and he seems angry that this fact is not mutual. Although the nature of what Leper admits to himself might be nothing other than his incapacity to complete his military service, in such a sexually charged and apparently "homoerotic" novel, Leper's words assume queer implications, especially given that fact that in many ways his situation mirrors Finny's. Finny, of course, is ultimately killed for his queer desires and Leper is driven insane for his.

At the climax of the novel when the boys try Gene for maiming Finny, Leper

arrives to present the damning evidence, his testimony that Gene deliberately caused Finny's accident. Faced with this evidence, Finny flees from the truth and finally dies at the end of the sequence of events put in motion by Gene. In the context of the trial, Leper occupies the place of the critic, the one who reads through the allegory and exposes the underlying mechanisms motivating Gene's violent act. Leper stands as a figure that warns the reader to avoid reading too closely or looking too intently to uncover the reason for Gene's violence. The processes of achieving heterosexuality and masculinity cannot be completed properly in the witness if he becomes too aware of their workings. The figure of Leper functions in the story to present the potential risk of insanity to the student who might be drawn to the position of the critic. The student should not be a witness who observes directly these mechanisms of gender construction since insanity looms as a possible punishment.

Leper's role as critic is not unrelated to the actions of Brinker Hadley. Brinker orchestrates a trial to expose Gene's role in Finny's accident, and he calls Leper as an eyewitness to these events. Finny might not have fled the trial had Leper not arrived to present his testimony. Perhaps this could be read as a warning that the critic's own words might be used to further the process being critiqued, for Leper's testimony was appropriated and used by Brinker. Brinker accuses Gene of making Finny unavailable for the war effort; he calls Finny a casualty (159), and he suggests that Gene is postponing his enlistment because of Finny (151). He also claims not to care about Gene's guilt (159); however, he arranges the mock trial to expose the truth. Brinker holds a prominent position in various student organizations, and he is invested in his social and political authority at the school. He also seems concerned about Finny's well-

being. He tells Gene that Gene's pity will damage Finny: "And if you don't watch out he's going to start pitying himself. Nobody every mentions his leg to him except me. Keep that up and he'll be sloppy with self-pity any day now. What's everybody beating around the bush for? He's crippled and that's that. He's got to accept it and unless we start acting perfectly natural about it, even kid him about it once in a while, he never will" (152). Still, Brinker's desire to stage the trial cannot be accounted for fully by a concern for Finny and a respect for the truth. His motives for putting Gene on trial remain unclear unless Brinker is imagined as the successful alternative to Leper as critic.

Whereas Leper is the first to enlist and is perhaps the least suited for military service, Brinker concocts "plan after plan, each more insulated from the fighting than the last" (151). He ends up settling for the Coast Guard, much to the disappointment of his stern and patriotic father, who lectures Brinker and Gene about the importance of serving their country. Brinker later apologizes for his father: "I'm enlisting.... I'm going to 'serve' as he puts it, I may even get killed. But I'll be damned if I'll have that Nathan Hale attitude about it. It's all that World War I malarkey that gets me. They're all children about that war.... It gives me a pain, personally. I'm not any kind of hero, and neither are you. And neither is the old man, and he never was" (192). Gene suggests that Mr. Hadley feels left out, to which Brinker replies, "Left out! He and his crowd are responsible for it! And *we're* going to fight it!" (193). Leper enlists without thinking through his actions because he gets caught up in the excitement of the recruitment efforts. Although he comes to be critical of military life, that insights develops too late for him. Brinker provides a more successful model. He recognizes the flaws of his father's position and arranges to take part in the war effort without necessarily accepting the

greatest risk. Thus, unlike Finny or Leper, Brinker can occupy the role of critic without dying or going insane. Notably, Knowles based Brinker on his Exeter classmate, Gore Vidal, who is himself an essayist, social critic, and gay novelist.

In his report of a panel discussion held to discuss literary criticism and the teaching of *A Separate Peace*, Jack Lundy quotes panelist Betty Nelick as saying that the novel is concerned with “Gene’s slow and painful dying to the world of adolescence into the world of manhood, through the outward pressures of a world at war and the inward pressure of the realization of fear and evil within himself” (114). Diane Shugert claims that books like *A Separate Peace* are taught because “the book’s point of view bears upon democratic and American values,” which *A Separate Peace* quite clearly accomplishes through its valorization of Gene’s coming-of-age, his rejection of a possible homosexual attachment, and his ascension to proper manhood at the cost of the death of his all-too-queer best friend (4). The failure of many of these critics to acknowledge explicitly the sexual politics of the novel represents the success of Leper’s warning against precisely this attention. *A Separate Peace* thus serves the education of the American ideal well – a heterosexual and “properly” gendered ideal.

The popular characterization of same-sex desire as a confusing adolescent experience at a stage that must be successfully negotiated in order to achieve a more “adult” heterosexuality lends descriptive validity to Butler’s formulation in which the homosexual attachment is lost and incorporated. But this psychosocial process by which heterosexuality is achieved need not be understood as either inevitable or innate, but rather, it may be understood as produced. The widespread belief that youth might experience same-sex desire during an early developmental stage that they are expected to

outgrow functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy at the cultural level. Adolescents learn that they must restrict their potential object-choices by learning to understand other-sex desire as appropriate and expected, while learning to interpret any indications of same-sex desire as the product of rampant hormones, inexperience, or confusion. *A Separate Peace* encourages the understanding of this lesson. The process of gender construction allegorized in *A Separate Peace* does not fully precede the use of such texts as educational tools. Rather such texts might be said to collectively contribute to the discourse that materializes the phenomena they describe. When teachers take texts to be “realistic” and present them as such, they unwittingly popularize this discourse, a discourse that is generative rather than simply representational. Such texts are thought to document a psychosocial process; however, the process might instead be understood as the collective effect of those texts, an effect ensured through the perpetual repetition of their use and the insistence on their realism. The contribution of *A Separate Peace* to the procedure by which same-sex desire is constructed as adolescent positions the book at a crucial site of cultural production, that of the “adult” heterosexual and the “ideal” democratic citizen.

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Like *A Separate Peace*, Paterson’s *Bridge to Terabithia* represents anxieties surrounding (im)proper gender and sexuality. Jesse, the only boy in a family of five children, wakes up early each morning to practice his sprinting in order to become the fastest runner in the fifth grade. He covets the distinction as a means of overcoming his reputation amongst his classmates for being the “crazy little kid that draws all the time” (4).<sup>10</sup> In fact, his artistic pursuits elicit not only the ridicule of other children, but also the

concern of his father, whose response to Jesse's desire to become an artist lingers in Jesse's memory as a pivotal event of early childhood:

He would like to show his drawings to his dad, but he didn't dare. When he was in first grade, he had told his dad that he wanted to be an artist when he grew up. He'd thought his dad would be pleased. He wasn't. "What are they teaching in that damn school?" he asked. "Bunch of old ladies turning my only son into some kind of a ----." He had stopped on the word, but Jess had gotten the message. It was one you didn't forget, even after four years. (14).

Neither Jess's father nor Paterson supplies the word, but that it is some kind of homophobic epithet is certain. Even as a young first-grader Jess understands that whatever it is his father will not name must be something awful and that his artistic interests signal that he might either already be or become precisely that. His father's refusal even to utter the word aloud after he proves himself willing in the same rant to swear in front of his young son can only further indicate to Jess, whose very name is sexually ambiguous, the horror of being a homosexual or sissy. As the only son in a family of four girls and as a boy with too many female teachers, Jess is put at further risk by these feminizing influences, thinks his father. As he fantasizes about becoming the fastest runner, Jess considers the biggest payoff to be the possibility that "even his dad would be proud" (5).

Thus, Jess takes up running in order to participate and hopefully triumph in the all-boy, schoolyard competitions. His new interest in this activity indicates Jess's comprehension that his father's concern is connected to gendered behavior. When Leslie, the new girl in town, wants to participate, the other boys object, of course, because the

aces are about testing their boyhood masculinity. Jess's plan to use his practiced running skills as an antidote to his perceived gender deviance is foiled when Leslie successfully outraces both him and all the other boys. Leslie and her parents move in next door to Jess, and the first time Jess encounters her she is sitting on the fence separating their yards. At first he is unsure about whether she is a boy or a girl because of her clothes and haircut. Leslie is the consummate tomboy (a gender fence-sitter?), who eventually comes to make a good companion to the sensitive and artistic Jess.

The children are therefore connected by their marked deviance, with the bold Leslie positioned as having something to teach the more timid Jess. When their teacher, Mrs. Myers, assigns the students a composition about their favorite hobby, Jess chooses to lie by writing about football, which he actually hates, because "he had enough brains to know that if he said drawing, everyone would laugh at him" (42). Leslie, in contrast, decides to write about scuba diving, prompting Mrs. Myers to read her composition aloud because scuba diving is "an unusual hobby—for a girl" (42). Leslie's writing nearly triggers a panic attack in the fearful Jess, who begins to choke and sweat just from listening to Leslie's description of diving. Jess is immediately disappointed in himself because "his dad expected him to be a man. And here he was letting some girl who wasn't even ten yet scare the liver out of him by just telling what it was like to sight-see underwater. Dumb, dumb, dumb" (43). Nevertheless, Leslie's notable courage and the failure of Jess's running plan encourage him to look to the tomboyish Leslie for lessons on how to be a proper boy.

Together the two children construct a fanciful world they name Terabithia where they rule as king and queen. Their creative act is prompted in part by the need to get

away from their troubles at school. The other children mock Leslie, whose mother mostly neglects her to work on her own writing, and the introverted and thoughtful Jess fails to connect with his classmates or siblings. It is Leslie who suggests they create “a whole secret country” just for the two of them to which they might escape. They find a place in the woods on the other side of a creek that is crossed by swinging on a rope tied to the limb of a tree. Leslie takes the lead in elaborating the mythology of their kingdom, but Terabithia seems to have a more pronounced effect for Jess:

Just walking down the hill towards the woods made something warm and liquid steal through his body. The closer he came to the dry creek bed and the crab apple tree rope the more he could feel the beating of his heart. He grabbed the end of the rope and swung out toward the other bank with a wild exhilaration and landed gently on his feet, taller and stronger and wiser in that mysterious land.

(59)

So despite the taunting of the other children because of their cross-sex friendship, and the concern of Jess’s parents that their son spends all his time playing with girls (“they both were worried about what would become of it”), the two are able to cope with their reality by constructing an alternative world in which Leslie can practice her storytelling—she is praised by Mrs. Myers for being a good writer—and Jess, encouraged by the art teacher, Miss Edmunds, can practice his drawing.

Terabithia is meant to be a place of empowerment and serenity for the children, but to Jess, it is also tinged with danger and fear, as is most everything else in his life. Terabithia provides a place that is absent of the everyday anxieties that plague his life and the negative judgments of peers and parents. It offers opportunities instead for

triumphant successes against imagined monsters and invasions. But for Jess, who is terrified by just listening to Leslie's description of diving, the woods also contain "dark places where it was almost like being underwater," although he keeps these feelings from Leslie because he is embarrassed by his sensitivity and fearfulness (50). Later, when he refuses to confront the schoolyard bully on behalf of his younger sister, he is called a coward and feels ashamed. Even the preacher startles him, and at some of the more fiery moments in the sermon "Jess would jump, and it would take another couple of minutes to relax again" (107). The scariest thing Jess must do is swing across the creek to get to Terabithia, and as the rains cause the creek to rise, Jess finds visiting Terabithia more and more frightening: "For Jess the fear of the crossing rose with the height of the creek. Leslie never seemed to hesitate, so Jess could not hang back. But even though he could force his body to follow after, his mind hung back, wanting to cling to the crab apple tree the way Joyce Ann might cling to Momma's skirt" (115). Jess's sensitivity is connected clearly with his interest in and aptitude for art, his appreciation of Leslie, and his parents' concern over Jess's sexuality and gender. And while Jess sees the fearless Leslie as a role model, it is ultimately his anxiety—that which marks him for others as flawed—that saves him from the fate that befalls her.

One rainy day as Jess worries about telling Leslie that he is too scared to swing across the rising creek, he is invited to visit an art museum by Miss Edmunds. The invitation not only provides him an easy escape from his dilemma, but it also means a chance to spend time alone with the encouraging teacher on whom he has a crush. For these reasons he reports his pleasure in having failed to ask Leslie along. That same day,

Leslie decides to visit Terabithia alone, but the rope they use to swing across the creek breaks, and she presumably hits her head and drowns.

Here again the death of one friend provides the critical catalyst for the maturation of the survivor. Although Jess is rendered inarticulate and disoriented upon learning the news, he eventually must confront the loss of Leslie. First, her death triggers Jess's recognition of his ambivalent feelings. He finds himself angry at Jess for precisely that which he admired about her: her courage. He thinks for a moment that she had swung on the rope the day she died just to prove her guts and, by extension, to highlight his fear. He resents her because she had "failed him," and he worries that she is "somewhere right now laughing at him" (145). Freud notes in his discussion of melancholia that "the loss of a love-object is an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself effective and come into the open," a possibility that Jess evidences when he tells his father, "I hate her. I wish I'd never seen her in my whole life" (147). And as Freud goes on to write, in some cases "the conflict due to ambivalence gives a pathological cast to mourning and forces it to express itself in the form of self-reproaches to the effect that the mourner himself is to blame for the loss of the loved object" (251). We can see this happening in Jess's case with his guilt over not asking Leslie to join him and Miss Edmunds at the museum and again when Jess throws away his paints and paper after Leslie's wake, an action that only punishes himself.

Jess, in following the melancholic trajectory charted by Freud, comes to identify with Leslie in a move that promotes his development at the close of the novel. The loss of Leslie finally enables Jess to achieve the courage and innovation that had characterized his playmate. Jess demonstrates this when he returns to Terabithia for the first time after

Leslie's death. Rather than swing on the rope, Jess uses a fallen branch to build a bridge across the creek. Next, he undertakes to make an offering and ceremony to honor the deceased queen of Terabithia, thereby taking over from Leslie the creative initiative. Finally, when Jess's younger sister attempts to follow him across the bridge and finds herself paralyzed with the fear of being swept away by the waters below, Jess must summon the courage he had witnessed in Leslie in order to retrieve his sister from the branch and guide her back to the safety of the bank. "Everybody gets scared sometimes...." he tells her, "You don't have to be ashamed" (156). At the same moment he recalls the time when Leslie confronts the schoolyard bully, clearly recognizing that she must have been scared then too and managed that fear successfully just as he was now doing. In this moment he identifies with his dead friend, which enables his understanding of how she managed to appear so brave.

It was Leslie, thinks Jess, who had "turned him into a king," and upon Leslie's death Jess assumes the responsibility and pleasure of generating the mythology of Terabithia. He does so by crowning his younger sister May Belle as the new queen and describing for her the imaginary dimensions of the ceremony. As Sue Misheff notes, "Jess's days in Terabithia serve him as well to allow the artist and man in him to grow" (134), and Misheff also comments on the significance of May Belle's coronation in the final pages of the novel: "Jess comes closer to a nurturing relationship with his sister May Belle, sharing Terabithia with her, so Leslie's legacy is not lost" (137). If Leslie mentored Jess through the elaboration of Terabithian mythology, then Jess would reproduce that relation with May Belle in a move that evidences his identification with Leslie. Thus, Jess effectively incorporates Leslie's courage and creativity, thereby

becoming the bold authorial (tom)boy Leslie had been. In enacting the process of melancholia, Jess achieves maturation as a properly gendered and ethical boy by surviving the loss of a loved friend through an identification that results in the insights culminating in that maturity.

Like Gene in *A Separate Peace*, the death of a queer friend is used to propel the protagonist into a properly gendered maturity. According to Misheff, Leslie “must die so that the redeemed male can go on alone, empowered to be the strong individual that the savior has nurtured” (135). If Leslie has nurtured Jess in life, then in death she provides an object of identification that cements his attainment of maturity. Jess himself recognizes the profound impact Leslie has on him when he considers that “she had made him leave his old self behind” (145). Upon Leslie’s death, Jess recognizes that he inherits the title of “fastest runner in the fifth grade,” an honor that had always been understood as gendered and one that the tomboyish Leslie had earned. Now, Jess sees that Leslie’s death signals the possibility that he himself has successfully approached manhood. When his father comes to comfort Jess at the bank of the creek, he speaks to him for the first time like a man: “Finally his father said, ‘Hell, ain’t it?’ It was the kind of thing Jess could hear his father saying to another man. He found it strangely comforting, and it made him bold” (147). Thus, Jess’s father arrives on cue to help validate and—in the very act of validating—confer Jess’s manhood.

More than simply becoming a proper man, Jess uses the occasion of Leslie’s death to consider the importance of proper civic virtue. He considers that “before Leslie came, he had been nothing—a stupid, weird kid who drew funny pictures and chased around a cow field trying to act big—trying to hide a whole mob of foolish little fears

running riot inside his gut. It was Leslie who had taken him from the cow pasture and turned him into a king” (160). But he realizes that their time in Terabithia had been a temporary period of education. Misheff argues that Jess’s relationship with Leslie is “a sort of apprenticeship with the female physically close by until the death of the savior forces [him] to apply what [he has] learned” (140). What I am suggesting is that texts like these encourage the application of their lessons by imbuing them with an imperative force that is sealed by the gravity of death, a death that provokes a process of melancholic development into a properly gendered and ethical adulthood. During their afternoons in Terabithia Leslie had explained to Jess the importance of various social causes like saving the whales. Now, Jess think that “he must go on for both of them” and that “it was up to him to pay back to the world in beauty and caring what Leslie had loaned him in vision and strength” (161). Such a sentiment is no doubt what wins a book the Newbery Medal.

Given the popularity of *Bridge*, the frequency of its classroom use, and its potentially controversial subject matter, the book has inspired a number of challenges by parents seeking to have it removed from the classroom. Some have cited the novel’s use of profanities, its violence, and its “disrespect for authority” as reasons for its removal. Others have suggested that the novel offers “a negative view of life to impressionable students” (Sova 57). Although *A Separate Peace* has been recognized by a variety of different kinds of readers, including those seeking to have it banned, as involving possible “homoeroticism” or homosexuality, similar discussions surrounding the use of *Bridge* are remarkable for their absence of reference to sexual and gender deviance. This is so despite the fact that these “concerns” are in some ways far more explicit in *Bridge*

than they are in *A Separate Peace*. As we have seen, Jess's father responds to his son's interest in art in a rather vehemently homo/sissy-phobic way, and yet one critic writes this about Jess: "His family circumstances are anything but nurturing, and his artistic impulses are neither understood nor appreciated by his family and friends. Jess's one hope of gaining social stature by being the school's fastest runner is dashed when Leslie appears" (Misheff 133). To write that his family simply does not nurture or "appreciate" Jess's art, which clearly signals to them his gender/sexual deviance, is really to overlook or ignore both the cultural import and personal ramifications of the reasons for this failure to "appreciate," and I have explained here my thoughts on the ways the "social stature" Jess attempts to gain by running is coded quite significantly in gendered terms. However, in the same essay, which is about "the search for safe places," we get no discussion of what exactly Jess needs to be safe *from*.

Not surprisingly, then, like those for *A Separate Peace*, teacher rationales for *Bridge* avoid mentioning gender and sexuality almost entirely in spite of the centrality of those issues to the novel. One rationale suggests the following "objectives in exploring this novel with children":

- Identifying the impact of the setting on the two main characters and noting the influence of the setting on the plot.
- Identifying similarities and differences in numerous pairs of characters in the book, e.g., Jess and Leslie, Jess's parents and Leslie's parents, Jess's beloved music teacher and his classroom teacher.
- Noting vocabulary, idioms and constructions peculiar to Appalachia.
- Identifying changes in the value systems of characters as the story progresses.

- Identifying striking use of figurative language. (Brittain 110).

Although there are possibilities for addressing gender/sexuality embedded in several of these points, the avoidance of explicit reference to them seems telling.

Another teacher guide designed to examine Newbery winners for traces of sexism highlights the usefulness of *Bridge* for encouraging cross-sex friendships and declares that “this book is non-sexist. The author has created characters that see no limits for themselves. The fact that they are female and male have [sic] no bearing [sic] on what choices they make” (12). Not only are the claims that Jess and Leslie see no limits for themselves and that their respective sex assignments have no bearing on their decisions inaccurate—Jess is keenly aware of his sex/gender and the need to write about football instead of art to avoid being teased, for instance—but this guide also fails to explain how else the book qualifies as “non-sexist” or to acknowledge the central role gender deviance plays in the novel.

Yet another rationale produced by the National Council of Teachers of English as part of its intellectual freedom network, SLATE (Support for the Learning and Teaching of English), states that

*Bridge to Terabithia* is a highly symbolic, multi-layered story that deals with family, life, friendship, fantasies, romance, and death.... Additionally Paterson focuses on the difficult and enlightening process through which young people who are prematurely left to their own resources become acquainted with the compromises and obligations that are necessary to survive in the adult world, says the *Washington Post Book World* (1978). (Bryson)<sup>11</sup>

Here again, gender and sexuality are absent from the list of the novel's themes. Perhaps more significant are the ideas implicit in the reference to the "compromises and obligations that are necessary to survive in the adult world." The most central conflicts in the novel are between Jess and Leslie on the one hand and their parents and classmates on the other. Since both sets of conflicts are either fueled or exacerbated by the children's gender deviance, the compromises and obligations presumably necessary to survive in the world must, at least in part, refer to gendered ones.

This rationale does, however, refer to Jess's mother's belief in "the unwritten traditional household law that says men do men's work and women do women's work," and there are other oblique references to what some readers might recognize as allusions to the novel's treatment of gender and sexuality. For example, Bryson writes, "Paterson's novel is a heart warming story of two children who use each other's strength to conquer and overcome many of their own weaknesses," and, "*Bridge to Terabithia* is an excellent novel for boys and girls ages nine to twelve because it deals with real life situations and problems that many children in the nine to twelve age group find difficult to cope with." Bryson praises the novel for its realistic treatment of childhood development and the way it facilitates reader identification with the protagonists:

Jess and Leslie were made to feel inferior mostly by their parents which as individuals caused both to feel inadequate. Jess really wanted to paint but his father's constant criticism caused him to feel inadequate about himself. Leslie wanted love and attention but when she did not receive it she began to feel inferior. Together they were able to overcome the dilemmas and move to the next stage. They were attempting to define their own identity and do things on their

own. This is evidenced by Jess taking over the races at school and Leslie taking on Janice Avery.

Like the absences noted above, these examples are telling precisely in their failure to identify explicitly the “weaknesses” and “problems” these children must manage, the specific reasons for their disapproval by parents, and the dimensions of “identity” with which they struggle.

In both *A Separate Peace* and *Bridge to Terabithia*, we are left with the death of a sympathetic young protagonist, and in discussions of both novels we find traces of an understandable discomfort and dissatisfaction with these deaths. Nancy Huse claims about Leslie in *Bridge* that “there is no way to become fully reconciled to the harshly unnecessary death” (100), and Paterson has reported the effects of the story on one group of students she affectionately refers to as “hoodlums” (“Lure” 10). Paterson explains how teacher Finian O’Shea was assigned a group of incorrigible sixth graders distinguished by their bad behavior and poor academic records. O’Shea decided to have the children read *Bridge to Terabithia*. Paterson tells of the intense feelings of betrayal the class felt upon learning of Leslie’s death: “Finian tried to read the next chapter, but the class wouldn’t let him. He had betrayed them. They hardly spoke to him for two days.... When he asked for reactions, they couldn’t get past their anger that Leslie had died” (21). Paterson describes how another book, one about pirates, had struck a chord with their “outlaw hearts” (10).<sup>12</sup> Both *Bridge* and *A Separate Peace* perhaps offer, like that book, the possibility of similarly interacting with the transgressive spirit of youth.

Young readers of *A Separate Peace* have posed the question, “Why must Finny die?” (Wacht 7). If the question is motivated by a desire to see Finny live, then it marks a

potential impetus for the student to produce a resistant reading of the text. The question, “Why does Finny have to die?” could represent the student’s desire to see the homosexual attachment completed, or at least not entirely foreclosed before the possibility of consummation is realized. Finny must die precisely because he refuses to reject the possibility of loving Gene. Even when Gene attempts to confess his guilt, Finny struggles to deny Gene’s need to push him away: “... it was like I had all the time in world. I thought I could reach out and get hold of you.” But Gene responds by flinching violently away from him: “To drag me down too!” (57). Even here when Finny speaks of his previous desire to grab hold of Gene, Gene can only recall such a wish as the desire to drag him down and prevent him from attaining a heterosexually defined manhood. Finny must die so that Gene can become a proper man, yet as Butler writes, “There is no necessary reason for identification to oppose desire, or for desire to be fueled by repudiation” (“Gender” 35).

Knowles’s text, if noted for the ways in which it propagates normative constructions of gender, might be employed to interact with adolescents’ impulse for transgression, and the same might be said of *Bridge to Terabithia*. The excessive warning away from an overly perceptive reading symbolized by a psychotic Leper might serve to provoke a desire to reveal what one is warned against revealing. The very prohibition used to enforce Gene’s conformity might be eroticized in such a way that its very transgression becomes desirable. In this sense, the warning away might potentiate the desirability of the forbidden object and serve the function of drawing one closer to it. The inverted prohibition, one that attracts the subject to the prohibited object, could function to

destabilize the force of the prohibition so that it ultimately loses its effect to either warn away or entice. Finny would not have to die if Gene rejected a “proper” and fixed identification. Had he refused the need to bring about and disavow this loss, Gene might have avoided foreclosing the queer potential.

## Notes

1. In *Regendering the School Story* Beverly Lyon Clark seeks to debunk the notion that *Tom Brown* was the first school story, while still crediting it as having influenced hundreds of subsequent school stories, popular culture, and mainstream literature for adults (11).

2. The uncertain status of John Knowles's *A Separate Peace* as children's, or adolescent, literature reflects the instability of these terms. First published in 1959, *A Separate Peace* predates S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, which many cite as initiating the genre. Initial reviews in *The New Yorker*, *New Statesman*, *Saturday Review*, and *Time* made no reference to the book as being specifically for young adults, and its review in *The Horn Book Magazine*, a publication concerned with literature for children and young people, appeared in a section intended to highlight current adult books of interest to high school students.

*A Separate Peace* has, however, arguably entered the popular imagination as particularly well-suited for young adults. In a 1992 article that considers adolescent novels written before 1967, *A Separate Peace* is favorably noted as one read and enjoyed by adolescents and teachers of adolescents (*Still* 87). The frequent use of *A Separate Peace* in high school English classrooms might contribute to the perception that it belongs in the YA category. As it continues to be taught, more adults will recall their first experience with the novel as having taken place in school. The fact that its protagonists are themselves adolescents certainly compounds the perception that it is *for* adolescent readers.

3. The novel has also been challenged for containing "unsuitable language" and "negative attitudes" and for encouraging undesirable behavior, such as skipping class, breaking school rules, and trespassing (Foerstel 181, Sova 214). In spite of this occasional opposition, *A Separate Peace* has been regularly taught in high school English classrooms since the early sixties. An early apology for its use applauded it as recommending itself immediately to high school instruction (Crabbe 111).

4. I am not necessarily suggesting that the novels themselves are homo/sissy-phobic or that they work in any unidirectional way in promoting a properly gendered heterosexual adulthood. The interaction of reader and text, and indeed the entire cultural terrain that provides a vast array of devices for such a project, admit far too many complexities for such a simple cause-effect. This essay does, however, explore the potential uses and effects of these novels, and by extension the use of the "queer" youth on which they are centered, for the purpose of contributing to that cultural terrain. The work of such criticism can be read as suggesting ways the texts themselves offer possibilities of different uses.

5. I do not want to be understood as suggesting that the authors of these rationales are consciously motivated by a phobic impulse to obscure the implications of these novels for the gender/sexual development of their characters or readers. The rationales are written, after all, to provide teachers with ideas for justifying the classroom use of

controversial texts that some have tried to ban. This is, of course, a laudable goal. One possible explanation for this almost careful avoidance of reference to gender and sexuality in these rationales is the desire on the part of their authors to avoid inciting further hostility towards these already embattled texts. It might be that the authors don't want to call attention to the treatment of these themes in *A Separate Peace* and *Bridge* lest that very fact lead school administrators and parents to support the banning of these books. Even if this were the case, though, the necessity of omitting explicit references to gender and sexuality in rationales designed to combat censorship attempts is itself notable.

6. The school story as same sex love story is a possibility explored by Isabel Quigly. The readiness with which these stories lend themselves to such readings supports Sedgwick's contention and represents a tradition that provides the context for such an approach to *A Separate Peace*. In two of the three school stories Quigly describes as typical of the school love story, one of the boys dies. In all three, one of the boys is enormously handsome and athletic, while the other is rather plain, slightly too scholastic, and perhaps a bit too nervous as well. *A Separate Peace* is thus easily placed in this tradition.

There is other evidence that *A Separate Peace* is widely recognized as "homoerotic." A dance-club advertisement appearing in a New York City gay magazine, *HX*, depicted a number of sexual situations involving men at a library. Several books, having been pulled from the shelves, lie strewn on the floor. The texts are ones commonly known to be available to "homoerotic" readings: *Leaves of Grass*, *Moby Dick*, *Billy Budd*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *A Separate Peace*. A popular gay audience, one that is meant to understand an ad such as this, does not need such a reading to be pointed out to it. It is not my aim to say merely the possibility of reading the text this way exists. Rather, given this possibility, I am interested in how teachers have written about the text's use, in the processes that seem to underlie this homoeroticism, and in what else the text might be saying about these things.

7. The argument I am pursuing here develops further one briefly sketched by George-Michel Sarotte in *Like a Brother, Like a Lover* (1978), where he notes how the relationship between Gene and Finny is characterized by an undercurrent of desire. "Their friendship changes into hatred out of fear of its changing into love," he writes, and "Gene's hatred of Finny reveals his refusal to eroticize the desire for identification with him. This frantic refusal to become Finny's masochistic partner is translated into a fatal act" (45). Specifically in response to Sarotte's claims Hallman Bell Bryant writes, "To ascribe any one motive to explain Gene's action would be reductive" (68). Sarotte does not, however, suggest that "suppression of his homoerotic attraction" (67) is Gene's *only* motive, and even to be recognized as one possible motive among many, someone has to bother articulating it in the first place. In Bryant's accusation of reductiveness one can almost detect a wish that this particular motive had not been noticed at all. In spite of Bryant's seemingly dismissive response to Sarotte, the significance of gender and sexuality to Knowles's novel cannot be overlooked given their centrality to precisely the themes around which *A Separate Peace* is centered: adolescence, initiation, school, war, innocence, and maturation.

8. Theologians, Bible scholars, film critics, and gay lay people have commented repeatedly on the potential for seeing same-sex eroticism in Christian rituals, symbols, and texts, particularly in the relation between object and viewer created by the spectacle of Jesus' body, or in the intimate nature of his relationships with his disciples, especially John, the so-called "beloved disciple." The very structure of Christian faith—which calls for the submission of men to Jesus as savior and God, love for and devotion to Jesus and to fellow Christians, meditation over Jesus' body, its consumption through the ritual of communion—suggests the kind of intense libidinal investment and carnality characteristic of eroticism. Such claims have been made in books like *Queering Christ* by Robert Goss, a former Jesuit priest, and in *The Man Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives from the New Testament* by Theodore Jennings at Chicago Theological Seminary. In response to the 2004 release of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, Frank Rich wrote in the pages of *The New York Times* that

with its laborious build-up to its orgasmic spurtings of blood and other bodily fluids, Mr. Gibson's film is constructed like nothing so much as a porn movie, replete with slo-mo climaxes and pounding music for the money shots. Of all the *Passion* critics, no one has nailed its artistic vision more precisely than Christopher Hitchens, who on "Hardball" called it a homoerotic "exercise in lurid sadomasochism" for those who "like seeing handsome young men stripped and flayed alive over a long period of time." (Section 2, page 1)

If Finny is a kind of Christ-figure, as a conventional Christian-allegorical reading might suggest, then surely he is the kind of Christ proposed by Goss or Jennings, or filmed by Gibson, one whose sacrifice for his loved friend occurs in the context of their intense and intimate bond in which the other's body has a central place. Finny *does* in fact sacrifice himself for Gene. Instead of spiritual salvation, that sacrifice purchases Gene's heterosexual manhood.

9. The term "queer" of course cannot—and should not—be reduced to some simplistic notion of fluidity. A number of scholars have taken up the possible implications of the term—not so much its "meaning," which must remain contingent if it is to be put to use in contesting normative regimes. See, for example, Butler's "Critically Queer" in *Bodies That Matter*; Doty's *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* xv; Sedgwick's "Queer Performativity" in *GLQ*; Michael Warner's introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet*; de Lauretis's "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Studies: An Introduction" in *differences*.

10. Nancy Huse explains that "in her Newbery acceptance speech, Paterson tells how her editor, Virginia Buckley, urged the writer to give Jess the mind of an artist, in order to dramatize his sensitivity and the concomitant power to create new meanings out of his play with Leslie" (100). Jess's "sensitivity," then, is the source of both his anxiety and power, a dual effect which is perhaps what enables him to survive by refusing to cross the creek into Terabithia after the heavy rains.

11. Of course, Leslie does not in fact survive, although the possibility of Jess's survival is perhaps enhanced through his identification with his lost friend. A particularly "paranoid" critic (see Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading") might

question whether the reader is meant to think Leslie too bold for a girl in venturing to Terabithia alone or Jess the wiser of the two in building an effective and safe bridge. He manages this, of course, only after Leslie dies and only with the help of the courage he gains, I am arguing, from identifying with her. I do recognize that to read *Bridge* as reinscribing “proper” gender and sexuality *is* a paranoid reading of a novel that in other ways celebrates the gender deviance of its protagonists.

12. Margaret Mahy’s *The Great Piratical Rumbustification* (1978).

## Chapter 2

### A Boy and His Dog: Canine Companions and the Proto-Erotics of Youth

The image of the canine companion in Western literature has a long history, dating back at least to Homer's *The Odyssey*, in which Odysseus's faithful dog Argos long awaits his master's return to Ithaca and dies only upon seeing him. This tradition extends through Shakespeare, whose comedic depiction of the relationship between Launce and his dog Crab in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is one of the more noted representations of devotion between a man and his pet. Dogs have also been featured in some of the earliest imaginative works for children. Edward Augustus Kendall's *Keeper's Travels in Search of His Master* was published in 1798 by Elizabeth Newbery, who carried on the publishing business of her husband's uncle, John Newbery, credited with having originated the publication of pleasurable works for children. A didactic story that encourages readers to be kind to their pets, Kendall's book is told from the perspective of a dog seeking to be reunited with his master, a young boy. In 1872, English novelist Marie Louise de la Ramée, writing under the penname Ouida, published *A Dog of Flanders*, a story for children that centers on the relationship between an orphaned boy and his beloved Belgian dog. *A Dog of Flanders* establishes the prototype of the boy-and-his-dog story, which has been frequently reproduced in American children's literature of the twentieth century, most prominently in novels like Jack London's *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* and Fred Gipson's *Old Yeller*.

The image of the boy and his dog is now ubiquitous in American culture, from television programs like *Lassie* and *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin* to the paintings of

Norman Rockwell—popular for his images idealizing small-town America—who produced a series of four paintings known as *A Boy and His Dog*.<sup>1</sup> Commenting on the indispensable status of the family pet, Marjorie Garber notes that the “very same school reader that instructed mid-twentieth-century Americans in the shape of the ideal family also told us that no nuclear family was complete without its Spot” (35). Not surprisingly, then, children’s literature is also replete with honored boy-and-his-dog stories such as William Armstrong’s *Sounder* and Phyllis Reynolds Naylor’s *Shiloh*, both recipients of the Newbery Medal.<sup>2</sup>

I explore in this essay the question of why the image of the boy and his dog has so pervaded our culture, finding expression in any number of domains ranging from child-rearing practices and psychotherapeutic programs to the literary genre represented by the novels I examine here: Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, Fred Gipson’s *Old Yeller*, Jim Kjelgaard’s *Big Red*, and Kate Di Camillo’s *Because of Winn-Dixie*. I want to suggest three interrelated points in order to explain the popular resonance of these boy-and-his-dog stories and their related therapeutic manifestations. First, the relationship between a boy and his dog and its representation in literature provide the opportunity for children to practice engaging in affectively charged social relations, if only through reading about them. Second, the narrative of the boy and his dog exemplifies a culturally widespread disciplinary device that involves promoting intense affectional attachments and then demanding their sacrifice as a way of (re)forming social subjects that are properly gendered and sexualized. Third, the relationship between a boy and his dog, characterized by emotional and physical intimacy

and providing possibilities of great pleasure for the child, represents a form of childhood sexuality that is often overlooked as such.<sup>3</sup>

Through the boy-dog relation the boy can practice managing mobile and shifting social relations in a simplified field. The nature of the relationship between boy and dog circumvents some of the potential complexities that impose unwanted limitations on human-human relations. Some of those complexities include the exigencies of adult responsibilities (in *Old Yeller* Travis's father has to go to Kansas in order to earn money), the complexities of communication produced by language itself in contrast to the relative inarticulateness of the dog (Old Yeller cannot protest or give assent in very clear ways, for instance), and the conventions and risks of affectively charged relations between people. The relationship between boy and dog is sometimes hierarchical, sometimes egalitarian. Sometimes the boy is more competent than his dog; sometimes the dog is more competent than the boy. They are throughout intensely passionate attachments, but also eminently disposable ones. The dog provides a site for all kinds of projective fantasies. It is an object both to desire and identify with. The dog can be both guilty and innocent, and hence the boy can be either guilty or innocent and function as either judge or judged. He can rescue the dog, or be rescued by him. The dog has something approximating a "will": he can try to run away, and he can be bad (like steal meat or bark incessantly); but, he is also subject to the will of the boy, who otherwise lacks subjects on which he can impose his will. The boy can experience physical affection by both petting the dog and being licked in response without evoking fears of either pedophilia, as might happen with an intensely passionate relationship with an adult, or precocious sexuality if the relationship were with a near-age playmate.<sup>4</sup> Love for a dog, argues Garber,

“represents the ‘pure’ and unambivalent relationship *in contradistinction to* human-all-too-human narratives of erotic complexity and ambivalence” (128).

In Gipson’s novel, *Old Yeller* clearly functions in these ways for Travis by coming to figure Travis’s absent father and teaching Travis to assume his role as a normatively gendered heterosexual man.<sup>5</sup> Boy-and-his-dog stories are, as is much children’s literature, about coming of age, and a central component of coming of age, except perhaps for some transgender kids, is coming of age *as* either a man or a woman. Given the ways in which gender identity and sexuality have been so insistently soldered together in our culture, perhaps we should not be surprised at the lengths to which these stories go to ensure that properly gendered children achieve heterosexual adulthood. We can see from these stories how that potential heterosexuality is purchased at the expense of great trauma. In the case of *Old Yeller*, it means that Travis must actually murder his beloved dog, which itself repeatedly suffers tremendous wounds while saving the boy he loves, in order to be validated as a grown man. As Judith Butler points out, “presumably, sexuality must be trained away from things, animals, parts of all of the above, and narcissistic attachments of various kinds” (*Psychic* 211 n.2). Our reliance on the use of trauma to initiate children into adulthood and to train children away from queer objects is evidenced in these texts and re-invoked by such practices as the high-schooled assistance dog program, to which I will return at the end of this essay.<sup>6</sup> In fact, we can understand initiations as typically involving some kind of ritualized trauma often enacted in highly eroticized scenarios. Rarely, perhaps, is the compulsion to murder what is understood as the childhood attachment so dramatically literalized as it is in *Old Yeller*.<sup>7</sup>

Travis accomplishes his development through his affection for, loss of, and subsequent identification with his dog in what I'm calling a proto-erotic relation of youth. Boy-and-his-dog stories like this one represent and promote a disciplinary technique that involves the formation of intense affectional bonds with companions that are ritually sacrificed so that they can function as objects of a melancholic identification, which as Butler notes, "is central to the process whereby the ego assumes a gendered character" (*Psychic* 133). Butler employs Freud's ideas about melancholia to understand one of the possible ways whereby the gender and sexuality of the subject are constituted.

In "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud hypothesizes that one way of dealing with the loss of a loved object is through the incorporation of the object into one's own ego in the form of an identification, which preserves the lost object internally in a way that fundamentally alters the psyche. Freud later builds on these formulations in *The Ego and the Id*, where he speculates that rather than a pathological outcome of mourning gone awry, melancholia might be understood as a normative process whereby the character of the ego is formed. This process of melancholia, he claims, "especially in the early phases of development, is a very frequent one, and makes it possible to suppose that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices" (*Ego* 24). Butler, exploring the implications of Freud's theory, describes the character of the ego as "the sedimentation of objects loved and lost" (*Psychic* 133). The act of identification, Freud ultimately speculates, may be the only way in which an object can be given up, and with this move he effectively generalizes the experience of melancholia as a model for childhood development.

One of the ways identifications with lost libidinal objects come into psychological play is through their role in providing the foundation for the faculty of self-evaluation and for “social feeling.” Freud attributes what he calls “the most important characteristics of the development both of the individual and of the species” to this process of loss and melancholic identification, through which the ego ideal is formed. It is the existence of this ego ideal, the “residue of the earliest object-choices,” that produces the demands of conscience experienced as guilt and makes self-judgment possible. “Social feelings,” Freud continues, “rest on identifications with other people, on the basis of having the same ego ideal” (*Ego* 30-33). Thus, the disciplined behavior of the subject, regulated by one’s conscience, is an effect of the formation of the ego ideal through this process of attachment, loss, and identification.<sup>8</sup>

John Bowlby’s theories of attachment and loss, which seek to understand the importance of affectional bonding with a competent attachment figure during childhood, might elucidate along with Freud the reasons why boy-and-his-dog stories and their subsequent reenactments as socio-psychological therapies have proven so compelling. If a child’s various attachment behaviors—efforts to retake the attachment figure—are repeatedly thwarted, the child risks enormous frustration, long-term trauma, and the formation of maladaptive attachment patterns in the future. Since the interaction between the attachment figure and child determines the internal working models of the self and the other, the lost figure and the inability to regain it will alter how a child represents itself to itself and how it perceives any subsequent attachment figures. The inability to reestablish contact with an attachment figure during childhood because of travel, death, illness, or abandonment produces anxiety, frustration, and the alteration of these models, which

record the child's inefficacy to alter either its unpleasant state or its vulnerability to heightened risks to physical and emotional well-being. Such experiences can lead to feelings of chronic anxiety and a distrust of other potential attachment figures, which undermines the establishment and maintenance of their relationships. For Bowlby, given both the degree to which these internal models remain difficult to alter and the tremendous impact on one's emotional life of the state of one's intimate bonds, the attachment experiences of childhood prove profoundly important.

What Bowlby's careful observations of children separated from their caregivers enable for us is the possibility of understanding some of the reasons boy-and-his-dog stories prove so pleasurable for their young readers. They represent the narrativization of children's anxieties—particularly surrounding attachment, loss, vulnerability, and need—and, with the appearance in the story of the rescuing dog, a temporary abatement of those anxieties and the concomitant potentialities for great pleasure.

Freud of course revolutionized thinking about childhood sexuality and pleasure by denying the popular notion that sexuality only emerges at puberty. Freud considers sexual maturation at puberty to involve the convergence towards a sexual object and aim of both affectionate and sexual currents. The affectionate current, he writes, "comprises what remains of the infantile efflorescence of sexuality" (*Three* 73). His belief that children are indeed already sexual enables Freud to recognize otherwise banal behaviors as evidencing childhood sexuality. He offers thumb-sucking, the holding back of stool in order to maximize pleasure in its release, the voyeuristic curiosity to view their own and others' genitals, and the exhibitionistic glee in exposing their bodies as examples of how young children stimulate their erotogenic zones for the purpose of pleasure. But despite

the 1905 publication of his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, the subject of children's sexuality still remains highly controversial, if not taboo, nearly one hundred years later. Whether or not one accepts Freud's account of the dynamics of childhood sexuality, his work is significant for calling attention to the erotics of children and to the ways that childhood erotics both do and do not mirror the erotic dynamics of later life.

Freud's proposition that children possess an innate aptitude for the polymorphously perverse has offered one possible foundation for constructivist claims that understand (adult) sexuality as emerging out of the multiple, even infinite, possibilities that through various historically and culturally contingent strategies and/or discourses are channeled, foreclosed, promoted, or constructed in particular ways.<sup>9</sup> What is left after this process, so it goes, amounts to a rather limited selection of identity formations or positions, and hence a limited range of sexual objects recognized as available and appropriate.

Those discourses on sexuality that render certain possibilities, if not imperatives, blindingly visible also render others obscure and elusive.<sup>10</sup> For instance, many coming out narratives of gay men and lesbians, in their looking back to early "evidence" of later sexual identity, function not only as efforts to narrativize and hence (re)capture the childhood erotics thought to predate the child's ability to articulate or conceptualize his or her desires or pleasures, but also as the staging of a belated scene of listening to whatever the child might have had to say about those desires or pleasures. Sociologist Vera Whisman, in her analysis of the coming out stories of gay men and lesbians, notes the tendency of many to "gather evidence for this belief [that they were always homosexual] via retrospective interpretation, a re-reading of their pre-homosexual pasts

in terms of their present sexual identities.” She cites one lesbian-identified subject, who recalls, “When I came out I looked back on the types of games I liked to play as a child, or the kinds of toys I wanted to have, or what my goals were. And I think I probably saw them differently” (86). More often than not, the erotics of children are assimilated to the possibilities and outcomes recognized by adults, while less readily assimilable or contradictory evidence remains unnoticed or incomprehensible. Far from simply not existing, the sorts of relations, attachments, behaviors, or scenarios that give children pleasure or that excite them—even in ways that in later life would be recognized as sensual or erotic—might exist in instances that prove difficult to trace from the retrospective vantage point of the often crystallized sexuality of adulthood.

The effect is to make the adult reader incredulous of those potential traces, but what I want to suggest by invoking Bowlby and Freud is that the boy’s relationship with his dog represents a kind of prototypical romance of childhood, a transitional moment from parental attachments of early youth to the explicitly romantic and sexualized attachments of adolescence and adulthood. The dog as attachment figure facilitates this transition through its multiple functions as secure base, site of identification, and object of affection or desire. In *Old Yeller* Travis comes to play father with Arliss and to take interest in Lisbeth by first learning how to do that through his attachment to his dog. If one’s first affectively charged proto-erotic relations are with one’s caregivers—towards whom the affectionate current that follows the emergence of infantile sexuality is directed—and then later with other explicitly sexualized objects, then between them lies a field of learning in which the boy’s relationship to his dog in these stories provides a range of affective practice. More than practice and more than transitional, though, the

boy's relationship with his dog, characterized as it is by an intensity of passion and pleasure, might just be one of those instances of childhood sexuality that has remained largely overlooked by the adults who give more conscious and deliberate thought to human sexuality.

One need look no further than the most popular author of dog stories, Jack London, for evidence of the erotic nature of men's relationships with their dogs.<sup>11</sup> Though the human protagonists of London's novels are adult men, both *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* are often considered children's literature. In *The Call of the Wild*, written from the perspective of the mixed-bred Buck, London describes the dog's feelings for his man as a "love that was feverish and burning, that was adoration, that was madness, it had taken John Thornton to *arouse*" (71 emphasis added). Such is the language of romantic passion: feverish, burning, madness, arousal. About the relationship between John and his dog London adds:

[John] had a way of taking Buck's head roughly between his hands, and resting his own head upon Buck's, of shaking him back and forth, the while calling him ill names that to Buck were love names. Buck knew no greater joy than that rough embrace and the sound of murmured oaths, and at each jerk back and forth it seemed that his heart would be shaken out of his body so great was his ecstasy.... Buck had a trick of love expression that was akin to hurt. He would seize Thornton's hand in his mouth and close so fiercely that the flesh bore the impress of his teeth for some time afterward. And as Buck understood the oaths to be love words, so the man understood this feigned bite for a caress. (72)

This scene can easily be described as a kind of sexual encounter. The man and dog embrace roughly; there is jerking, the calling of “ill” names, the murmuring of oaths—certainly the lewd name-calling and exclamations of rough sex. The dog’s heart is nearly shaken out of “his” body—London uses this personifying pronoun—and Buck experiences this as an ecstasy. Buck responds by taking John’s hand—that part of the man’s body that represents to Buck the giving of life because it is from the man’s hand that he is fed—into his mouth.<sup>12</sup> To John this “feigned bite,” a near penetration of the skin, is a caress.

In another of London’s popular dog stories, *White Fang*, he again describes the relationship between dog-wolf and man in the language of passion.

As the days went by, the evolution of *like* into *love* was accelerated.

White Fang himself began to grow aware of it, though in his consciousness he knew not what love was. It manifested itself to him as a void in his being—a hungry, aching, yearning void that clamored to be filled. It was a pain and an unrest; and it received easement only by the touch of [Weedon Scott’s] presence. At such times love was a joy to him, a wild, keen-thrilling satisfaction.... Meat, even meat itself, he would forego to be with his god, to receive a caress from him or to accompany him down into the town. (158)

Weedon Scott fills for White Fang an aching, yearning void that can only be appeased by his caress of the dog, which gives “keen-thrilling satisfaction.” These books provide other such examples, but the evidence here is clear. The relationship between human and dog is an erotic one, even if that eroticism is barred from sexual expression, as White

Fang himself recognizes: “At times, when his god looked at him and spoke to him, he betrayed an awkward self-consciousness, caused by the struggle of his love to express itself and his physical inability to express it” (159). Such writing suggests that London is frustrated by the inability of, or at least the compelling taboo against, human and dog consummating their love. They must find satisfaction in the biting, in the jerking, in the caressing, and in the nuzzling that constitute the physical expression of desire within these two relationships.

But Travis is after all still a boy, and so none of the sort of caresses and ecstatic murmuring that appears in London’s work transpires between Travis and Old Yeller. It is precisely because the boy-dog, inter-species romance cannot be understood in terms of the genital sexuality thought to predominate in the lives of adults that this relationship has eluded notice as a proto-erotic one.

First published in 1956, Gipson’s *Old Yeller* can be read as a story about attachment and loss. The short novel opens with Travis recalling his father’s departure from Salt Licks, Texas. He and a group of other men plan to herd their steers to a cattle market in Abilene, Kansas, 600 miles away. The trip will take months, and the 14 year-old Travis, charged with looking after his mother and brother, is reminded by his father that he must be the proverbial “man of the family.” Frontier Texas in the late 1860’s, Travis realizes, is a dangerous place fraught with all kinds of potential peril for this small settler family. The months-long absence of his father quite literally requires Travis to lie awake at night and ward off animals that threaten their crops and their lives. It also means that Travis must add the usual workload of his father to his own usual chores:

milking the cows, cutting the wood, marking the pigs, working the corn patch, and guarding against “raiding Indians.”

After the departure of Travis’s father, a dog appears to take his place.<sup>13</sup> This is a case in which the father’s absence is absolute, proximity impossible, and attachment behavior futile. Before his father rides off, though, Travis makes one request: bring back a horse. “What you’re needing worse than a horse is a good dog,” his father presciently replies before their final goodbye (4). When the “big yellor dog” first appears he steals a rack of meat from the dog run. Travis is indignant and rejects the dog; his attachment to his father cannot be replaced so soon. With his father’s departure we can see Travis needing to make adjustments, in Bowlby’s terms, to his internal model of self. Travis must be the man, and that requires him to act the disciplinarian with his brother, Arliss. But his mother at once scolds him for being too bossy. Travis cannot win here, and the impossibility of his conflicting roles—boy, playmate, man, protector—frustrates him, as does the enormous weight of the responsibility placed on him by his father. “It didn’t seem fair to me,” he thought, “how could I be the man of the family if nobody paid any attention to what I thought or said.... I sulked and felt sorry for myself all the time I worked with the meat [of the doe he kills]. The more I thought about it, the madder I got at the big yellor dog” (23).

Anger, argues Bowlby, is a common and perhaps invariable response to loss. The function of anger in his view is to add “punch” to strenuous efforts to recover the lost person and to dissuade him or her from deserting again. In Travis’s excessive anger towards Old Yeller we can already see his identification of the dog with his absent father, that is, with a protecting attachment figure. Soon afterward, Travis’s doubt about his

ability to live up to his father's charge is fueled when his mother must rescue him from beneath a rampaging bull and again when Arliss is nearly killed by a bear, a possibility that would have represented Travis's ultimate failure. Travis softens his attitude toward Old Yeller when the dog rescues Arliss from the mother bear protecting her threatened cubs.<sup>14</sup>

Once Old Yeller proves to be an effective protector, in contrast to Travis's repeated bumbblings, the boy begins to develop an affection for him. The pressure on Travis is eased, as is the tension produced by his impossibly conflictive roles. Seen in this new light, Old Yeller occupies for Travis the place of his absent attachment figure, but Old Yeller is, after all, a dog. Thus, the relationship between it and Travis is necessarily of a different order than that between Travis and his father. Given his age, Travis was not yet his father's equal in physicality, maturity, or experience. Old Yeller, however, can function more easily as a companion-protector, a sort of peer particularly suitable for an adolescent boy on the brink of manhood. On several occasions Old Yeller must come through by physically defending the boy from wild animals or by protecting the crops from varmints, and the dog, in turn, is fed and cared for by Travis. When the two are badly wounded by a pack of wild hogs, Old Yeller first intervenes to defend Travis, who must then rescue a near-fatally wounded dog. Travis proceeds to care for the dog in return by petting him furiously, withdrawing a thorn from between the dog's toes, bathing him thoroughly, and letting him snuggle up in bed. Such physical intimacy and bodily care is different from the mutual helpfulness that characterizes Travis's relationship with his father.

With Old Yeller, Travis is able to maintain adaptive attachment patterns and desirable models of both himself and his attachment figure. With the dog, Travis is able to successfully care for the crops, milk the uncooperative cow, and mark the pigs. He can therefore construct a model of himself as a successful provider for his family, as someone not impeded by loneliness or anxiety and able to achieve an affectional bond with a responsive companion. These achievements are, according to Bowlby, essential to adaptive and happy living. In fulfilling these duties, Travis is the “man” his father requires him to be. The presence of Old Yeller allows him to avoid the various forms of emotional distress precipitated by the absence of a suitable attachment figure. The dog enables him to quell his anxiety about maintaining the family’s safety and to avoid the anger of not being treated like a man, since his mother comes to support his discipline of Arliss only after Travis develops a satisfactory relationship with the dog.

Two rivals threaten the relationship between the boy and his dog. Travis thinks, “How lonesome I would have been” without Old Yeller, and “Papa had been right when he told me how bad I needed a dog” (60). It comes as shock to him, then, when a young man turns up at the cabin claiming that Old Yeller is *his* dog. In the face of this rival Travis is paralyzed with fear: “I nearly died when a man rode up one day and claimed Old Yeller” (64). There are two moments at which Travis nearly cries: when his father leaves town and when Burn Sanderson makes as though he is taking Old Yeller off.<sup>15</sup> Sanderson, sensing the family’s attachment to the animal, permits it to stay, but Old Yeller too has a rival. While the boy and his dog recover from their hog wounds, a young girl named Lisbeth comes to stay with them to help Ma around the cabin. Clearly liking the boy, she brings him the young progeny of Old Yeller and her own dog, but Travis

rebuffs the gift. “What use did I have for a pup?” he wonders, “I had me a dog” (103).

Old Yeller is all he needs, and neither Lisbeth nor the new puppy is a suitable replacement.

*Old Yeller's* traumatic climax no doubt fuels its popularity and award-winning status and demonstrates adult thinking about the normative development of childhood sexuality. In defending Mama and Lisbeth from a rabid wolf, Old Yeller is bitten. Mama hints at what must be done. Old Yeller has to be killed lest he come down with rabies himself and in turn infect or kill a member of the family in his madness. Mama offers to do the deed, but at the moment she offers, Travis understands that it is something *he* must do. Old Yeller is *his* dog, and to allow Mama to kill his dog would be to shirk his duty. And so Travis places the muzzle of his gun against Old Yeller's head and pulls the trigger, killing his beloved object. In killing his dog there is an immediate identification with it: “It was going to kill something inside me to do it.... Once I knew for sure I had it to do, I don't think I really felt anything. I was just numb all over, like a dead man walking” (127). In killing Old Yeller it is as if Travis has killed himself and become a walking “dead man.” Shortly thereafter Travis's father returns to Salt Licks, and after hearing about how Travis handled the affair with Old Yeller, tells his son that he “couldn't ask any more of a grown man” (131). His father gives us the clue to the tremendous significance of Old Yeller's death. In killing the object of his proto-erotic attachment Travis finally becomes a man, and his father returns just in time to validate that transformation. “Now the thing to do,” he tells him, “is to try to forget it and go on being a man” (131).

Papa tries to reassure Travis, who is no doubt gratified that he has graduated to manhood, but his depression persists. According to Travis, hearing his father's words "still didn't do me any good. I still felt just as dead and empty" (131). What brings Travis "alive again" is witnessing Old Yeller's pup reenacting an earlier scene in which its father had stolen some of the family's food. The story concludes with Travis taking his little brother and the pup into the woods to teach them how to hunt, which shows that Travis has assumed the role of father. If we recall that initially Old Yeller took his father's place as an attachment figure, then we might understand Travis's assumption of his paternal role and his coincident rebirth at the sight of Old Yeller's active pup as the confirmation of his identification with both Old Yeller and his father. Furthermore, given the fact that the pup is the offspring of Old Yeller and Lisbeth's dog, we can see the two dogs as modeling the proper developmental trajectory for Lisbeth and Travis: heterosexuality and reproduction. Their dogs mated, and so will the children apparently. This realization is what compels Travis's rebirth. *Old Yeller* demonstrates the importance of relinquishing the childhood attachment figure and hence assuming the responsibility presumably characteristic of adulthood. The contrived traumatization of children and the transcendence of loss, as *Old Yeller* teaches us, are essential to the making of (re)productive citizens.

Another widely read boy-and-his-dog story, Jim Kjelgaard's *Big Red* offers an additional example of how a boy learns from his dog what exactly it is he must grow up to be and do. Printed on the first page is a quotation from a review that describes *Big Red* as a "sure-fire combination of a boy and dog. When they meet it is love at first sight, and so it will be for all who read the story." Danny, the boy of the story, is a squatter living

along with his widowed father on the property owned by the wealthy Dick Haggin. We learn that Danny has grown up fostering a fantasy of having the perfect dog and that all he wants in life is to “find a dog to shame all others, a fine dog that he could treasure, and cherish, and breed from” (6). After Danny bonds with Mr. Haggin’s Irish setter, whose name is Sylvester’s Boy, Mr. Haggin lets Danny care for the dog. Danny demonstrates promise as a skillful “dog man,” a handler of show dogs, and thus Haggin hires him. Mr. Haggin, who represents to Danny worldly success and great riches, is also a “dog man,” and, like Danny, was quite poor himself as a youth. Danny discovers a picture of Mr. Haggin as a boy, and in realizing that he and Mr. Haggin share a common origin, comes to identify with him. His identification with Haggin is mediated, of course, by Boy: “Mr. Haggin was looking at him, and Danny felt strangely drawn to the older man. They were not a wealthy dog financier and his apprentice handler, but two men who could be brought very close by a common bond—the love of a good dog” (41). So Boy and his dog man embark on a series of adventures, one of which is a trip to New York City to participate in a dog show. At first Danny thinks dog shows are a waste of time, but Mr. Haggin explains to him their import:

In one sense you could think of it as part of the story of man, and his constant striving towards something better. A dog show is illustrative of man’s achievement, and a blue ribbon is more than a bit of silk. It’s a mark, Danny, one that never can be erased. The dog that wins it will not die. If we send Boy to the show, and he comes back as best of breed, then that’s something for all future dog lovers and dog owners to build on. Don’t you see? A hundred years from now someone may stand on this very spot with a fine Irish setter, and he’ll trace his

lineage back to some other very fine setter, perhaps to Boy. And he will know that he has built on what competent men have declared to be the very best. He will know also that he, too, can go one step nearer the perfection that men must and will have in all things. (32)

Through Boy, who had been bred to be a successful show dog and bird hunter and who is destined to sire other dogs that will be even better than he, Danny recognizes his own destiny. The breeding of dogs mirrors the history of man, with each successive generation improving on the previous one. Boy ultimately fails to win best in show, so it becomes imperative that Danny breed him in order to produce an even better dog. Danny, the son of a poor trapper, is described as more knowledgeable, talented, and charming than his own father. Like Boy, whose very name marks him as the canine double of the novel's human boy, Danny will breed in order to continue the improvement of his line. The novel ends with Danny looking upon his own future as Boy looks upon his newborn pups.

Although less common, examples of girl-and-her-dog stories have appeared in fiction and film for or about youth. *Border Street*, a 1949 Polish film concerning the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, focuses on a group of children as their lives converge towards the Jewish revolt. A young girl named Jadzia, whose father has concealed the family's Jewish identity, exchanges rings with a young Polish boy in a mock wedding ceremony. Later, the boy's growing anti-Semitism and the revelation of Jadzia's Jewishness destroys their relationship. Jadzia's father arranges for the girl to be hidden, though he himself comes to be confined to the ghetto. She is nearly captured by German soldiers with a German Shepherd trained to sniff out Jews. Though having demonstrated its viciousness

with Jews before, the dog is uncharacteristically affectionate with Jazzia and betrays its master to accompany her. Thus, like the two protagonists in the stories I have discussed, this girl is separated from her father and forms an attachment to a dog, which saves her time and again from peril. While she loses the mock boyfriend whose anti-Semitism intensifies, she gains a canine companion, which transforms from a Nazi pet into her new Aryan lover, complete with a golden mane. The dog simultaneously stands in for her lost father and lost proto-boyfriend, indicating, as I suggest, that the dog-lover represents a transitional figure between parental and romantic attachments.

Like *Old Yeller*, the more recent *girl-and-her-dog* story by Kate DiCamillo, *Because of Winn-Dixie*, is a Newbery Honor book.<sup>16</sup> Like Travis, Opal has lost a major attachment figure, and like Danny, she will learn through her attachment to a dog how to navigate her troubled youth in order to attain successful adulthood. Abandoned by her mother and often neglected by a busy father whom she calls “the preacher” because “he spends so much time preaching or thinking about preaching or getting ready to preach” (13), Opal brings home a stray dog she discovers in the Winn-Dixie supermarket (hence the dog’s name). “We’re almost like orphans,” she tells the dog, since neither of them has a mama and her father is so consistently occupied. Since she and her father have moved to a small Florida town so he can take over as the preacher of a church that occupies a former Pick-It-Quick store, Opal feels extremely lonely. Opal hasn’t been able to make any friends in her new town, but thanks to Winn-Dixie’s adept social skills, she meets one towns person after another and develops a small circle of close friends, including a lonely librarian, a mildly retarded pet-shop keeper, a half-blind elderly woman, and a knuckle-sucking five year old.

As in *Old Yeller*, the book is pervaded by the anxieties of a child who misses an absent parent. The librarian, Miss Fanny Block, shares with Opal her Littmus Lozenges, which seem to have the power to evoke sad thoughts in those who taste them. To Otis, an ex-convict, they taste like prison. They remind Amanda of her dead little brother. They remind the preacher of Opal's momma. And to Opal's friend Gloria Dump, a Littmus Lozenge "tastes sweet. But is also tastes like people leaving" (119). Opal too thinks of loss:

I swept the floor real slow that day. I wanted to keep Otis company. I didn't want him to be lonely. Sometimes, it seemed like everybody in the world was lonely. I thought about my mama. Thinking about her was the same as the hole you keep on feeling with your tongue after you lose a tooth. Time after time, my mind kept going back to that empty spot, the spot right where I felt like she should be. (132)

We have here a child's recognition of the prevalence of loneliness and her honest attempt to comprehend loss.

Now, though, Opal has Winn-Dixie, whose one weakness is his intense fear of thunderstorms. During the story's climactic scene in which Opal has gathered her new friends together for a party, a sudden and violent storm scares the dog away in what seems like a repetition of the usual pattern for such stories, which end with the loss of the dog. Earlier in the story she asks her father to tell her exactly ten things about her Mama; Opal thinks these things will help with finding her mother. Now, identifying her dog with her lost mother, she considers what ten things she will write on a "lost dog" flier to help find Winn-Dixie. The dog, however, is recovered, but only after the occasion of its

disappearance is used by her new friends to teach her about reconciling with loss. Opal breaks down with the sorrow of losing her dog, and it is at that moment she finds the courage to ask her father whether he thinks her mother will ever return. He thinks not. In the critical scene of Opal's maturation, she realizes "that you can't hold on to anything. That you can only love what you've got while you've got it" (167).

Before rejoining the party she kneels down by a tree she had planted. Dunlap, a young boy with whom she repeatedly exchanges childhood taunts, comes to bring her inside: "And then he surprised me. He did something I never in a million years though a Dewberry boy would do. He held out his hand to help me up. And I took it. I let him pull me to my feet" (180). One of the ten things the preacher tells Opal about her mother is that she was a fast runner and could outrace him. Now, as though she embodies her mother, Opal races Dunlap back to the party, and wins. Thus, Opal not only gains a group of friends and a surrogate family, she gains a little proto-boyfriend. Despite the absence of her mother, we are left confident that Opal will attain womanhood. Unlike Opal's mother, with whom through its disappearance the dog is identified, Winn Dixie returns. The dog therefore offers itself as an alternative object with which Opal can identify, thereby encouraging us to believe that Opal will, unlike her mother, but like her dog, grow up to be a good, dependable mother/wife.

The trajectory of these stories has been reproduced as a therapeutic program in which participants train service dogs in order to relinquish them to persons with disabilities. The program has been attempted with two populations: school children and prison inmates. The high-schooled assistance dog program, founded by Bonita Bergin at her Assistance Dog Institute in California and replicated by school districts throughout

the country, involves pairing “at risk” youth with dogs, which the students then train. As the dogs learn to be service animals for the disabled, their young trainers are provided with an incentive to come to school and improve their academic performance through the lure of the dog’s affection. According to program enthusiasts, these troubled teens see dramatic improvements in school attendance, grades, self-esteem, and overall behavior (Lake, Green). One high school counselor at a school that instituted the program claims that these kids “are learning about life, people, society and themselves. That knowledge will [allow] them to make a positive contribution to society, no longer a victim of its inadequacies.” According to Bergin it is “the unconditional love that these animals offered the youngsters” that keeps them involved in the program and coming to school. “For some,” she continues, “it was something they’d seldom experienced” (qtd. in Green). Reporter Ranny Green characterizes the relationship between youth and dog as a romance: “When you toss in the touch factor with petting and massage, and eye contact, you have the makings of a burgeoning love affair and partnership.” The kids come to school because they are in love—with their dogs. At the very least, what they experience is an intense attachment to these animals.

The final lesson comes in the inevitable conclusion of the program. After 18 months of training, the dogs are ready to be handed over to the disabled recipients in a ritual graduation where each student ceremoniously walks across a stage to relinquish the animal to its new lover. The ceremony is, as we expect, an emotional one. The students weep, hesitate, then move toward the wheel-chair bound recipients one by one. The animal is given up, lost. Clearly those involved find it satisfying to witness young people potentially reduced to tears by handing over their carefully trained puppies in what

represents, at the very least, a craving for pathos as a prescribed remedy to the youth's perceived troubles. In other words, what we see here are these children being disciplined through their disciplining of these dogs, which the young people are forced to give up in order for the dogs to make useful contributions to their new owners. As Green reports, "The students can relate to these animals that once refused to accept direction. For they, too, have done the same with authority figures, ranging from parents, teachers and the law." The objective is for these young people to identify with the now disciplined and socially useful animal, and that identification is ensured by the intensely affectionate relationship cultivated between youth and dog and by the subsequent loss of the animal.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps not surprisingly, schools and prisons are the two locations in which the "therapeutic" use of dog training has been made. This notable coincidence highlights the disciplinary use of the enforced attachment-sacrifice paradigm. Associated Press writer Bill Baskervill reports that the use of dog training programs in prisons is meant to "teach prisoners respect for life." One of the benefits, Baskervill notes, is that the dogs are saved from being euthanized. The canines, which he describes as being at first "high strung," "nervous," and "stubborn," are transformed into "lovable, well-mannered pets adopted nationwide." It is not difficult to read this as precisely the fantasy, if not the objective, with regards to the prisoners themselves. The fact that the dog-training programs are intended as therapeutic, explicitly designed to produce subjects who will make "positive" social contributions, and employed with students and prisoners exposes the disciplinary use to which this process of attachment, loss, and identification is put.

In discussions of what is referred to as "situational homosexuality"—sexual contact between persons of the same sex that supposedly takes place only because other-

sex partners are unavailable—the two “situations” most commonly cited are schools and prisons, precisely the two locations in which the “therapeutic” use of dog training has been made. This coincidence confirms, I think, the disciplinary use of the enforced attachment-sacrifice paradigm that is manifest in these parallel ways: the “situational” homosexuality of schools and prisons and the boy/prisoner-dog attachments of the training programs. Both manifestations involve fostering attachments while expecting and promoting the loss of those attachments. In the case of “situational homosexuality” amongst schoolboys or prisoners, individuals are placed in circumstances that cultivate same-sex attachments, while the prescriptive expectation is that those attachments are merely provisional. The dog training programs reenact the same “situation,” replacing a person of the same sex with a dog, and thus they are exemplary of this attachment-sacrifice device.

Schools and prisons are imagined as places of (re)formation, and as I have tried to show here, the practice of encouraging intense, affectional attachments—especially queer ones—and then compelling the loss of those attachments has proved particularly useful as a (re)formative disciplinary device in which a melancholic identification with the good, disciplined object results in the “better,” normative behavior of the subject. What boy-and-his-dog stories do is reproduce that device in narrative form, thereby extending its influence while simultaneously providing evidence of an often-overlooked form of childhood sexuality, that of the relationship between a boy and his dog.

In the boy-and-his-dog story the young protagonist experiences an intense attraction to and affection, even to the point of sensual passion, for a dog, which in turn reciprocates that passionate and queerly perverse attachment. At least that is how some

relationships between humans and their pets seemed to Austrian psychologist and Nobel laureate Konrad Lorenz, who in his book *Man Meets Dog*, writes “Anyone who, disappointed and embittered by human failings, denies his love to mankind in order to transfer it to a dog or a cat, is definitely committing a grave sin, social sodomy so to speak, which is as disgusting as the sexual kind,” although he notes that “of course it is harmless and legitimate for a lonely person, who for some reason or other is deprived of social intercourse, to procure a dog to assuage an inward longing to love and be loved” (74).<sup>18</sup> While neither Travis nor Opal is as of yet disappointed or embittered, both are deprived of social intercourse with one of their parents and instead form passionate attachments to their dogs, which help facilitate their gender-sexual development.

Ultimately, these books give pleasure not only to their child-readers, but also to the adults who write and publish them, who purchase them for children, who consent to read them to children, who select them to be available in libraries and to be made a part of school curricula, and who vote on awarding them prestigious prizes. I want to assert that these stories function as sources of pleasure precisely in that they enable the reader to revel in the ideality of this bestial relationship, this “social sodomy,” and all that it offers as an exemplar of a secure, successful, and pleasurable attachment in contrast to the typically more embattled attachments of life. These stories encourage us to rethink the literary practice of anthropomorphization in children’s literature. The making human-like of animals represents an impulse not only to form attachments with sensitive, responsive, and competent attachment figures in the absence of satisfactory attachments with other humans, but also to practice engaging in the complex sexualized relations of later life. Perhaps the representation of this bestial erotics indicates a more endemic

impulse towards what is queer that draws force in part from a widespread dissatisfaction with the qualities and (im)possibilities of normative human-human attachments.

Science-fiction writer Harlan Ellison makes use of the boy-dog motif in a way that exposes its erotic possibilities. In the post-apocalyptic story entitled “A Boy and His Dog,” Victor and his telepathic canine, Blood, roam the wastelands simply trying to survive. One day Victor unexpectedly falls for a girl named Quilla June, and he abandons Blood in order to pursue her. Later, when he returns with her to where the dog has been waiting for him, Victor finds Blood sick, starving, and too weak to travel, which poses a dilemma in the dangerous wasteland. Victor is forced to choose between his beloved dog and Quilla June, who insists on hurrying away. The story concludes with Victor making his choice: boy and dog eat the girl, literally. “Do you know what love is,” Victor recalls Quilla June asking him. “Sure I know,” he thinks, “A boy loves his dog” (983). “A Boy and His Dog” is the queerly reversed version of *Old Yeller*: whereas Travis murders his dog in the service of the family unit and his own successful manhood, heterosexuality, and reproductive future, Victor chooses to maintain his bestial commitment to Blood at the expense of his heterosexual possibility by murdering the girl, a telling choice given the scarcity of available females in the world of Ellison’s story.

Like Ellison’s “A Boy and His Dog,” Jeanne Desy’s 1982 “The Princess Who Stood on Her Own Two Feet,” collected in an anthology of feminist fairy tales, similarly invokes the potentially erotic-romantic relationship between human and canine companion while addressing the pattern of sacrifice usually associated with this relationship. The princess in this story is too tall, outspoken, and intelligent for any suitable princely suitor, but she does have a beloved, speaking dog that remains always

faithful. At first the princess attempts both to mask her height by remaining seated in the presence of the prince who is courting her and to silence herself and her wit by feigning muteness. Still, the unsatisfied prince wants her to get rid of the dog, and he makes this the condition for their marriage. Paralyzed with frustration and uncertainty, the princess asks her dog what to do:

“Sometimes,” the dog said, looking beyond her shoulder, “sometimes one must give up everything for love.” The Princess’s lip trembled and she looked away.

“What will I do?” she cried again. The dog did not answer. She turned toward him and then fell to her knees in shock, for the dog lay motionless on the floor. For hours she sat weeping at his side, holding his lifeless paw. (Zipes 45)

Thus, her dog sacrifices his life so that she can marry the prince. To honor her canine lover, she wraps him in her wedding dress and marches out of the castle to bury him, passing the prince along the way and telling him “good-bye” because she can no longer remain seated or silent. In the end, her dog is reborn as a handsome, albeit shorter, prince. The story concludes with a lesson, which emerges from a conversation between the wizard who observes all of these events and his own companion, a cat named Mirabelle.

“Ah, well.” The Wizard said. “I gather from all this—I shall make a note—that sometimes one must sacrifice for love.”

Mirabelle looked intently at the Wizard. “On the other hand,” the cat said at last, “sometimes one must refuse to sacrifice.” (47)

Both of these narratives refuse the normative conclusion that calls for the sacrifice of the canine companion, offering instead a queer and feminist revision that embraces social sodomy.

Although the conclusion of *Old Yeller* seems to reject the bestial and queer love of boy and dog, the novel, like the wife of Lot, enacts or stages a looking backwards. In order for this story to work, it must be projected back nearly one hundred years from the era of its composition to when hydrophobia, as rabies was then still known, remained unexplained and untreatable. The unavailability of a vaccine and the inevitable outcome of the disease produce the sense of necessity that Old Yeller must be killed. In 1956 when this story was published, similar circumstances such as those depicted in the novel would not have invoked the force of necessity: dogs could be vaccinated against rabies, and this was becoming a requirement for the licensure of pets. Thus, the story functions as a kind of looking back in a nostalgic return to America's frontier past—frequently noted as a useful site for working out questions of manhood and masculinity—for a developmental and disciplinary tract in the same way that for adult readers it facilitates a looking back to their own childhoods. The return to the frontier, and to a town called Salt Licks, as a setting for the love between boy and dog and the subsequent violence that ends their relationship suggests an ambivalence that is embodied by Lot's wife.

One might profitably use, however much it may require an imaginative leap, this violent conclusion to think about contemporary debates around the status of queer youth. Arguments used to do violence to these kids that invoke such rhetorical constructions as the “return” to family values, the “need” for unassisted heterosexual reproduction as a method of population sustenance, or the “threat” of divine sodomitical judgment seem

from a more politically progressive standpoint like *at the very least* a nostalgic looking back to an undesired and fantasied past. This looking back provides the opportunity for the violent conclusion to *Old Yeller* in the same way that a religiously inflected, rhetoric of nostalgia has a similarly disciplinary and reformatory aim.

C. Jerry Kutner goes so far as to write that Disney's film version of *Old Yeller* "isn't just about child abuse; it *is* child abuse, as any number of viewers who saw it in their youth can attest" (2). Through such novels and films, the child-viewer is able to experience the trauma of "having" and "losing" the queer attachment. What seems remarkable about the high-schooled dog assistance program, which reflects the trajectory of these dog stories, is that it purportedly does children a favor by traumatizing them in a way that blurs the line between the benevolent pedagogy of "let me show you" and the violent punitiveness of "I'm going to teach you a lesson." These children are drawn in by the life-saving temptation of a queer attachment only to have its loss demanded of them. They are offered the comfort of the object only to be forced to relinquish it, and the offer and retraction operate together as a disciplinary technique by which the child's normative citizenship is purchased such that the memory traces of the loss function as a warning away from the return to or search for the lost object. It is Travis's father, after all, who advises him to get a dog in the first place. But ultimately for Travis to permit the potentially rabid Old Yeller to live is literally to risk madness, to risk the death of his family, to fail the charge of manhood—a necessary charge, no doubt, as it is a charge to survive—by allowing his charges to die. There is clearly a lesson in all of this for Travis, one he has to learn the hard way. Old Yeller, like the trained dogs of the high-schooled

assistance dog program, is a good, disciplined object whose loss makes possible an identification that enables Travis to become the good, disciplined subject.

In Bowlby's theory of attachment, the child builds internal working models of itself and its relationship to attachment figures as it experiences these relationships. As one figure is exchanged for another, or as the relationship with the attachment figure changes, these models are gradually updated. Nevertheless, traces remain throughout adulthood of those models first formed during childhood, and therefore the attachments formed during youth continue to exert a profound influence throughout the lifespan. This understanding of the significance of childhood attachments resonates with Freud's view that the "character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes" (*Ego* 19), or with what Butler, in response to this passage in Freud's *The Ego and the Id*, describes as the "sedimentation of objects loved and lost" (*Psychic* 133). The significance of lost childhood attachments compels our attention to those texts, like the ones I have looked at here, that represent relationships to children, that present the possibilities of what might be, and that function didactically in offering reasons either to provoke or to resist losses of the queer sort.

## Notes

1. The image and narrative of the boy-and-his-dog has become so well recognized in children's literature that it has been spoofed in Gordon Korman's *No More Dead Dogs*.
2. One of the more famous literary relationships between human and dog is depicted in J.R. Ackerley's *My Dog Tulip*. The erotic nature of the relationship between Ackerley and his dog Queenie/Tulip has been noted by a number of critics.
3. The satirical use to which the boy-dog motif is sometimes put in order to comment on issues of gender and sexuality evidences its recognizable connection to those themes. Emily Cheney Neville's 1964 Newbery Medal winner, *It's Like This Cat*, centers on a long-haired fourteen-year-old boy named Dave, who prefers to stay indoors listening to Belafonte records that he buys with money he earns from baby-sitting. These indications of Dave's boyhood deviance are clearly coded in gendered terms. His father, of course, thinks Dave should cut his hair, play outdoors instead of listen to records, and get himself a dog. In the very first line of the novel, Dave says, "My father is always talking about how a dog can be very educational for a boy. This is one reason I got a cat" (1). Dave's father is obviously not alone in his assumption that getting a dog is a useful ingredient in the remedy for sissy boys.
4. James Kincaid, in writing about the Coppertone sunscreen ad in which a young girl has her bottom exposed by a dog tugging at her swimsuit, says that the dog "makes it all very 'innocent,' conveniently so; we are invited to look our fill, without risking anything messy, like arrest" (392 note 5). Also quoted by Garber (147).
5. In his review of Disney's film version of *Old Yeller*, C. Jerry Kutner writes, "It is part of the film's dream logic that the dog is sometimes the child having to constantly prove himself, and sometimes the good/bad father figure" (2).
6. I'm using "queer" in a more general way that has an affinity with Michael Warner's use in his introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet*, where he writes that "the preference for 'queer' ... rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (xxvi). Butler describes the term as a "discursive rallying point" for those who pursue marginalized or non-heteronormative pleasures and sexualities (*Bodies* 230).
7. In his memoir *Indian Boyhood*, Sioux writer Charles Alexander Eastman (1858-1939) provides an autobiographical account of a ritual that parallels remarkably the attachment-sacrifice narrative of these boy-and-his-dog stories. He is first given the name Hakadah ("Pitiful Last") because his mother dies shortly after childbirth, and Eastman's father is imprisoned after an 1862 action against Minnesota settlers. So like the boys in these stories, the young Eastman suffers from parental loss. Raised by a grandmother, Eastman tells of his first sacrificial offering at the age of eight to the "Great Mystery," which his grandmother hopes will continue to bless her grandsons with "savage nobility and strength of manhood" (102). Hakadah is told that he must give up his dearest object, and

after making a number of suggestions, his grandmother indicates what it is that will please the Great Mystery: the boy's beloved dog.

8. Just as in the novels discussed here, the boy-protagonists of Wilson Rawls's *Where the Red Fern Grows* and William Armstrong's *Souder* also suffer the loss of their dogs. In the latter text, the boy's identification of the dog with his father, lost first to prison and later to death, is particularly apparent. Dog and father receive the same wounds, and the boy must search for the whereabouts of both his imprisoned father and his missing dog. His discovery and care of the dog clearly represent what he would like to be able to do for his father.

9. Freud, in writing about the channeling or damming of the sexual instincts by shame, prefigures these kinds of constructivist claims. Guy Hocquenghem, writing in a psychoanalytic vein, argues that "there are drives of desire which all of us have felt and which nevertheless do not affect our daily conscious existence. That is why we cannot come to terms with what we believe about our own desire. There is a social mechanism forever wiping out the constantly renewed traces of our buried desires" (35). Later proponents of constructivism, such as David Halperin, have looked to Foucault's *History of Sexuality, Volume I* as popularizing such claims (although Halperin notes in *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* that Foucault was not a social constructionist per se). Halperin writes, "Homosexuality and heterosexuality, as we currently understand them, are modern, Western, bourgeois productions. Nothing resembling them can be found in classical antiquity" (8). Proponents of constructivist-type claims would be too numerous to name, but other notable examples include Jeffrey Weeks, Jonathan Ned Katz, and John D'Emilio.

10. In Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's essay "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," in which she explores the autoeroticism of *Sense and Sensibility* and the invisibility of this dimension of the text for most readers, Sedgwick writes that it is our "interpretive habits that make it so hard to register the erotics of *Sense and Sensibility*" (128).

11. Freud himself, incidentally (and perhaps sensationalistically), comments that "sexual intercourse with animals ... is by no means rare, especially among country people ... in which sexual attraction seems to override the barriers of species" (*Three* 14).

12. Freud considers "sensual sucking" to be one of the key sexual manifestations of childhood (*Three* 45).

13. The psychological literature is not devoid of children replacing a lost parent by attaching themselves to a dog. Psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch reports the case of one patient whose "only reaction of longing for his dead mother betrayed itself in a fantasy, which persisted through several years of his childhood. In the fantasy he left his bedroom door open in the hope that a large dog would come to him, be very kind to him, and fulfil (sic) all his wishes" (19).

14. Given the contiguity of these scenes I wonder if the reader is meant to ask whether Travis himself needs rescuing from an “overprotective” mother. Presumably it would be Old Yeller who would rescue him from the need to be rescued by Ma.

15. In a similar scene in Kjelgaard’s *Big Red*, Miss Grennan, who is the only woman to appear in the book (other than the bitch with which Boy mates) and is described as “very hard and very cold,” demands that Boy be given to her, much to the despair of poor Danny, who does not technically own Boy but is simply allowed to take care of him. Miss Grennan would have driven off with the dog had he not encountered a skunk shortly before Danny was supposed to relinquish him (80).

16. Many readers have no doubt noted the potential eroticism of girl-and-her-horse stories, but a more detailed treatment of this genre is perhaps called for. Notably, girls aren’t the only ones in literature who seem to form an erotically charged attachment to their horses—so do cowboys and (cavalry) soldiers, two prototypes of virile manhood.

17. This is not to claim that the adults involved are not well meaning, innovative, or mostly benevolent. Yet what remains unsaid in any of these journalistic accounts of the program, and what remains untried in the current climate of hysteria surrounding the erotic lives of youth, is the possibility that these young people might or should find school a place in which affection is available from other people rather than a place in which affection is viewed as a source of distraction or danger. Consider, for instance, recent discussion surrounding the utility of same-sex classrooms for improving student performance by circumventing the “problems” of rampant hormones or “performance anxiety” as sources of educational interference in mixed-sex classrooms—the heterosexism of the entire issue being obvious. To be clear, the young people in the program must agree to participate, and they no doubt find the program rewarding despite (or because of?) the loss of the dog. That is, of course, the point.

18. This phrasing is taken from an alternative translation quoted in Garber (123).

### Chapter 3

#### Knowing, Unknowing, and the Achievement of Young Adulthood: *The Outsiders* and *That Was Then, This Is Now*

Since the first books specifically for young readers were intended to be instructional, and since the ideas of such thinkers as Locke and Rousseau continue to influence the ways childhood is thought about, didacticism remains a central component of the history of children's literature.<sup>1</sup> David L. Russell suggests that the first "Golden Age" in that history owes its efflorescence of quality work for children to the movement away from this emphasis on education, which had dominated children's literature until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. "Before children's literature could fully mature, it had to abandon the shackles of moral didacticism," he writes (10). Given that the origins of children's literature were so marked by this didactic impulse, perhaps it should come as no surprise that the emergence of young adult (YA) literature in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century would bear similar traces of the inclination to instruct. In order to construct a new market of readers, disentangle itself from the main strand of children's literature, and justify its provocative attention to formerly taboo or mature material, adolescent fiction and its authors might have felt the need to cite its potentially instructional value and to insist on its necessity. It seems that the "mere" edification or pleasure of literary innovation and complexity would not have sufficed to ground this new enterprise.

Although not exactly a "problem novel," *The Outsiders* can be seen as a precursor to this subgenre, and as such it possesses some of the qualities that would come to characterize, if not mar, the problem novel for adolescents. Michael Cart, after reviewing

milestone publications that were widely read by young adults—even if not specifically written *for* them—during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, concurs with other critics in his opinion that most of these novels are what would now be called “genre literature,” like romance or fantasy, a designation that effectively dismisses them. In what has come to be a popular view of the history of adolescent literature as a distinct category, Cart argues, “I think it is sufficient to say that the real birth of young adult literature came with its embrace of the novel of realism, beginning...in the late 1960s” (39). The 1967 publication of S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders*, with its depictions of inter-class conflict and violence, would most clearly signal the maturity of YA literature. Responding to what she saw as the lack of realism in literature for young adults, and its failure to grapple honestly with the difficulties faced by young people, Hinton attempted to write a novel she thought would better represent the experiences of teenagers. That meant confronting directly some of the problems of adolescence: violence, conflicts with parents and other youths, and feelings of alienation and isolation. In other words, focusing on problems and how to deal with them was adopted as a strategy both to produce the appearance of realism, as though realism were synonymous with turmoil, and to distance YA fiction from the overly sanitized and benign writing of the preceding three decades.<sup>2</sup>

This push to represent the realistic problems of adolescents clearly led to YA literature’s being caught up by the lure of didacticism. It’s hard to write a novel about a problem or problems without being tempted to offer solutions. Thus, the “New Realism” of YA literature also ushered in the “new didacticism.” *The Outsiders* is emblematic of these connections. It is not only a key prototype of the new realist novel for young adults, but also an explicitly didactic one. In fact, as the novel ends we learn that

Ponyboy is submitting it as make-up work for his English class. Hence, the book refers to itself as the product of an instructional assignment. Ponyboy decides to hand *this* in to fulfill that assignment because he feels a moral urgency to share the lessons he has learned through his experiences, which become the story of the novel. Ponyboy admits he wants “to tell people” what he has discovered. That central lesson is crystallized for him by his sacrificial friend Johnny, who admonishes Ponyboy in a deathbed letter to “stay gold.” For Johnny, to “stay gold” signifies remaining innocent and childlike. Ironically, then, this foundational novel of young adulthood effectively urges its adolescent readers to turn back, or, since they cannot turn back, at least to practice innocence.

Given what appears to be the novel’s self-consciousness about its own instructional purpose, Hinton’s explanation for the origin of *The Outsiders* is of particular note. She says, “It was just something to let off steam. I didn’t have any grand design. I just sat down and started writing it. I look back and I think it was totally written in my subconscious or something” (“Speaking” para. 1). This suggests a contradiction at the heart of the novel. If we are to believe Hinton, then in some way the composition of the novel, and therefore its moral lessons, lacked deliberation, but Ponyboy’s determination to share his insights through *The Outsiders* is clearly a didactic gesture, something that is by definition designed and intended. So Hinton’s comments can only be read as a disavowal of intent. It says, in effect, “I didn’t know what I was doing,” which rather strikingly resonates with Johnny’s advice to “stay gold.” Hinton pleads innocent and unknowing. What I want to argue is that this contradiction, or tension, between intent

and accident, or knowing and unknowing, is critical to understanding not only *The Outsiders*, but also adolescence itself.

The objective of this project is to examine how the qualities of different kinds of lost objects affect the development of children, and how their maturity is subsequently coded as a result of their relationships with these objects and their experiences of loving and losing them. Maturity, as embodied by Ponyboy in *The Outsiders*, involves the ability to handle contradiction and to respond to the world in a way that combines being “tuff” with being empathetic. This outcome, I believe, is achieved in part by a strategic management of knowledge, knowing when and what to know and not know and enacting the compromises necessary to signal the appropriate state of knowingness. Ponyboy’s maturity, his management of knowledge, is enabled by the deaths of three boys whose actions or affiliation mark them as delinquent or troubled teenagers: Johnny, Dally, and Bob. Through their deaths and Ponyboy’s identification with them, he is able to actualize those qualities he needs to survive and attain young adulthood. In particular, it is what these boys “know” that Ponyboy takes from their deaths. Johnny knows a fear that makes one alert to danger, and he knows the value of others that makes him able to care for them. Bob, in contrast, represents the self-worth that motivates survival and the normativity that on some level Ponyboy craves. Dally’s distrustfulness and anger, results of what he knows about the world, provide Ponyboy with the tools he needs to protect himself.

Ponyboy’s maturity is catalyzed by the loss of these three boys, and the mature Ponyboy is moved to think critically about his experiences and the very lives of his gang. Given Freud’s suggestion about how loss and identification function to produce a faculty

of self-criticism, we can understand Ponyboy's losses as affecting his capacity for critical thought. The mature Ponyboy is made able to produce a meditation on the experience of young adulthood. He finds himself set apart from the group and able to reflect upon it, and in this way he acts as a kind of collective conscience or ideal towards which others can aspire. In other words, Ponyboy experiences the process of melancholic development himself, but more than that, his development replicates the formation of the ego ideal. In Freud's theory, the ego ideal, or super-ego, reflects the history of object-cathexes and the identifications formed with those lost objects. Criticism of lost objects is directed against oneself when those objects are lost and introjected. Through this process, a part of the ego is able to differentiate itself from the rest in order to evaluate the ego. *The Outsiders* presents Ponyboy as the ideal Greaser: thoughtful, self-reflexive, and yet still "tuff." Unlike Johnny or Dally, he survives, and his survival effectively validates his choices. Ponyboy is therefore set up as a group super-ego, whose function it is to offer itself as a model of proper behavior and thought.

Freud makes clear, though, that the super-ego operates as not only an ideal towards which to aspire, but also as an injunction against what is forbidden:

The super-ego is, however, not simply a residue of the earliest object-choices of the id; it also represents an energetic reaction-formation against those choices. Its relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: "You *ought to be* like this (like your father)." It also comprises the prohibition: "You *may not be* like this (like your father)—that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative." (*Ego* 30)

He goes on to assert that this double imperative proceeds from the work of the super-ego to repress knowledge of how the super-ego is formed, knowledge of the early object-choices that comprise it. Thus, the dual purpose of the ego ideal to promote and prohibit is linked to authorizing consciousness of some psychical materials and processes and repressing others, thereby making them unconscious. In this way, the formation and function of the super-ego involves knowing and unknowing what is proper or improper to know and not know. I am arguing that Ponyboy, as a model of the ego ideal, demonstrates this crucial connection of knowing/unknowing to the operation of conscience and therefore “proper” adult behavior. Understanding this aspect of Ponyboy’s maturity helps us to understand something about why this way of representing young adulthood played such a significant role in the history of YA literature.

What young adults do and do not know, and what they should and should not know, are critical dimensions of the ways adolescence is conceptualized, whether that knowledge is about sex and sexuality, financial and economic matters, or the pain associated with violence and death. *The Outsiders* is highly invested in what its characters know and don’t know, and, as we’ve seen, it is also invested in making sure readers put the book down knowing something they didn’t before, despite Hinton’s claim about the unknowingness of the novel’s composition. Johnny’s plea that Ponyboy “stay gold” is an imperative that amounts to “do not know.” Thus, one lesson of *The Outsiders* is that adolescence itself involves a complex negotiation of knowing and unknowing, with both resulting in tremendous ramifications for young people. In this paper I explore specifically what it is that youth in *The Outsiders* know, don’t know, and don’t want to

know, and I examine what the novel suggests are the ramifications of this knowing and unknowing.

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As a didactic novel, the adolescent protagonists know or think they know a number of important lessons. Lesson 1: Greasers (or outsiders, or Others) are human too. As real people, Greasers experience complex emotions, value brotherhood and loyalty, and care about family. They also possess the capacity for altruism and self-sacrifice. That the Other with whom one might not readily identify is also a three-dimensional person is one of the central lessons of the narrative, and no doubt one of the key reasons—in addition to the fact that adolescents seem to like this novel—why *The Outsiders* is assigned so consistently in secondary schools. For Ponyboy himself, this is also one of the more obvious lessons of his own story. In the final pages of the novel, he thinks about his friends, “Someone should tell their side of the story, and maybe people would understand then and wouldn’t judge a boy by the amount of hair oil he wore” (179). The novel begins with Ponyboy walking home from the movies and getting jumped by four Socs simply for being a Greaser. Greasers have long hair, dress in jeans, and have reputations for being thugs. Some of them occasionally hold up gas stations and get into gang fights. Nevertheless, the obvious concern and affection between the Curtis boys and amongst their circle of friends is clearly meant to counteract the impression of Greasers as heartless criminals.

The boys take care of each other and experience a range of emotions. The parentless Curtis home is used as a kind of communal living space. Johnny, whose parents alternately ignore and abuse him, is adopted as a pet by the other boys. “If it

hadn't been for the gang, Johnny would never have known what love and affection are," thinks Ponyboy, and this is probably true for other boys in their immediate circle as well.

Ponyboy and his brother Sodapop are demonstrably affectionate towards one another, often giving back rubs, throwing arms around each other's neck, tousling hair, and using each other as pillows.<sup>3</sup> Pony and Johnny, both having been jumped and had their lives threatened, experience genuine fear simply walking home alone, and Darry, the oldest of the orphaned Curtis boys and the head of the household, lives with the anxiety of being responsible for his two brothers. All of the boys risk or experience arrest, physical pain, and even death in order to help each other. Finally, in the scene of ultimate sacrifice, and the moment when the realist novel turns into a sentimental romance, Johnny gives his life to rescue a group of schoolchildren from a burning church.<sup>4</sup> All of this works to "tell their side of the story," lest the world think of Greasers simply as dangerous juvenile delinquents.

Lesson 2: young adults have real problems, like violence and depression. The same year *The Outsiders* was released Hinton herself claimed in the pages of *The New York Times* that books then being regarded as for adolescents were ridiculously outdated and unrealistic. She effectively charged writers of young adult fiction with not honestly depicting the difficult lives of teenagers, whose problems are often much more troubling and painful than adults often like to think or admit. If *The Outsiders* was shocking at the time of its release, that was due in large part to its portrayal of violence. Decades before the rash of school shootings in the late 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century called attention to the seriousness of schoolyard bullying, Hinton was showing the terror some children and adolescents were living with because of conflicts between rival cliques.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, she

showed that this kind of everyday violence had the potential to be not only physically life-threatening, but also emotionally crippling. The rather meek Johnny suffers both physical wounds and the emotional trauma of his abuse at the hands of other teenagers and his own parents. Ponyboy describes him as “a little dark puppy that has been kicked too many times and is lost in a crowd of strangers” (11). If the reader looks past the pathos of this sentence, the image of a genuinely wounded boy is potentially disturbing.

The other boys in the Curtis gang all experience varying degrees of anger and resentment because of their class status, about which they are keenly aware, and the novel treats their different emotional and coping responses seriously. Their class status causes Dally to construct a defensive and hostile posture towards the world that only leads ultimately to his death. The novel even addresses the stress and anxiety surrounding sex and pregnancy when it alludes to Sodapop’s concern that his girlfriend is pregnant with his baby. Hinton also provides glimpses into the emotional lives of the privileged Socs. Cherry Valence confesses to Ponyboy the habitual insincerity and dissatisfaction that leaves her and her friends feeling numb: “We’re sophisticated—cool to the point of not feeling anything. Nothing is real with us. You know, sometimes I’ll catch myself talking to a girl-friend, and realize I don’t mean half of what I’m saying.” She concludes that these are symptoms of having too much, but not of what they want: “It seems like we’re always searching for something to satisfy us, and never finding it” (38). The feelings expressed here are too sophisticated, sincere, and complex to be dismissed as the hormone-driven turbulence of adolescence. Nor are the feelings of either Greasers or Socs that Hinton manages to articulate even particular to adolescents. The difficulties experienced by these adolescents are serious, and their effects on them are multiple and

complicated. The ramifications of these experiences are lifelong and significant, which we gather from what else the novel knows.

Lesson 3: the world is not all bad. Abused and ignored at home; jumped, beaten, and threatened by a gang of muggers; and severely burned and paralyzed in a fire, Johnny nonetheless believes that “there’s still lots of good in the world,” a sentiment he expresses in his deathbed letter to Ponyboy (179). This line is followed by the simple command to “Tell Dally.” At this point, however, Dally upon learning of Johnny’s death has already committed suicide by police, pulling a gun in order to force them to shoot him. His inability to deliver this message to its intended audience is what triggers Ponyboy’s realization that he needs to communicate what he and Johnny know to all the “hundreds and hundreds of boys living on the wrong sides of cities” (179). What *is* still good in the world? Johnny himself is the novel’s primary representation of goodness, which is why his loss is what finally breaks the hardened Dally. After Johnny, it is the memory of him, but also, presumably, the potential in other boys to make similar sacrifices. In his note Johnny refers to the value of the children he rescued from the church and the appreciation of their parents. Thus, the good in the world is also the fact that some children are loved and valued, even though that has not been Johnny’s experience. Given the centrality of Ponyboy’s relationship to Darry in the novel, their fraternal bond and love also signifies something good in the world. And, in addition to all that, there remains a potential embodied by Ponyboy himself.

Lesson 4: individuals have the capacity for self-determination and self-fashioning. Johnny thinks that Ponyboy has the potential to become something other than what he is. “Don’t be bugged over being a greaser. You still have a lot of time to make yourself be

what you want,” he writes in the letter (179). Throughout the novel Ponyboy is acutely aware of not only his class position and greaser identity, but also how he wants to enact his own way of being in the world. He sees the other members of his gang as models both to emulate and reject. Ponyboy notes that Two-Bit responds with a practiced indifference, Sodapop with a defiant love for life, and Tim Shepherd with a reversal of affect that permits him to enjoy and participate “happily” in the violence of their lives (47). He doesn’t think any of these ways of dealing with being a Greaser will work for him, something the observant Johnny must recognize. Still, when Johnny insists Ponyboy cut and bleach his hair, he’s horrified: “Our hair labeled us greasers, too—it was our trademark. The one we were proud of. Maybe we couldn’t have Corvairs or madras shirts, but we could have hair” (71). His new hair feels to Ponyboy like “being in a Halloween costume we can’t get out of” (73). Johnny recognizes the significance of their hair as a sub-cultural symbol. He explains to Ponyboy that judges make boys like them get haircuts in order to “break them” because that’s the only thing such boys have to be taken from them. By choosing to cut their own hair first, the boys are refusing to allow anyone else to do it.

Both boys recognize that people view them as thugs, and after Johnny kills Bob, as murderers. Still, when confronted with the decision about whether to risk their lives to save a group of schoolchildren from a burning church, they choose to do so in a move that departs from the expectations others have of them. Johnny explains his decision by pointing to the possibilities the children have in life: “Their lives are worth more than mine, they have more to live for” (178). Thus, Johnny fashions for himself the role of martyr, whereby he increases his own value by placing the children’s parents in his debt.

Ponyboy too begins to develop his own individual style, while remaining a Greaser. In the novel's final pages he is once again threatened by a group of Socs. This time he busts the end of bottle and uses it to ward them off. After he's left alone, he begins picking up the pieces of broken glass because he doesn't want anyone to get a flat tire. Ponyboy demonstrates here his efforts to develop the toughness needed to survive as a Greaser without sacrificing his sensitivity or the empathy he feels for others. His act of self-fashioning is to take qualities from Dally and Johnny and integrate them.

Lesson 5: the final key lesson of *The Outsiders* is that adolescents shouldn't lose their innocence. This conclusion is articulated by Johnny, who wishes Ponyboy would "stay gold," a phrase that alludes to a poem by Robert Frost. Frost writes that "nature's first green is gold," and he describes "her early leaf" as lasting "only an hour." Then, just as time in Eden must end, the leaf descends because "nothing gold can stay." Thus, Johnny recognizes that "gold" means new and innocent, and he charges Ponyboy with remaining so: "I've been thinking about it, and that poem, that guy who wrote it, he meant you're gold when you're a kid, like green. When you're a kid everything's new, dawn. It's just when you get used to everything that it's day. Like the way you dig sunsets, Pony. That's gold" (178). Johnny doesn't want Ponyboy to get so used to things that he becomes too numb or tough and loses the sensitivity that enables Ponyboy to see and understand things differently. And since Ponyboy and these aspects of him are clearly validated in the novel, readers, along with Ponyboy, are the intended recipients and audience of Johnny's exhortation to remain innocent and "not know."<sup>6</sup>

However, neither Johnny nor Ponyboy is "innocent" in the sense that neither is naïve or inexperienced, and both have been forced to confront a number of traumatic

events by which they've had their "innocence" torn from them. Both boys have been jumped and beaten. Ponyboy's parents have been killed only eight months before the novel begins, and Johnny has killed another boy while trying to defend himself and Ponyboy from yet another attack. They've had to flee and hide like fugitives, and they've witnessed and participated in gang fights. The only images of innocence in the novel are the schoolchildren, whom the boys rescue, the same ones Johnny feels are more valuable than himself. His imperative that Ponyboy "stay gold" then is not only an acknowledgement that he would be better off not having experienced these traumatic events, but also his sense that Ponyboy could be more like those children: valued by others, with something to look forward to.

Still, given that the novel culminates in a Ponyboy who now has a deeper understanding of his friends and their ways of being in the world, his brothers and the sacrifices they have made for him, and the Socs, who have their own problems, Ponyboy is precisely not the "kid" Johnny would like for him to remain. Johnny also asks Ponyboy to share their discoveries with Dally, but Dally is already dead when Ponyboy finds the letter. Similarly, Ponyboy is already not gold, nor can he go back. Thus, like Frost's poem, the novel is a lament for that which is lost, the carelessness of youth. *The Outsiders* opens (and closes) with Ponyboy walking home from the movies alone, not considering the danger. The Ponyboy of the novel's end knows better.

While these five lessons are apparently what the novel is conscious of knowing and wanting to transmit to readers, there are others it seems less conscious of knowing. First, if Ponyboy cannot "stay gold" after the experiences related in the novel, neither can the reader after reading it. In other words, the novel works against the very imperative it

most explicitly articulates. That the novel is instructive and hence promotes “knowing” is clearly evidenced by both the fact that, like *A Separate Peace*, it is widely taught in high schools and the fact that, like *Bridge to Terabithia*, it was one of the most frequently challenged books of the 1990s. Both teachers and challengers then recognize the potentially transformative effect of *The Outsiders* on readers, especially on those who take note of the seriousness and sadness engendered by unbridgeable class or clique conflicts, the real possibility of death and trauma, and the frustration of being helpless in the face of these realities. It is precisely these aspects of the novel that have earned it so much attention and led some to see it as signaling the maturity of YA literature as distinct from either children’s or adult literature. The reader both implied and constructed by *The Outsiders* is a young adult, and that state of young adulthood is defined as one beyond or no longer “gold.”

As Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer explain in *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, the position of the implied reader is “a role a text implies and invites a reader to take on.... The reader must, in some way and to some degree, *become* the implied reader” (17). The implied reader one is invited to become by *The Outsiders* is one prepared to be interested in, grasp, and respond to the experiences of the novel’s characters. The text both requires and expands the reader’s own experiences, thereby signaling for the adolescent the achievement of young adulthood while simultaneously initiating the reader into it. As we have seen, those experiences include sex and its ramifications, the difficulties of fashioning one’s identity in response to life’s circumstances, and the need to recognize and manage danger and pain. In order to accomplish these things, Ponyboy has to acknowledge and prepare for them, and thus in

some sense he cannot help but “get used to” them, the phrase Johnny uses to explain the opposite of staying gold. The Ponyboy at the end of the novel is clearly better able to meet these challenges, and the fact that he survives and survives as a more competent individual endorses the outcome he represents. On one level, then, the advice to “stay gold” signals not only a contradiction, but also an impossibility for both protagonist and reader.

Despite its desire to assist readers in seeing past such classifications as “Greaser” and “Soc,” the novel has the paradoxical effect of creating or reinforcing them. At the very least, these terms in particular are not in widespread circulation, as least not any longer. The extent to which the readers of *The Outsiders* have any familiarity with Greasers and Socs is in fact because of the novel. But more than that, for readers who cannot readily identify with the classed position of the underprivileged Greasers, *The Outsiders* might be read as a kind of ethnography of poor youth. Hinton, who describes her own high school friends as like the characters in her book, might be seen as a native informant or participant observer reporting on the practices and culture of urban gangs for the voyeuristic pleasures of generations of teachers and students. So by whatever term poorer youth are known, Ponyboy and his friends have the potential to be read as representing all, or some version of, them. This is perhaps an unavoidable consequence, but it is nonetheless a likely result and not one the novel does or can know about itself.

One of the central lessons the novel seeks to communicate is that Greasers and Socs are both human and shouldn't be judged because of their hair, clothes, or friends. When near the end of the novel Ponyboy and Randy, his sensitive Soc counterpart, meet and discuss everything that has happened, Randy expresses disbelief in the sacrificial

actions of two Greasers. Ponyboy responds: “‘Greaser’ didn’t have anything to do with it. My buddy over there wouldn’t have done it. Maybe you would have done the same thing, maybe a friend of yours wouldn’t have. It’s the individual” (115). When Ponyboy’s friends ask what the Soc wanted, he replies, “He ain’t a Soc, he’s just a guy” (118). The novel, then, calls for individuals to be disassociated from their group affiliations. Nevertheless, it quite thoroughly constructs Greasers *as* Greasers and Socs *as* Socs. As with staying gold, *The Outsiders* works against the ability or tendency to comprehend or evaluate individuals as distinct from their class identities and affiliations, despite what it might say.

For example, we know that Dally had already been arrested once by the age of ten, and Ponyboy describes him as tough, cold, and mean. Ponyboy reports that “Dally had jumped people. He had told us stories about muggings in New York that made the hair on the back of my neck stand up” (34). He also says Dally lies, cheats, steals, “rolls” drunks, and jumps “small kids” (11). Nevertheless, Dally ends up looking more like a tragic and misunderstood youth than a dangerous criminal with no social conscience, and he manages this impression largely through his relationships with Ponyboy and Johnny. That is, the novel makes it difficult to judge Dally apart from his social relations. We see him helping Johnny and Ponyboy escape to the country, bringing them supplies and news, and begging Johnny not to die in the hospital. When Dally pulls a knife on a doctor in order to gain access to Johnny’s room, the novel’s sympathies are clearly with Dally. You don’t believe he’s actually going to use the knife, and neither does the doctor: “The doctor didn’t bat an eye. ‘You can see him, but it’s because you’re his friends, not because of that knife’” (148). It doesn’t hurt that Hinton describes Dally as

beautiful, and even the Soc Cherry Valence finds herself attracted to him. In fact, all of the Greasers are romanticized. Two-Bit is funny, Sodapop is charming and handsome, Darry is responsible and heroic, and Johnny sacrifices his life. Since the story is narrated by Ponyboy, none of them seems remotely threatening. And thus it is because they are Ponyboy's friends, Greasers, that the reader's impression of them is so favorable. In this way, their designation as Greasers effectively signals their status as sympathetic characters, even for those about whom the reader knows relatively little, like Steve or Two-Bit. Ponyboy's desire to "tell their side of the story" cannot help but generate an impression of Greasers as defined by their collective identity. Therefore, though Ponyboy argues that the boys should be judged as individuals, the novel encourages an entirely different response.

This idealization of the Greasers also works against what commentary the novel offers about social class in the U.S. *The Outsiders* is rather remarkable for its consciousness of class issues. Ponyboy notes that the warfare in their town is between "social classes," and he describes Socs as the kids with all the breaks. All of the Greasers are aware of the inequality between the groups, and both Ponyboy and Dally are described as bitter about it. "It wasn't fair," thinks Ponyboy, "for the Socs to have everything. We were as good as they were; it wasn't our fault we were greasers" (47). Still, despite their lack of economic and social privilege, and the occasional misunderstanding or fight between them, the lives of Ponyboy and his circle often seem enviable, almost idyllic. They provide each other with love and affection—Ponyboy's terms—consider each other to be "like brothers," and demonstrate an unwavering loyalty. The boys hang out in the parentless space of the Curtis home, and neither there nor on the

streets are they forced to deal with intrusive adults, except perhaps for the looming and abstract danger that Darry will lose custody of his brothers. As Michael Cart notes, “Hinton obviously wants the reader to make an equation between Margaret Mitchell’s Southern cavaliers [of *Gone with the Wind*] and her own gallant Greasers” (49). Many of the “problems” and much of the “realism” that made *The Outsiders* so groundbreaking could be read as making the lives of Hinton’s Greasers seem rather exciting. These kids are never bored, at least, so despite the difficulties associated with their class status, the novel hardly works to elicit any conviction that the economic system producing the separation between Greaser and Soc should be rethought. Ponyboy is satisfied with simply “telling their story,” and the implication is that this act adequately addresses the novel’s class conflict. The novel does not appear to recognize its limited efficacy in this regard. This is not to say that it does not have many other uses or is not efficacious along other dimensions. However, with regards to the issue of class, the critique offered by *The Outsiders* seems disarmed by the arguably appealing way in which the lives of Greasers are depicted.

Still, both Johnny and Ponyboy must recall that the title of Frost’s poem is “Nothing Gold Can Stay.” In order for Johnny to claim that his desire for Ponyboy to stay gold is derived from having figured out the poem, he must ignore its more obvious lesson. That is to say, on some level, he knows he offers an impossible suggestion. And Ponyboy knows it too. His recollection of the poem’s final line, “Nothing gold can stay,” is what triggers his recitation of the entire verse. Ponyboy knows it better than Johnny even. But this is not the only knowledge the boys wish they didn’t possess. In addition to the ideas that the young adults in *The Outsiders* know and don’t know, there are others

they evidently know and wish they didn't. Ponyboy alludes to this fact when he notes, "I lie to myself all the time. But I never believe me" (18). And when Two-Bit complains about his lost switchblade, which is with Dally when the police search Dally's body, Steve asks him whether he is only bothered about the switchblade even though two of their friends are dead. "No," he responds, "but that's what I'm wishing was all that's bothering me" (178). *The Outsiders* is as much about not wanting to know things as it is about wanting to instruct.

Ponyboy and the other youths "know" many others things they resist knowing. Such ideas include the inescapability of experience, the idea that a Greaser cannot simply stop being one even if he wants to, and the inalterable nature of the conflict between themselves and the Socs. Ponyboy appears to know this despite his failure to express any kind of skepticism in response to Johnny's faith in the possibility of becoming something else. Both Two-Bit and Ponyboy recognize that Darry might have been a Soc if not for the gang, but they also understand that his connection to the gang is indissoluble given who Darry is. This paradox becomes clear through Ponyboy's conversations with Randy and Cherry, two Socs. Randy confronts Ponyboy with the purposelessness of the rumble that is intended to settle the Soc-Greaser dispute over territory. He plans to skip out on it, despite the ramifications to his reputation, because he is tired of the violence:

I'm sick of it because it doesn't do any good. You can't win, you know that, don't you?... You can't win even if you whip us. You'll still be where you were before—at the bottom. And we'll still be the lucky ones with all the breaks. So it doesn't do any good, the fighting and the killing. It doesn't prove a thing. We'll

forget it if you win, or if you don't. Greasers will still be greasers and Socs will still be Socs. (117)

Ponyboy does not dispute this observation. He thinks that he would help Randy if he could, but he also recognizes that there is nothing he can do. The rumble will go on, and little will be settled because the economic conditions that underlie the Soc-Greaser conflict will remain unchanged. This recognition is echoed when Ponyboy finally confronts Cherry about her relationship with Bob, the boy Johnny kills while defending himself and Ponyboy. Cherry thinks she's helping by passing news to the Greasers about her Soc friends, but Ponyboy criticizes her. "Do you think your spying for us makes up for the fact that you're sitting there in a Corvette while my brother drops out of school to get a job?" he asks her (129).

During the rumble, Darry confronts Paul Holden, a Soc who had been on the high school football team with him and who has had the opportunity to go to college. Darry has had to give up on college in order to support his two younger brothers. When Ponyboy sees them face off, he realizes that the two young men hate each other because of this difference: "They shouldn't hate each other...I don't hate the Socs any more ... they shouldn't hate ..." (143). Ponyboy is unable to complete the thought. They *shouldn't* hate each other, but he's not sure why, or how to get past that hate. At the moment he has this thought, the first punch in the rumble is thrown, which attests to the hopelessness of altering this mutual animosity. Ponyboy must reconcile Johnny's belief that there is still good in the world with his own recognition of a helplessness to alter his circumstances. Given that it is clear Ponyboy understands the conditions of Greasers, his

optimistic wish that they not be judged must be read in the context of his knowledge that they will be anyway.

Those who need Ponyboy's message the most are the same ones who are least able to hear it. This is something else he knows, and yet resists knowing. The evidence of this resistance is his insistence on sharing a message he knows is too late. Johnny wants Ponyboy to share this faith in the possibility of good with Dally, but since Dally is already dead when he finds the instructions, Ponyboy decides to tell other boys like Dally by recounting his experiences for his English theme. He understands, however, "that it was too late to tell them that there was still good in it, and they wouldn't believe you if you did" (179). Thus, he offers the book as a way of telling them even as he acknowledges its pointlessness. The belief that Ponyboy expresses in this notion of good does not simply indicate his childlike naiveté. It is clear that he knows better. In fact, it is the ability to manage the contradiction between his realistic assessment of the world and his residual faith in goodness that signals Ponyboy's maturity at the end of the novel. Knowing, despite not wanting to know, is what qualifies him as a young adult.

These characters also show evidence of a deep sadness about the separation between Greasers and Socs. When Darry faces off against his former football teammate, Ponyboy detects some expression behind both of their eyes that he cannot quite place. He thinks it might be contempt or pity in the eyes of Paul, and jealousy and shame in Darry's, but their initial hesitancy when confronting each other reveals the possibility of something else: "He looked at Darry and said quietly, 'Hello, Darrel.' Something flickered behind Darry's eyes and then they were ice again. 'Hello, Paul'" (142). This confrontation, which requires them to engage in violence with each other, is a tragic one.

Their quiet hellos, their use of first names, and the fact that they used to “buddy it around all the time,” as Ponyboy recalls, suggest as much. Darry and Paul are compelled to meet this way, but it seems likely that what Ponyboy detects behind their eyes is a desire to be buddying it around instead. They must also recognize the impossibility of doing just that.

This flicker of sadness in response to the unbridgeable gap between Greaser and Soc is seen in others as well. While speaking to Cherry, Ponyboy expresses the possibility that it is money that separates them. Cherry tells him that they are separated by more than money. Their values and their emotionality also come between them. Ponyboy clarifies, “It’s not money, it’s feeling—you don’t feel anything and we feel too violently” (38). Cherry’s later attempts to pass information along to the Greasers and her fear of liking Dally attest to a desire to connect with them. Randy, on two occasions, reaches out to Ponyboy, even coming by his house after the rumble to express his concern and regret. Ponyboy’s expressed desire to share his story so that Greasers are less likely to be judged can be read as his response to this separation, and yet it might just be another instance of Ponyboy lying to himself. By the end of the novel neither Cherry nor Randy judges the Greasers simply for being Greasers, and yet it is clear that they cannot simply ignore their differences. As Ponyboy’s own story has shown, mutual understanding is not sufficient to bridge that gap, and on some level he knows that, even if he wishes he didn’t.

In the end, Ponyboy knows something more about what motivates his fellow Greasers and the rival Socs and about how to get along better in the world. He also knows that his story is usefully instructional, or at least how to make it so. That it reproduces a narrative of love, loss, and identification in order to make itself intelligible

as a bildungsroman makes this clear. He also knows not to linger too long on the fact that Johnny is valued by the world only because he saves a group of more valuable children. Or that Dally is not valued because the child *he* saves from the fire, Johnny, is not valued in and of himself. Ponyboy, however, is able to make *himself* valuable by producing this narrative, one that, as we've seen, "knows" certain lessons and doesn't "know" others. It is precisely the extent to which he knows and doesn't know what is proper for him to know that he achieves this value. And *The Outsiders*, as a representation of young adulthood, is indeed quite valuable. It consistently ranks as one of the best-selling children's book each year, and no doubt fueled by its place on school reading lists, in 2001 *The Outsiders* was ranked second by *Publisher's Weekly* on its list of all-time best-selling paperback children's books (Roback and Britton).

What I have suggested is that recognizing what this novel and its protagonists know and "don't know" is key to understanding its success, and we can look to what knowledge is encouraged or valued in *The Outsiders* in order to learn what knowledge is encouraged or valued in young adults. This proper knowledge includes the notion that even those with legitimate social complaints, who are therefore potentially disruptive of the social order, are ultimately harmless, loving, and loyal. It also includes the idea that the physical and emotional traumas of adolescence work to make young people into better adults. No matter how bleak your social or economic prospects, the world is still basically good. Everyone, irrespective of larger social forces, has the capacity to choose one's destiny and remake oneself. Young people should be valued for their innocence and remain so as long as possible. They should not acknowledge that they are already not innocent, that they understand how they will be judged on the basis of their

affiliations, that the idealization or valuation of children or particular groups of children effectively disempowers them in critical ways. Thus, proper adulthood involves representing oneself as knowing or unknowing with regards to particular aspects of oneself, one's social relations, and one's culture—knowing, that is, what one is supposed to know or not know.

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As with her first novel, Hinton has explained the writing process whereby she produced her second novel, *That Was Then, This Is Now*. One key detail of this experience was the three-year writer's block that resulted from the immense success of *The Outsiders*. As it has been widely reported, Hinton was herself a 16-year-old adolescent when she wrote *The Outsiders*. *That Was Then, This Is Now* is, therefore, her first novel as an adult author and represents her efforts to break free of her own authorial childhood. It centers on the changing friendship of Bryon and Mark as they reach young adulthood. Since Mark was taken in by Bryon's mother, the two boys have been like brothers, but now they find themselves growing apart and struggling with their increasing distance. When Bryon learns that Mark has been selling drugs to younger children, he decides to turn him in to the police, which results in Mark's incarceration and the end of their friendship. Hinton has noted the disappointment of readers in the way she chose to end *That Was Then*: "So many readers say the ending made them throw the book against the wall—and I say 'Great, you got it!' (*Books*). Like *The Outsiders*, this novel is about loss, maturation, and what the young adult protagonists and readers "know"—about themselves, the world, and their relationships with others. Like the end of the relationship between Gene and Finny in Knowles's *A Separate Peace*, the dissolution of

the affectionate and intimate friendship between Bryon and Mark is posed as the inevitable consequence of growing up. The end of the friendship results, in part, from what each of these boys knows, doesn't know, and doesn't want to know. Thus, as a follow up to *The Outsiders*, *That Was Then* elaborates Hinton's view of the connections between knowing, unknowing, and the attainment of young adulthood, and, as with her first novel, she represents adolescence here in deeply ambivalent terms.

As we have seen, loving and losing an object is a common narrative of childhood development. It is as if loss generates the escape velocity of the adolescent. It is the fuel used to achieve the speed necessary for escaping the gravitational force of childhood. *That Was Then*, however, is more than just another example of this predictable trajectory. It represents how two boys grapple with the sense of this necessity in the absence of any formalized rituals and without the loss being forcefully compelled from without. In this novel, childhood is associated with attachment and friendship, whereas adulthood involves independence and individuation. In order to achieve these goals, the loved objects of childhood must be given up or lost. In this case, it is clear that if the object is not taken away by forces beyond one's control, like illness or accident, then its sacrifice must be voluntary, or nearly so. Unlike Ponyboy, who loses his friends through violent tragedies, Bryon must consciously reject Mark in order to certify his maturity, and the fact of the choice seems to make the loss all the more difficult.

It is clear to Bryon that his call to the police effectively kills Mark, both figuratively and literally. In one sense, the fun-loving and "innocent" Mark who trusts and loves Bryon "like a brother" ceases to exist when he realizes what Bryon has done. And although he cannot know it with certainty yet, that decision will force Mark down a

path that does in fact lead to his death in one of Hinton's later novels.[Note] Bryon does know that turning Mark in represents a loss to himself, and he understands that loss in terms of death: "I didn't have to do what I did. Last night it had seemed the only right thing to do. Now Mark was in jail. It would kill him. It would kill him. It would kill him" (150). The repetition here is clearly Bryon's attempt to absorb the magnitude of killing his best friend. Months later when he visits Mark in the state reformatory, Bryon notices, "Mark had changed.... He looked dirty somehow, and hard, things I had never seen in him before. His strangely sinister innocence was gone, and in its place was a more sinister knowledge" (157). As with Bryon, Mark's development is represented in terms of knowing and unknowing. Mark's first death is the death of his childhood self, and as in *The Outsiders*, childhood is associated with innocence, and adulthood with knowledge. Mark now knows something about Bryon and about the limits of loyalty and love.

One way in which the characters in this novel understand their maturity is through what they are beginning to know about themselves. Childhood is a period, Mark thinks, when one's self is produced collectively: "We were like brothers, not just you and me, but all of us together. We woulda died for each other then. And now everybody's kinda slipped away, and then we woulda died for each other. Really, man, remember? It was great, we were like a bunch of people makin' up one big person, like we totaled up to somethin' when we were together" (68). What is remarkable here about how Mark conceptualizes childhood is the way he associates attachment to loved objects with the willingness to sacrifice oneself on behalf of those objects. It makes clear the recognition of the utility, if not the desirability, of loss to the well-being and development of others.

It is as if he recognizes that something must be lost, and given that necessity, there might be something noble about volunteering oneself to be what is lost. What Mark is suggesting here was his willingness to spare his friends, Bryon in particular, of the need to make the very choice Bryon makes at the end of *That Was Then*. In response to Mark's recollection, Bryon thinks, "And now we total up something by ourselves just as easy" (68). But, the extent to which Bryon and others are independent of one another requires their mutual ties to be severed. For Bryon to truly "total up" something on his own, he must choose to lose Mark, and it is this knowledge and choice with which he struggles throughout the novel.

Following this conversation, Mark begins to understand more about himself and the world in which he lives, and that understanding—described in terms of what he now "knows"—signals his growing maturity. He values his individuation from the group less for how it provides independence and more for how it signals his new self-knowledge: "It's kind of a good thing too...when you know your own personality so you don't need the one the gang makes for you" (69). When he shows up at school after Mark has been in a fight, he thinks, "Now I knew. That Monday I could see through people and I knew what was going on" (71). He knows that although they ask him to explain what happened, his classmates will choose to believe what they want. He knows that the rich kids have appropriated the style of the poor ones by dressing like them, and he realizes that they were "spending as much money to look poor as they used to to look rich" (70). He also knows that as a "poor white" guy who is smart and friendly, he sometimes gets invited to the homes of his wealthier classmates not because they like him, but because they were "liberals" and wanted to appear "hip." For that one day he feels as though he

can see through everyone, including what they think and their motives for how they act.

The next day is different:

It was just that day—the next day I wondered what had hit me to make me act like that; and when I saw these Soc guys, they were just guys, friends of mine, and of course they asked me to their homes because we were friends—we were in the same English class and we got along. They were sincerely trying to change the world for the better, that was why they talked politics. They wore those clothes because that was their bag. That’s what I thought the next day. But not Monday. That Monday I knew. (72)

Bryon knows one day and does not know the next, which indicates his ambivalence about growing up and what that entails. It also indicates that young adulthood is not simply a state of knowing more, but one in which you both know and don’t know either simultaneously or alternatively, even about the same things.

Bryon’s increasing awareness of the world includes the very idea of ambivalence and the pain associated with it. One reason for the growing tension between himself and Mark is the relationship between Bryon and Cathy. Mark is clearly jealous of her and worries that she is responsible for the distance between him and Bryon. When Cathy comments on how beautiful Mark is, she triggers one of the first instances of Bryon’s ambivalence about him:

I stopped breathing for a second. Cathy was looking at Mark, and I suddenly felt like I’d swallowed a spoonful of red pepper. I felt cold and hot and sick and mad all at once. I only felt it for a second, only for a second and then it was gone—but sometimes now I wonder how it would be to feel like that all your life. You know

what the crummiest feeling you can have is? To hate the person you love best in the world. (55)

Of course, his feelings for Mark here, hating the one he loves best, foreshadow Mark's eventual feelings about Bryon. A significant dimension of each boy's maturity, then, is an awareness of ambivalence. When Bryon visits Mark in the reformatory, Mark only agrees to see him in order to be sure that he hates him, forcing Bryon to recall this knowledge about the pain of ambivalence. By the end of the novel, it is a knowledge both of them possess.

For Freud, ambivalence plays a vital role in the process of melancholia, and he claims that it must not be overlooked as one of its preconditions. To the extent that development requires the loss of loved objects so that they can be introjected in order to alter the character of the ego, ambivalence towards the object serves as not only a precondition of this process, but also a sign of its occurrence. The ambivalence felt towards those objects is turned inward on oneself, which installs uncertainty and contradiction as defining trademarks of the mature ego. For Bryon, Mark is defined by his defiance of rules, his ability to survive trauma—such as witnessing his parents murder each other—, and his love for his best friend, a love that comes to be mixed with hate. In losing him, Bryon can begin to identify with these qualities, including both a love and hatred of himself. Bryon demonstrates a keen awareness of this process of melancholic development: “I seemed to have become a mixture of things I had picked up from Charlie, Mark, Cathy, M&M, Mom and even obscure people like Mike and the blond hippie-chick and the Shepherds. I had learned something from everyone, and I didn't seem to be the same person I had been last year. But like a mixture, I was mixed up”

(155). Of the people on this list, Bryon ends his relationships with all of them except his mother and Charlie, who is killed. On the last page of the novel Bryon claims that “the guy who was my best friend doesn’t exist any longer, and I don’t want to think about the person who has taken his place” (159). Arguably, he is speaking about himself here as well. The person he used to be no longer exists, and the person who has taken Mark’s place is not only the hate-filled Mark of the reformatory, but also Bryon himself. It is Bryon who is left to take Mark’s place.

The Bryon who does so is one marked by contradiction and uncertainty. In fact, not knowing is the primary sign of his maturity despite the ways in which adolescence is often understood as a period in which young adults are coming to learn more about themselves and the world. When Mark asks for an explanation as to why Bryon has turned him in, all he can think is, “I couldn’t tell him. I didn’t know” (148). When he later attempts to figure out why he has done it, again he realizes that he doesn’t know. The novel concludes with Bryon thinking, “I am too mixed up to really care. And to think, I used to be sure of things. Me, once I had all the answers. I wish I was a kid again, when I had all the answers” (159). Part of the struggle for both Mark and Bryon is that their awareness and clarity of this developmental process shifts in and out of focus for them. That is, part of the pain of losing a loved object and maturing through that loss is the disorientation of at one moment knowing, and at another not knowing, how and why that process is working. As with Ponyboy, attaining young adulthood for Bryon involves the ability to survive contradiction and uncertainty without self-destructing like Bob, Johnny, Dally, or Mark. Development for these boys is not a matter of simply moving from unknowing to knowing, but of managing both together, of knowing what

one does and does not know, or should and should not know. To be grown up is to be mixed up in Hinton's work.

Hinton herself comments on this attention to knowingness in an article for *The New York Times*, where she writes, "Teen-agers know a lot today. Not just things out of a textbook, but about living. They know their parents aren't superhuman, they know that justice doesn't always win out, and that sometimes the bad win. They know that persons in high places aren't safe from corruption, that some men have their price, and that some people sell out" (29). In light of all of these things teenagers know, she goes on to plead to writers of young adult fiction on behalf of youth, "But give them something to hang onto. Show that some people don't sell out, and that everyone can't be bought. Do it realistically." Help readers stay gold. You can know, but you don't always have to *know*.

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In conclusion, I want to return to the question of how understanding the maturation of Ponyboy and Bryon helps us to understand something about YA literature, its history, and adolescence itself. What I am arguing is that despite Enlightenment or humanist value of education—informational and moral instruction—to the production of proper adult citizens, what Hinton's novels demonstrate is the vital importance of not only knowing, but also unknowing. In other words, becoming young adults is not simply a matter of knowing more, acquiring more sanctioned knowledge, but a matter of not knowing what one should not, or not admitting knowing. Becoming an adult, then, is as much about practicing unknowing. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has referred to "the privilege of unknowing" as a way of describing the benefits that sometimes accrue to not

knowing. “Such ignorance effects can be harnessed, licensed, and regulated on a mass scale for striking enforcements,” she writes (23). Ponyboy and Bryon exemplify, I think, a harnessing of claims to ignorance/innocence as a way of achieving maturity. Claiming not to know, or to be mixed up, or to be lying to oneself about what one is doing or what one has learned are ways these young adults signal their young adulthood.

To understand why Hinton has been so important to the narrative of YA literature one might ask what Hinton offers as a response to the problems Ponyboy experiences in *The Outsiders*. The solution is the recursive and self-referential narrative itself—again, the product of an instructional assignment—with its rather mixed up lessons and evasions about what it and its characters know, don’t know, and don’t want to know. For *That Was Then, This Is Now*, the solution to both Hinton’s writer’s block and Bryon’s dilemma is the very uncertainty of the novel’s ending. Hinton’s fiction, credited as it is with marking the maturity of YA literature, is itself an exercise in unknowing, in being mixed up. Like her characters, her work is “mature” precisely because it professes a kind of uncertainty and because it knows (or doesn’t know?) that the privileges of adulthood are connected with not so much the loss of innocence or ignorance, but its practice, the performance or privilege of unknowing.

Ponyboy and Bryon, who achieve maturity through the melancholic identification with lost objects, represent adolescent ego ideals that function to judge what is proper to know and not know. As we have seen, for Freud a key task of the ego ideal is the repression of this process of melancholic development. Freud claims that the injunctions of parents, teachers, and others in authority “remain powerful in the ego ideal and continue, in the form of conscience, to exercise moral censorship. The tension between

the demands of conscience and the actual performances of the ego is experienced as a sense of guilt. Social feelings rest on identifications with other people, on the basis of having the same ego ideal” (*The Ego* 32). This helps us to understand why a book like *The Outsiders* would play such an important role in the history of YA literature. It has exerted the force of its influence by providing a model for the development of social feelings, the necessary foundation of an ordered society. It is precisely a book about the development of moral sense, of conscience, and of a practiced unknowing of what might disrupt the operation of social feeling. It is as if a certain peace, or simply survival, is purchased with the knowledge or knowingness that must be sacrificed. As with Leper in *A Separate Peace*, to know is to go mad, or at least to be marked as mad. To not know is to survive as the ideal, and for Ponyboy, to pass his English class.

## Notes

1. David Russell notes that “at least two specific influences of the seventeenth century heightened society’s awareness of the special needs of the child: the rise of Puritanism and the philosophy of John Locke” (7). In particular, it was Locke’s ideas about education that proceeded from his description of the minds of children as *tabulae rasae*. The popularization of this way of thinking intensified the importance of and attention to the education of children. Jean-Jacques Rousseau would later assert in *Emile* the importance of educating children with the aim of promoting wisdom rather than simply knowledge acquisition per se, and he would thus be credited with leading to a greater emphasis on moralistic instruction.
2. In an article for *The New York Times* in which she explains her project in *The Outsiders*, Hinton is actually critical of the ways “realism” is represented as simply a collection of problems. “Adults who try to write realistically seem to mix up the real with the dirty,” she writes (“Teen-agers” 27). Ironically, though, her novel can be seen as fueling precisely this way of coding realism in fiction for young adults.
3. Michael Cart refers to these expressions of affection as examples of Hinton’s tendency to overwrite. He also argues that the voice “is too obviously not that of a Ponyboy at all; it is a Ponygirl speaking” (51). While the issue of cross-writing opens up a number of interesting questions about *The Outsiders*, Cart’s incredulosity about boys being affectionate with other boys seems to come dangerously close to sounding like some kind of sexist-homophobic rant about proper gender roles.
4. Cart decries the pastoral interlude and the characterization of Johnny as sentimental and self-indulgent, and he describes the book as a hybrid, “party realistic novel and part romantic fantasy” (48).
5. This theme has come to be a trademark of both fiction and film for young adults. The virtual industry of John Hughes films during the 1980s made it a staple of the teen flic.
6. Frost’s poem, by citing the association of innocence with Eden, also invokes the connection between the loss of the innocence and the acquisition of knowledge. It is when Adam and Eve eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that they are expelled from Eden. *The Outsiders* is, of course, similarly about the end of innocence, and so its association of maturity with knowledge places it within a long mythical and literary tradition.
7. Notably, “gold” is also how Ponyboy remembers his mother, and this scene appears before his discussion with Johnny about Frost’s poem. “My mother was golden and beautiful,” he thinks (48). This rare consideration of his mother appears in the context of his fantasy about living in the country where he would “not worry about being jumped or carrying a blade or ending up married to some scatterbrained broad with no sense.” For Ponyboy to “stay gold” then must also carry the meaning of being like his mother. The description of his mother as “golden” follows his recollection that she is one of the few

who could keep Dally out of trouble. The only other person with any influence on Dally is Johnny. Thus, through the signifier “gold,” Johnny, Ponyboy, and his mother are all identified with each other.

8. As Hinton readers come to find out in her 1979 novel *Tex*, Mark is eventually killed in a shootout with police after his experiences in prison transform him from a smalltime drug dealer into a hardened murderer.

9. Freud writes specifically about the Oedipal Complex, but I want to suggest that this is a specific instance or privileged example of a larger tendency to develop through the incorporation of lost objects. This is a generalization that Freud himself seems to suggest.

## Chapter 4

### Melancholic Development and Revolutionary War Fiction for Children: *Johnny Tremain* and *My Brother Sam Is Dead*

In 2001 *Newsweek* writer Evan Thomas coined the phrase “founders chic” to describe the surge of public interest at the beginning of the new millennium in the Founders and the events surrounding the American Revolution. Studies of the Founders have not only enjoyed massive sales and long-term spots on bestseller lists, but also received prestigious awards. Books about the Revolutionary generation and its work in constructing a new nation won a National Book Award in 1997 (*American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*) in addition to Pulitzer Prizes in 1993 (*The Radicalism of the American Revolution*), 1997 (*Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution*), 2001 (*Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*), and 2002 (*John Adams*). This “founders chic” phenomenon has led historian H.W. Brands to declare in *The Atlantic Monthly* that “our reverence for the Fathers has gotten out of hand” (101). Brands attributes the remarkable popularity of the United States’ founding moment to a widespread interest in returning to America’s roots at the beginning of a new century and to the heightened mistrust of politics and politicians that has been fermenting since at least the 1970s. These trends have prompted attention to a time that seems somehow purer, simpler, and more admirable.

It is to be expected then that this “founders chic” would also manifest itself in the domain of children’s culture. In 2002 PBS debuted an animated series for children entitled *Liberty’s Kids*. Accompanied by a set of picture books and a cd-rom of games

and activities, *Liberty's Kids* follows the exploits of three young reporters whose work for Benjamin Franklin brings them into contact with many of the major figures and events of the American Revolution. The children's publishing world has also taken note, continuing to churn out fiction for young people set in and around the birth of the United States. Both the "Dear America" series marketed to girls and the "My Name is America" companion series for boys have featured novels detailing the lives of children in Revolutionary times, and Ann Rinaldi, the popular writer of historical fiction for young people, has alone published no fewer than eight novels between 1991 and 2003 set during the American Revolution.

Coinciding with the beginnings of this surge in interest was the 50-year anniversary of the 1943 publication of *Johnny Tremain*, the classic of children's literature written by Pulitzer-Prize winning historian, Esther Forbes. In its report on the anniversary, *The Boston Globe* described the book as "the enduringly popular novel for young adults that defined historic Boston in the popular imagination the way *Gone With the Wind* defined Atlanta, or *Huckleberry Finn* the Mississippi" (Canellos 17). Even now visitors to Massachusetts can take a tour called Johnny Tremain's Boston. Despite historian Christopher Collier's scathing critique of *Johnny Tremain*, in which he accuses Forbes of representing an outdated and simplified view of the War, the novel is still widely read by and to children 60 years after being designated the Newbery Medal winner of 1944. Given both the "founders chic" phenomenon of recent years and the ongoing readership of Forbes's novel, *Johnny Tremain* is useful for thinking about not only the appeal of the founding moment in the United States, but also what can be

learned from how the American Revolution gets represented once it enters the sphere of children's culture.

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Collier's reevaluation of *Johnny Tremain* in the year of the U.S. bicentennial details the changing views of the American Revolution from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century through the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> in the scholarship of academic historians. Collier, himself a professional historian, distinguishes between the Whig, Imperialist, and Progressive schools of thought. The first, he writes, dominated thinking throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and presented a picture of the Revolution that was "moralistic and pedantic, depicting simple, freedom-loving farmers marching in a crusade to fulfill God's plan for a rationally ordered society based on principles of liberty and equality" (133). W.H. Brands traces the emergence of this Founders myth to the Reconstruction Era, when both the North and the South found a commonality in their reverence for the Revolutionary generation. According to Collier, the Whig approach was succeeded, although by no means replaced, by Imperialist historians who sought to understand the War "from the center of the empire looking out," using materials found in Britain and other Commonwealth nations. The third group described by Collier, the Progressive historians, cast doubt on the motives of the Founders by examining the economic factors influencing their construction of the new nation and its foundational documents, ultimately presenting the Founders as economically self-interested and the War as more ambiguous than previously thought. Charles Beard's 1913 publication of *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* stands in as a milestone of Progressive scholarship that

had an impact on a generation of historians and their understanding of the “Founding Fathers.”

While the social revolution of the 1960s prompted a further reevaluation of the Founders, particularly with regards to what has been seen as their failure to recognize fully the implications of their ideals for women and African Americans, Collier claims that popular literature was left virtually unchanged by new understandings of the Founding. Moreover, the intense ideological pressures of the Cold War era made it especially difficult for children’s literature to record these shifts in thought. Gail Murray has argued that children’s literature is an essentially “conservative medium . . . produced by and sold to adults to teach, persuade, convince, and solidify social values and establish mores for the rising generation” (xvi, 2). Collier ultimately dismisses *Johnny Tremain* as a standard Whig treatment of the war and an obvious product of the patriotic fervor of WWII: “Miss Forbes’ presentation of the American Revolution does not pass muster as serious, professional history. Not so much because it is so sharply biased, but because it is so simplistic” (138).

Nevertheless, *Johnny Tremain* has not been short of apologists wishing to come to the novel’s defense. Several critics have noted what they have seen as the complexity of Forbes’s text. Hamida Bosmajian argues that Forbes is “aware of the ambiguity in her intent, for her choice of several important images suggests a language of flaw and fault that implies a critique or at least a problematizing of events and characters” (55). M. Sarah Smedman, in a rejoinder to Collier, describes Forbes as “too thorough a historian to be as guilty of one-sidedness and oversimplification as some critics have charged” (86). She cites Johnny’s affectionate relationships with the British officer, Lt. Stranger, and the

British soldier, Pumkin, who only wishes to have a bit of land and be a farmer, as attempts to humanize the British forces. Smedman also notes the statement by a British medical officer that “we don’t like being here in Boston any better than you like having us. I’d rather be with my wife and children in Bath. We’re both in a tight spot. But if we keep our tempers and you keep your tempers, why, we can fix up things between us somehow. We’re all one people, you know” (Forbes 143). Earlier, Johnny had been upset by the assault of a Tory loyalist by some of the Sons of Liberty (126). Smedman ultimately vindicates *Johnny Tremain* as “authentic history, classic fiction” and accuses Collier of “neglecting aesthetic principles in order to fit the novel into a schematized classification of various views of the Revolution” (91).<sup>1</sup>

Joel Taxel’s 1983 content analysis of Revolutionary War literature for children remains a significant contribution to the scholarship on this genre. Taxel attempts to connect the narratives of these texts to the historical context of their composition in order to understand their content and structure. He notes that the publication of children’s fiction about the Founding clusters around four distinct periods between 1899 and 1976, the years covered by his study, and he finds key differences between the content of the novels published during these four clusters. Of particular note, however, are the consistencies between texts. Like Collier, Taxel finds nearly every novel in his sample to represent “a vision of the Revolution as a life and death struggle waged by valiant American colonists against a tyrannical king bent on the destruction of rights and liberties” (67), and, like Collier, he singles out *Johnny Tremain* as guilty of this offense and notable for its wide and persistent readership. Despite what he understands as the shift in American fears from fascism to communism in the years immediately following

World War II, Taxel finds no or little trace of the reference in these novels to an economic or materialistic basis of the Revolution (68).

Moreover, Taxel finds this genre marked by its repeated invocation of a coming-of-age narrative: “The initial, youthful weakness and dependence of the protagonist is a defining characteristic of this genre in that the action of virtually every novel results in the character’s transformation to a stronger, more independent individual” (69).

According to Taxel, the protagonist’s involvement in the Revolution occasions his or her maturation, with the experiences of war functioning as a rite-of-passage. It is in the rite-of-passage motif, he contends, that the structure and content of the narrative work in “informing and interpreting each other in ways that reinforce a particular perspective on the Revolution as an historical event” (71). In other words, it seems, the temptation to employ the rite-of-passage motif in children’s fiction, especially war literature for young readers, imposes strict limitations in the ways war is represented to children.

In this respect, children’s literature about the Revolution has resisted the scholarly revisions of American history because these new understandings would undermine the effective construction of the rite-of-passage narrative, which requires the transcendence of initial flaw and the movement from dependence to independence or from ignorance to understanding. While, as Taxel notes, the coding of the “villains,” father-figures, or motives of the war changes between the four periods he examines, in each of them this developmental movement is one of the most salient features of the story: “Whether or not commitment [to Revolutionary ideals] is an issue, the protagonist’s involvement with the Revolution continues to serve as a crucible which readies him or her for initiation into the adult world” (73). Even the handful of texts that attempt to address the ambiguities of the

Revolution represent the war as a rite-of-passage. In the earlier novels the Revolution functions “as the vehicle through which characters prove their readiness to enter a world whose values are accepted,” but in those written between 1967 and 1976, while they retain the passage to adulthood as a central concern, development is re-imagined to privilege an experienced-based understanding of the world rather than the internalization of readymade ideologies, Taxel argues. Thus, novels from both periods are characterized by this emphasis on rite of passage, maturation into adulthood, and the development of the individual alongside and in the context of similar processes at the level of the nation.<sup>2</sup>

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M. Sarah Smedman reports that “Johnny Tremain is so real to adolescent readers that they have returned from Boston surprised not to find his mother’s grave in the cemetery, disappointed to realize finally that the boy did not actually live” (86). I would argue that the narrative construction of the novel itself works to make disappointment and loss two of *Johnny Tremain*’s most salient features, and these qualities are key to understanding how the novel works both to represent and encourage childhood development. *Johnny Tremain* can be read as a series of anticlimaxes. Considering this repeated absence of narrative closure as representing a kind of loss, albeit a loss of something never possessed, I would like to examine how different kinds of loss—both in terms of the text’s very structure and the experiences of its characters—function in *Johnny Tremain* to provoke a melancholic reading of the novel.

Freud notes very early in his exploration of mourning and melancholia that these experiences are reactions “to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on”

("Mourning" 243). In his theory of melancholia, Freud suggests that in cases when a loved object is lost, libido formerly invested in that object can be withdrawn into one's own psyche in the form of an identification. The identification with the lost object functions as a way of holding onto the object, and its installation within the ego produces alterations in the character of that ego. Freud later speculates that this process of love, loss, and identification might in fact be a model of subject formation and development. Hence, given the ways in which the event and memory of the American Revolution are so marked by losses of different sorts, we can read *Johnny Tremain* as bearing the traces of melancholia.

Moreover, given the prominence of the coming-of-age narrative in fiction of the American Revolution, a text of this genre is particularly useful for examining the connection between melancholia and development in order to understand how the qualities of different kinds of lost objects affect developmental trajectories and outcomes. As Joel Taxel argues, the rite of passage experienced by the protagonists of Revolutionary War literature for children functions "as a metaphor for the experience of the nation itself" (71). Johnny Tremain clearly figures the nation in Forbes's novel, and thus understanding the process and outcome of his maturation illuminates not only expectations of the nation, but also the ways in which both individual and national development are often read through each other, with the health and vigor of one imagined as reciprocally affecting the health and vigor of the other.

As with most novels of war, *Johnny Tremain* is permeated with loss. Johnny is an orphan and an apprentice of Ephraim Lapham, whose family functions as a surrogate for Johnny. After the accident that maims his hand and renders him useless as a silversmith,

he is eventually abandoned by the Laphams, and thus loses them as well. When he attempts to reconnect with his mother's blood relations, he is coldly rebuffed. And one of the most critical losses in the novel, the one that finally compels Johnny to have his hand examined and to undergo the surgery that will repair it, is the death of his friend Rab, who assists Johnny when he is desperate and homeless. On another level, a novel of the American Revolution cannot help but also invoke the loss of the "mother country," and from the perspective of 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century readers in the era of "founders chic," the founding moment itself can evoke a nostalgic experience of loss with regards to the mythically pure and noble motives of the Revolution and to the optimism and hopefulness in the prospects of nation-building.

Peter Brooks, in considering how the functioning of narrative can be understood in terms of psychic functioning, uses Freud's theories of the pleasure principle and death drive to understand the workings of plot. The movements, repetitions, and divergences of plot as it unfolds toward an ending mirrors the development of the organism, guided by the pleasure principle, towards a desired death. The conventions of plot, he argues, work to bind textual energies and thus delay the gratification experienced by reaching the end, which is a kind of death. The beginning, though, presupposes this ending, and the reader initiates reading in anticipation of this end:

The sense of a beginning, then, must in some important way be determined by the sense of an ending. We might say that we are able to read present moments—in literature, and by extension, in life—as endowed with narrative meaning only because we read them in anticipation of the structuring power of those endings that will retrospectively give them order and significance of plot. (94)

Because the end is effectively a precondition of the beginning, then we might consider that the ending is assumed and hence present at the outset, and that the subsequent failure of the expected ending actually to appear represents a loss. The ending is “had” in that the certainty of it makes a notion of beginning possible, but when the text or a narrative sequence fails to end properly or to end as the reader might expect, then it is as if the reader discovers that the end was in a sense never had. This experience of disappointment, of discovering that one does not have what one thought or expected, can be understood as a kind of loss.

It is in this sense that I want to consider the repeated failure of *Johnny Tremain* to provide narrative closure as a kind of loss, the loss of an ending the reader anticipates and desires. According to Anita Tarr, “*Johnny Tremain* is a children’s novel, but it is not simple (as most children’s books are decidedly not simple)” (179). Indeed, the extent to which the novel resists a simplified representation of the American Revolution is heightened by its repeated refusal/failure to run its narrative course. It instead makes a number of decisive shifts that prevent the resolution of plots or the delivery of confrontation promised by the presentation of earlier narrative material. If *Johnny Tremain* represents the construction of a new nation premised on a set of principles or ideals laid out in the course of the Founding, and Johnny as a young white boy struggling against his family history in order to come of age figures that Founding, then both the novel’s structural peculiarities and the boy’s personal disappointments also represent something about the history and development of the U.S. as nation and the individual as citizen. Through its multiple narrative failures that potentially defy expectation, produce disappointment, and prompt the reader’s imagined fulfillment of the

novel's failed promises—those absences or gaps that demand to be filled—*Johnny Tremain* can be read as producing a reader-relation characterized by melancholia in which the reader is encouraged to reenact, reconstruct, or complete the narrative in order to supply the elements that would realize the expected climactic moments. In other words, the reader is left to be(come) what both Johnny and *Johnny Tremain* fail to be(come). In this way the novel triggers the reader's own melancholic development, which might account in part for the emotional resonance and canonical status of the novel.

John Rowe Townsend describes *Johnny Tremain* as a milestone of children's fiction, claiming that “in the years immediately after the Second World War, American historical fiction for young people stood in the shadow Esther Forbes's *Johnny Tremain*” (178). Townsend also claims that the novel has “true classic quality” despite noting its flawed execution: “The book's main fault is a slight lack of cohesion between its two components: the personal story of Johnny, the smart apprentice whose expectations are dashed by injury, and the broad general subject of the rebellion. The first few chapters might be the start of quite a different kind of book” (136). In fact, what I want to argue is that the novel's lack of coherence and failure to meet the expectations produced by the earlier chapters might both inadvertently create a useful entry point for reconsidering the way American history itself is represented and powerfully encourage the novel's young readers to reproduce Johnny's model citizenship even in ways that Johnny himself cannot. To understand how this works, we need to examine more closely what expectations the novel does construct and how the narrative fails to meet them, whereby

it produces a sense of loss that readers are left to manage through their own melancholic development.

The “different kind of book” to which Townsend alludes would no doubt deliver the plot of the family romance at which the early chapters of Forbes’s novel hint. We learn that Johnny, who knows nothing about his father, has been orphaned upon the death of his mother. Before her death she signed a contract with Mr. Lapham placing Johnny in his service as an apprentice silversmith. Now, Johnny sleeps in the attic of the modest Lapham house with two other boys; Mr. Lapham’s daughter-in-law and four granddaughters share another room below. Johnny is the most talented and responsible of the boys, and since the aging Mr. Lapham has grown increasingly concerned with the next life, he has left Johnny to worry about the daily operation of the business. Johnny develops an amorous friendship with Cilla, one of Mr. Lapham’s granddaughters, to whom he reveals that his mother was related to the Lytes, a wealthy merchant family. As proof, Johnny possesses a silver cup with the crest of the Lyte family, given to him by his mother with these instructions: “Johnny, if there is not one thing left for you and you have no trade and no health, and God Himself has turned away His face from you, then go to Merchant Lyte and show him your cup and tell him your mother told you before she died that you are kin to him. He will know the kinship...and in pity he may help you” (29). The reader can understandably expect that since the cup has been introduced into the story, something dire will occur forcing Johnny to reveal it, thereby enabling him to move from the difficult position of an indentured servant to one of acceptance into the privileged circle of the Lytes. Such a narrative would reproduce Freud’s notion of the

family romance nearly perfectly: a child fantasizes that he does not really belong with his ordinary parents and that his real parents are rich and powerful, perhaps royalty.

The novel disappoints these expectations, however. After the accident that renders Johnny useless as a silversmith, he is gradually forced out the Lapham house and onto the streets, where his pride prevents him from taking other work he can still manage with a crippled hand. Desperate, Johnny decides to approach the Lytes and reveal his possession of the cup. When he does so, Merchant Lyte proves unsympathetic and disbelieving, charging Johnny with theft. Only the intercession of Cilla and Rab, Johnny's new friend, manages to save him from being convicted and imprisoned. He then attempts to sell Merchant Lyte the cup, but Lyte simply takes it from him instead. Later, when Johnny has the opportunity to take back his cup after the Lytes flee their home to avoid mob violence, he refuses, disowning his connection to them in a move that critics have noted represents the colonial rebellion against England (Tarr 179).

At this point, the family romance arc of the novel becomes drastically subordinated to Johnny's increasing work on behalf of the Sons of Liberty. It emerges much later, and only briefly, when Lavinia, Merchant Lyte's daughter, confesses to Johnny her father's mistake and explains his mother's history. He learns that his mother was disowned for marrying a French Catholic being held in Boston as a prisoner of war, and that his father had changed his name because of the dishonor. The Lytes thought Johnny's mother died in France and knew nothing of Johnny's existence. Because Johnny possesses his father's true name, they do not recognize him. Following this revelation, the loyalist Lytes leave for England in the hopes that the colonies will lose the war. Johnny, however, continues to participate in the Revolution as the novel unfolds.

The family romance plot never fully climaxes and is ultimately overshadowed by Johnny's work in the service of the Rebellion. Johnny never confronts merchant Lyte, positioned in the novel as a potential villain, once he learns his true origin, and Merchant Lyte simply vanishes from the book without having suffered any consequences of his rejection of Johnny.

In fact, a number of potential villains are introduced into the novel, and yet none of them fulfills the narrative expectation of providing Johnny with the opportunity for heroic confrontation and triumph. When Johnny maims his hand while making the silver sugar bowl for John Hancock, it is his fellow apprentice Dove who hands him the cracked crucible responsible for the accident. Dove is depicted as lazy and mean-spirited in contrast to Johnny, who is hard-working and earnest, even if prideful. After the accident, when Dove must assume Johnny's responsibility's despite his inferior skill while Johnny merely looks on unable to handle the tools, Dove taunts him by asking for help: "Thank you, Master Johnny. I know I'm not as good as you are. Won't you show me just how I should hold my crimping iron?" (44). Later, during the Boston Tea Party, Dove is spotted by Johnny dropping tea into his pants rather than overboard in an attempt to steal it and profit personally from its sale, thereby marring the symbolic act the other Rebels are undertaking. Johnny swears to get revenge on Dove for the accident, declaring, "If I have to, I'll wait ten years to get that Dove" (49). Nevertheless, when Dove reappears in the service of the British army and Johnny notices the way the Redcoats abuse him, he begins to develop a protective posture towards Dove. His resentment fizzles: "He was like a man who owns a dull, mean dog. He may punish it himself, but resents it if anyone else punishes it. For better or worse Dove was now his own private property" (198).

Ultimately, Dove slowly fades from the book and never proves to be an adequate foil to Johnny.

In addition to Dove and Merchant Lyte, Forbes introduces yet another potential villain, Johnny's replacement in the Lapham household. Given Ephraim Lapham's age and Dove's lack of talent, the family must search for someone to assume the duties of the chief silversmith. Mrs. Lapham discovers Tweedie, and when Johnny meets him, he is repulsed: "He had a queer, squeaky voice. Johnny disliked him even more than he expected. Such impotence, such timidity in a grown man irritated the boy" (58). Not only does Tweedie replace Johnny as Lapham's main help, but Mrs. Lapham also plans for him to run the business and marry Cilla, the daughter whom Johnny loves. None of her daughters will submit to marrying Tweedie, however, and Mrs. Lapham must finally do it herself to keep the business in the family. The marriage is mentioned casually by Cilla while talking to Johnny, and thus Tweedie never fully materializes as a romantic rival to Johnny, who simply loses interest in confronting Tweedie after his marriage to Mrs. Lapham. And although Tweedie becomes the silversmith Johnny wishes to be, Johnny finds his work in the Rebellion more meaningful anyway. As with Dove, the need to confront and triumph over Tweedie dissolves.

Esther Forbes introduces a number of possible romantic triangles, but none builds more than the slightest tension or results in a climactic confrontation between rival lovers. In addition to the Johnny-Cilla-Tweedie triangle, there is another involving Cilla, Johnny, and Lavinia Lyte, whom Johnny finds remarkably beautiful. Lavinia, as the only child of a wealthy merchant, is spoiled and snobbish, yet Johnny finds himself captivated by her whenever their paths cross. She is always quite cold and curt with Johnny, whom

she treats like a servant boy. The tall, thin, dark-haired Lavinia is clearly established as a contrast to the humble, hard-working, and conventional Cilla: "If, the winter of seventy-three, Johnny Tremain had a romantic attachment to anyone, it was to that black-haired and, as far as he knew, black-hearted, bad-tempered, disagreeable conceivable 'cousin' of his Miss Lavinia Lyte. Certainly not Priscilla Lapham" (123). Nevertheless, no romance develops between Johnny and Lavinia, the two never secretly court, and his physical attraction to her succinctly ends when he learns definitively that she is his mother's first cousin. And while the narrative might tease the reader with the possibility of a confrontation between these two women over Johnny's affection, no such confrontation happens. When Lavinia "adopts" Isannah, Cilla's younger sister, as a plaything, Cilla accepts employment as Lavinia's servant to keep an eye on her. But when Lavinia decides to take the increasingly obnoxious child to London in order to groom her as an actress, Cilla hardly puts up any resistance, despite her heartbreak.

The novel includes yet a third aborted romantic triangle that positions Cilla between Johnny and Rab. Johnny of course admires the older boy, who helps Johnny find work and treats him kindly after the accident with his hand. Rab seems calm, mysterious, and mature to Johnny, and he finds himself jealous of Rab's way with women. He notices that all the girls at a country dance want to be with Rab, while Johnny looks on in disapproval (111). When Johnny returns to the printing shop to find Rab and Cilla enjoying each other's company, his jealousy is enflamed, but so are his feelings for Cilla: "She was so pretty Johnny could hardly think where all this prettiness came from, and sourly he thought it came from Rab. He had a way of lighting people up, showing them at their best" (147). Later that evening Rab walks Cilla home while

Johnny waits, but when Rab does not return immediately, Johnny becomes worried and angry. Johnny learns later that Rab meets secretly with Cilla, taking her for walks and buying her sweets, but when Cilla confesses this to him she also implies that she prefers Johnny to Rab, and the young men never confront each other over their shared interest in Cilla. The reader never hears from Rab himself about the possible romance, and when the British attack Lexington, any possibility of Rab and Cilla meeting again ends. Just as with its villains, the novel's romantic triangles never provide the opportunity for Johnny to confront his rival and prove victorious.

As with these story arcs, the culmination of the novel's primary developmental narrative is merely suggested. Although this narrative builds towards Johnny's coming-of-age, the key event that would signal his maturation will occur, the reader can only assume, after the novel's end. At first, Johnny is described as an impatient and prideful bully. One of the reasons he inspires Dove's animosity is because the younger Johnny orders around the members of the Lapham household. The pious Mr. Lapham repeatedly warns Johnny about the dangers of pride, reading to him from the Bible about the sin and judgment of the prideful. When Johnny maims his hand while breaking the Sabbath, which he feels is necessary to complete John Hancock's order, Mr. Lapham considers this the punishment of god. Not only is he prevented from performing work that suits his talents, but he must also bear the stares, pity, and disgust his scarred hand evokes in others. Once Johnny is thrust out onto the streets, he must learn to fend for himself, and thus his pride is slowly broken. Thanks to Rab, Johnny is hired to deliver newspapers for Rab's uncle, and through this work he comes to be associated with the Sons of Liberty in Boston, who begin to use Johnny to deliver messages. Johnny finds Rab to be a good

influence, since Rab encourages him to treat others more kindly and provides him with work Johnny finds meaningful.

As the momentum of the conflict between colonists and crown builds, the reader is slowly led to believe that Johnny will play a key role in the Revolution, and that through his participation in the War he will master his temper and pride and achieve maturity. As a result of his association with Rab, Johnny finds himself at a number of key events in the early days of the Rebellion. First he participates in the Boston Tea Party, and later he is present at a meeting of the Sons of Liberty where James Otis gives his rousing speech about the reason for the Revolution: “We give all we have, lives, property, safety, skills ... we fight, we die, for a simple thing. Only that a man can stand up” (192).<sup>3</sup> Johnny even delivers key bits of intelligence to Paul Revere, who then rides off to warn the Minutemen about British activity. After the fighting breaks out at Lexington and Concord, Johnny carries word about British troop movements in and out of Boston to Rebel leaders. Through his participation in these significant events, Johnny will overcome the flaws of his childhood self.

The final chapter of the novel, “A Man Can Stand Up,” indicates more explicitly the gendered nature of Johnny’s development. While acquiring a British uniform to slip across enemy lines, Johnny is asked by the sympathetic servant of the Lyte family whether he is old enough to be putting himself in danger. Johnny tells her that he is sixteen: ““And what’s that—a boy or a man?” He laughed. ‘A boy in time of peace and a man in time of war’” (249). But despite his reply, Johnny does not yet prove his manhood until he learns of Rab’s death. This is the first key event in Johnny’s transformation into an adult citizen-soldier. When he first learns that Rab has been

wounded, the worried Johnny is told by Dr. Warren, “Rab played a man’s part. Look that you do the same” (261). Even on his deathbed, Rab’s manliness is upheld as a model for Johnny.

As he lay dying, Rab and Johnny share a final tender moment, and Rab excitedly bequeaths to Johnny the musket he has carefully refurbished. Rab himself has not been given the opportunity to fire it, but he hopes that it will serve Johnny well. Of course, with his maimed hand, Johnny is prevented from firing a weapon. Dr. Warren gets the first good look at the hand as Johnny fingers Rab’s gun. For the first time since the accident he feels free of shame and permits Dr. Warren to examine him. The Doctor explains that Johnny’s thumb became affixed to his palm by scar tissue because the burn was treated improperly. Dr. Warren is able to determine that it can be repaired by cutting through the scar tissue in order to free the thumb. Rab’s sacrifice provides Johnny with the courage to allow the operation—without anesthetic. Johnny insists he doesn’t even need anyone to hold his arm still during the operation, which will enable him to fire a gun and hence take Rab’s place on the battlefield as a soldier.

Thus, Rab’s death directly leads to this turning point in Johnny’s development. His wound will finally be healed, and he will be able to assume his roles as a soldier and a man. The exchange of the weapon symbolizes and facilitates Johnny’s transformation, and that exchange cannot take place, nor does Johnny have a compelling model of sacrifice, until he loses the friend he loves. Rab’s death opens up a space for Johnny to occupy, which he can only do by becoming like Rab, or like what Rab failed to become. Johnny’s maturation is therefore achieved through love, loss, and identification. In this way, Johnny’s expected development into a man, a soldier, and—through the success of

the Revolution—a citizen of the United States is a melancholic one. That is, through his attachment to and loss of his friend Rab, Johnny is propelled into adulthood, which is signaled by the suppression of his pride in allowing his hand to be examined and the demonstration of his courage by submitting to the surgery. This achievement might very well not occur without Rab's death as a catalyst and without the figure of Rab as a lost object for Johnny to introject, thereby enabling his (re)formation.

Nevertheless, it seems crucial to note that the novel ends before the surgery takes place and this transformation occurs. This is, of course, consistent with the numerous other absences of narrative climax. As we've seen, the novel repeatedly constructs expectations without delivering the critical event that would complete the narrative arc. And as I have suggested, this quality of the novel has the capacity to produce profound effects on the reader and the reader relation. With respect to the reader, these failed expectations can themselves function as losses. According to Freud, melancholia occurs in cases when the libido must be withdrawn from the object "owing to a real slight or disappointment" and that rather than simply displacing the free libido onto another object it is "withdrawn into the ego" ("Mourning" 249). This withdrawal of libido into the ego serves to produce an identification with the lost object. The ego then takes the place of what is lost and can carry on for what is lost. Since Rab is lost to Johnny, he can become like his friend by taking his place as a soldier and as a man. His inheritance of Rab's gun literalizes this process of replacement. But since the novel ends before the expectation of Johnny as soldier and citizen is realized, the loss, or foreclosure, of this conclusion has the potential to trigger the reader's disappointment and hence melancholic reaction to the novel itself. In order to complete *Johnny Tremain*, the reader must in his/her own psyche

become what Johnny was meant to be. In fact, every narrative failure or disappointment can be read as prompting the reader to enact its completion.<sup>4</sup>

What I want to argue is that the extent to which readers have responded enthusiastically to *Johnny Tremain*, and critics and awards committees have praised its virtues and impact, is a function of the novel's capacity to prompt its readers' melancholic identification and development. Arguably, it is this quality of the novel to which readers powerfully respond. Given the ways in which Johnny's expected development is coded in gendered and nationalized terms, the novel cannot help but prompt the (re)formation of analogously gendered and nationalized readers. The work of the text is to encourage the reader to become an adult citizen, and a particular kind of citizen, of the nation we see being birthed in *Johnny Tremain*. The extent to which such a subject is desired at all no doubt fuels the appreciation of a text that works to form such a subject.

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That this novel of the American Revolution is ultimately about an unrealized possibility, about a development that proves incomplete and that remains as a potential to be achieved by others, is what makes *Johnny Tremain* a compelling representation of not only the founding moment, but also the United States itself. That is, the history of the United States is perhaps best understood as a history of always unrealized potential, a process of ongoing efforts to deliver on the promises of the Revolutionary ideals. Some of those ideals that now seem central or foundational to the United States—ideas of such civil liberties like the freedom of speech and religion, or the very practice of democracy through universal suffrage, not to mention the notion of “liberty for all”—are and

continue to be contested, achieved, defeated or undermined, while at the same time they are retrospectively imagined as having been present from the nation's very inception in the same way that readers might recall *Johnny Tremain* as being "about" a boy who fights in the Revolution, something Johnny never actually does.

In fact, *Johnny Tremain* is contemporaneous with or even predates the national developments often assumed in the popular imaginary as having been complete at the nation's founding moment. The history of free speech in the U.S. is particularly telling. The Sedition Act of 1798, passed by the Revolutionary generation and signed into law by John Adams, made illegal the writing, printing, uttering, or publishing of anything deemed scandalous or malicious about Congress or the President, and it further barred any speech that would bring these government officials into contempt or disrepute or that would excite resistance or opposition to any laws.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the freedom of speech would evolve very little and lack the prominence in public discourse it would possess in the 20<sup>th</sup>. In the context of World War I, the severe restriction of speech would reappear in the form of the Sedition Act of 1918, which prohibited any speech deemed disloyal to or critical of the form of government, the Constitution, or military forces and activities. It further barred support for any country with which the U.S. was at war. Though repealed in 1921, the free speech debates engendered by protests surrounding the First World War would trigger some of the most significant reevaluations of the First Amendment in American history.<sup>6</sup>

The decade following the publication of *Johnny Tremain* would come to be remembered as one of the most critical periods in the conceptualization of free speech in the U.S. In 1947, as the Cold War was ignited in the wake of World War II, the House

Committee on Un-American Activities began holding hearings into the Communist ties of certain Hollywood figures. Joseph McCarthy would extend the investigation into the activities and speech of communists and civil rights leaders in 1951. Though McCarthy would be discredited by 1954, the intense hostility to speech deemed un-American would persist until the growing momentum and influence of the civil rights movements in the 1960s and 70s would demand the protection of speech critical of government actions and dominant ideologies, especially concerning gender and race.

The notion of universal suffrage, now thought fundamental to United States citizenship and a legacy of Jacksonian democracy, only gradually unfolded over the course of U.S. history and came to exist in its most recent form during the 1960s. In the election of 1792, nine of fifteen states had property requirements for voting. Three others required voters to be taxpayers, while only three had no property or tax requirements at all (West 116-117). It would be another 80 years before the 1870 ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment granted suffrage to black men. Women, who had possessed the right to vote in some colonies prior to the Revolution, gradually lose that right state by state between 1777 and 1807. Not until the final decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> do women begin re-winning the right to vote in some states. The Nineteenth Amendment, granting women the right to vote in all states, is ratified in 1920. With the 1964 ratification of the Twenty-Fourth Amendment prohibiting poll taxes for federal elections, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 intending to add further enforcement of the Fifteenth Amendment, and the 1966 Supreme Court decision (*Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections*) invalidating poll taxes in state elections the practice of universal suffrage was thought to be ensured for adult citizens. These key developments,

along with a series of court decisions upholding the 1965 Voting Rights Act, finally constructed a notion of voting rights that had not existed at the time of the Founding.

One of the recurring questions about the Founding has been about the extent to which it failed to extend its ideals to slaves. At the very least the Founding articulated the ideas that would later be mobilized in the service of emancipation and civil rights, and in this way the Founding created an expectation on which it failed to deliver immediately. Rather than the exception, however, to the promise of the Founding, the relationship between Revolutionary ideals and the problem of slavery might be taken as emblematic of the accomplishment of the Revolution, one that Forbes represents through the very narrative structure of *Johnny Tremain*: the construction of a possibility to be realized by others.

As Hamida Bosmajian notes in her reading of *Johnny Tremain*, the cracked crucible responsible for Johnny's injury is a key symbol in Forbes's novel: "The real slaves remain marginalized, a crack in the crucible the colonists themselves were conscious of in their fight for liberty and independence" (55). Although Forbes fails to address the issue of slavery in any direct or meaningful way, Bosmajian argues that the occasional reference on the part of the Sons of Liberty to their "enslavement" to the British is meant to be taken as Forbes's consciousness of the ways slavery represents a failure in the promise of the Revolution.<sup>7</sup> Of course, the question of slavery would preoccupy much of 19<sup>th</sup>-century American thought and would be a central factor in many of its key political debates and cultural trends, including the expansion Westward, industrialization (with its need for labor), and the evolution of civil rights. Moreover,

race, race relations, and civil rights would come to dominate domestic politics and public life over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Cornel West ask, “Who could imagine the American Century,” by which they mean the 20<sup>th</sup>, “without the African-American experience at its core?” (xii). They cite contributions to music, literature, political thought, film, sports, and comedy to support the centrality of African Americans to American culture.<sup>8</sup> Gates and West argue that one of the most significant aspects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the expansion of “democratic sensibilities,” both in the U.S. and abroad, and they note the ways in which the African American experience has played a defining role in shaping how the U.S. understands democracy and democratic citizenship:

The ethical precondition for democracy is to allow every voice of the citizenry to be heard in the basic decisions that shape the destiny of its people. The political prerequisite for democracy is to secure the rights and liberties for every citizen, especially the most vulnerable ones. And the economic requirement for democracy is fair opportunity to every citizen. The African American Century was first and foremost the black struggle for these ethical, political, and economic conditions of democracy in the face of vicious antidemocratic practices. (xiii)

If by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century access to public education, for instance, and the expectation that it would provide a means of upward mobility seemed intrinsic to American life, this can be seen as one effect of the legacy of slavery and the long civil rights struggle on the part of African Americans. First literacy, and then public education, would be seen as key access points for the promises of American ideals, and this vision would provide one of the most significant influences on the widespread faith

in education in American culture (Quarles 197). Here again, though these developments are absent at the founding moment, their possibility is suggested and their enactment is left to others who experience that disappointment as a loss or incompleteness to be corrected.

This pattern, in which the loss or failure of one—be it person or nation—occasions the development of another through a relation of identification, is a version of melancholia that is reproduced by the narrative of *Johnny Tremain*. To participate in the construction of a new nation is for Johnny to construct himself. That is, to collaborate in the work of nation-building provides Johnny with an external model for his own self-fashioning. Neither process sees its completion in the novel, and thus the reader is left to imagine the expected ending. That imaginative act necessarily involves the production in the reader's own psyche of those images, and given the positive affect associated with the projected outcomes—Johnny as man, soldier, and citizen—it is difficult for the reader who is reading sympathetically not to view them as desirable also or to invest libidinally in these psychical models. In imagining these outcomes there is also the impulse to imagine them in their ideal manifestation, and in this impulse is the potential for the reader to identify with the ideals and to attempt their enactment. Perhaps it is no mere coincidence, then, that the publication of *Johnny Tremain*, given the novel's work to encourage precisely this kind of melancholic development, occurred during the childhood of a generation that would demand the U.S. better deliver on the ideals of the founding moment.

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*My Brother Sam Is Dead* by Christopher and James Lincoln Collier centers around a 14 year-old boy named Tim, whose brother Sam has decided to leave college in order to join the Revolutionary army. Their father, however, is a Tory loyalist who opposes the Revolution. This poses a dilemma for Tim, who must decide whether to align himself with his father or the older brother he admires. Ultimately, both his brother and father are killed. In the confusion of war, his father is captured and dies in British prison ship, while Sam is falsely accused of stealing his family's own cattle and executed by his own army for pillaging. The fact of their needless deaths despite the sacrifices each man makes on behalf of his respective cause embitters Tim, who rejects an allegiance to either the British or Americans and instead comes to condemn war itself as a means of resolving conflict. Nevertheless, by the end of the novel, the War is over and Tim is now an American, left to ponder over the means by which his eventual prosperity is purchased and to question the motives and ideals upon which the new nation is founded.

*My Brother Sam Is Dead* was designated a Newbery Honor book in 1975, thus making it a sort of rival to *Johnny Tremain* in the canon of children's fiction about the American Revolution. According to Christopher Collier, he convinced his brother to collaborate on *My Brother Sam* in order to "fill a historiographic gap" left by the failure of children's literature to contend adequately with 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship on the Founding and the War (132). That scholarship had not only called into question the economic motives of the Founders, but also examined the ways in which the Founding arguably failed to actualize the promises seemingly embedded in the rhetoric of its foundational documents. The very different contexts in which these novels were

produced, and their starkly contrasting tones, further highlight the different motives of their authors. Whereas *Johnny Tremain* claimed the reason for the Revolution was so that “a man can stand up”—a lofty-sounding goal that invokes the importance of human dignity and the value of justice—*My Brother Sam* seeks to expose the ways war itself undermines precisely such notions.

Published in 1974, a year after the final withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam and the same year that Nixon resigns as President, *My Brother Sam* reflects a much darker and more critical view of war and is more cynical about the motives espoused for it. In a key scene that dramatizes Tim’s maturation, he questions his brother’s reasons for remaining in the army after their father’s death even though Tim and his mother need him at home. Sam explains to them that he has a duty to his country and that they should feel grateful others are dying for them:

For the first time in my life I knew that Sam was wrong about something; I knew that I understood something better than he did. . . . He was staying in the army because he *wanted* to say in the army, not because of duty or anything else. He liked the excitement of it. Oh, I guessed he was miserable a lot of the time when he was cold and hungry and maybe being shot at, but still, he was part of something big, he thought that what he was doing was important. It felt good to be a part of it, and I knew that was why he didn’t want to come home. (162-63)

Recognizing this about his brother makes Tim feel like Sam’s equal. Their mother simply tells Sam that she “doesn’t need anybody’s death,” and her growing apathy in response to Sam’s plight as a condemned prisoner of his own army only demonstrates her feelings about the War’s absurdity. In the wake of Vietnam, the novel rejects an image of

war in which the virtuous are pitted against the evil. Tim concludes, "It seemed to me that everybody was to blame, and I decided that I wasn't going to be on anybody's side anymore: neither of them was right" (167). Though Tim makes a pathetic and doomed attempt to rescue his brother, he must eventually watch helplessly as Sam is executed, a death that signals the end of an innocent and idealistic representation of the United States itself. We are all the children of Tim, the novel suggests, and Uncle Sam is dead.

Despite these significant differences between *Johnny* and *My Brother Sam*, the latter represents its protagonist's development in ways quite similar to its predecessor. Tim slowly matures over the course of the novel as he experiences a process of attachment/love, loss, and identification. Here again, the melancholic development of boy and nation are instructive. Tim's two key attachment figures are his father and brother, and both are lost. It is the loss of his father that proves the first significant catalyst to Tim's maturation. Because of Sam's absence, Tim must accompany his father for the first time on a 40-mile cattle drive. The profits from their sale of cattle are essential to the operation of their small tavern. During the return trip when Tim's father rides ahead to scout the trail, he does not return and is presumed to have been killed by highwaymen. Tim must complete the trip home by himself, and after he arrives he feels a change instantly: "So there were a lot of changes in our lives, but the biggest was the one that was happening inside myself. Ever since I had got the wagon home by myself I hadn't felt like a boy anymore. You don't think that things really happen overnight, but this one did" (132). Tim takes as a sign of his maturation that fact that he no longer complains about work and begins to plan what needs to be done around the home and tavern.

Another sign of his development, and one that signals the melancholic relation to the loss of his father, is Tim's increasingly loyalist sentiments. Despite the family's uncertainty about the fate of his father, Tim blames the Rebels and the War, and he even begins feeling angry towards Sam. He begins to wonder, "What had the English government ever done against me?" (131). And when the British Army marches through town, Tim tells one of the soldiers, "'We're mostly Tories here.' Suddenly I realized that I was. Father's capture had done that" (139). Both in terms of roles and politics, the loss of his father is manifested in Tim as an intensified identification that enables him to assume his father's place. It is this process of melancholic development that arguably makes it possible for Tim, who otherwise worships his older brother, to articulate to himself a criticism of his brother's insistence on remaining with the army despite the family's hardships.

Nevertheless, Tim's strongest expressions of affection are for his brother, and so Sam's absence and eventual death cannot help but also produce profound effects on him. When Sam first arrives home wearing his new uniform, Tim cannot keep his eyes off of him and recalls his intense envy of Sam. Throughout the novel he repeatedly thinks about curling up in bed with Sam and listening to his stories (9, 43, 52): "I still hadn't made up my mind which side I was on in the war, and I didn't care whether Sam was a patriot or a Tory or what. All I could think about was snuggling up to him and listening to him talk" (43). Later Tim thinks that the worst part of the war is missing his brother, and when his cousin asks him which side he would fight on, Tim thinks the British before worrying that it might mean he would have to fire at Sam (63, 103).

However intense his affection for his brother, Tim also feels a striking ambivalence. After their father's death Tim begins to blame Sam for the family's hardships. He notes that his parents had forgiven Sam for joining the Rebel army, but he wonders whether he is able to do the same. After deciding that neither side is right, he begins to consider the conditions being faced by the soldiers at Valley Forge: "From what we'd heard they were practically starving and hadn't any clothes. I was just as glad; it made me hope that the Rebels were at the end of their rope and would have to give up pretty soon and end this terrible war. I didn't even mind that Sam might be suffering with cold and hunger. It would serve him right" (168). Later, when the Revolutionary army is camped in his town, Tim is hesitant to provide information about where needed goods can be obtained, even when Sam asks for his help. Tim's ambivalence about Sam and the cause he represents not only distinguishes *My Brother Sam* from *Johnny Tremain* in its approach to war and to the Revolution, but it suggests a very different way of thinking about the nation itself.

In Freud's earliest articulations of his theory of melancholia, he explains the key role played by ambivalence in this process. According to Freud, "The loss of a love-object is an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself effective and come into the open" (251). He calls ambivalence a pre-condition of melancholia and suggests that the self-reproaches of the melancholic are the effect of the introjection of the lost object into the ego. What was felt for the lost object, including hostility and disappointment, is now directed inwards against oneself. Ambivalence, then, is the key factor that distinguishes melancholia from mourning in Freud's initial formulations and it is what leads him to rethink this process as the means by which the

critical faculty of the ego is formed. That is, the understanding of melancholia as a model for the formation of subjects emerges out of Freud's theories about the role of ambivalence towards love-objects in the ability to evaluate oneself.

Ambivalence plays a crucial role in *My Brother Sam Is Dead*. The novel concludes with an epilogue in which the now 64 year-old Tim looks back on the War and considers, "Somehow, even fifty years later, I keep thinking that there might have been another way, beside war, to achieve the same end" (211). He notes, however, that his life has been a successful one. He learns a trade, marries, has children, starts a business, and co-founds a bank. It is clear that Tim profits from the success of the Revolution, which he notes: "Free of British domination, the nation has prospered and I along with it" (211). Tim is conflicted about the War, about his brother, and ultimately, about his new nation. The means by which it is achieved are bound up for him with the country itself. If his brother is first equated with the nation, and Tim's claim to adult American citizenship is purchased by Sam, with whom he clearly identifies, then Tim himself comes to stand in for the nation, much like Johnny Tremain. Through this process of melancholic development, Tim can transform his ambivalence into a faculty of self-criticism and self-evaluation, and this seems to be one of the central lessons of *My Brother Sam Is Dead*.

Published at a moment of national crisis in the years following an intensified reevaluation of the United States and the ideals on which it was presumably founded, *My Brother Sam* foregrounds the importance and value of ambivalence to a functioning democracy. Rather than an uncritical acceptance of the nation or the ideals associated with it, ambivalence enables the melancholic citizen to avoid the kind of patriotic fervor that can lead to a dangerous and oppressive jingoism or a stubbornly unself-reflexive

attitude that makes positive change difficult or impossible. The democratic process itself requires the kind of critical faculty and space for fluctuation that an ambivalent posture produces. The novel's sympathy clearly rests with Tim, who embodies this process of melancholic development through his survival of the War and achievement of adulthood, and in doing so it proposes that melancholia as a national condition is necessary to the survival and maturity of the very nation.

While *Johnny Tremain* seeks to prompt the reader's melancholic development and civic engagement through its narrative structure, *My Brother Sam* demonstrates the crucial role of ambivalence to the process of melancholia and national development. In order to realize the possibilities proposed by the Founders, the nation itself, as a collectivity of its citizens, has identified with the Founding moment as a loved object that has been lost; as a set of ideals, it can only disappoint. Rather than rejecting the ambivalence engendered by the failures of the Founders and their generation, or rejecting the very idea that the Founders might have been imperfect, *My Brother Sam* suggests that this ambivalence be accepted as making possible the self-critical faculty necessary to recognize flaws, or cracks in the crucible, and to mobilize the motivation necessary to fix them. If there is any danger in "founders chic," it is the idealization of the Founders that would undo the work of ambivalence that has proved so useful over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ambivalence, as a source of the ability to think critically about the failure to meet an ideal, has fueled the struggles that have sought to actualize those promises that are the legacy of the Founding moment.

## Notes

1. John Rowe Townsend concurs with these critics who read *Johnny* as more complex. He writes, "As a British commentator, I have to observe that *Johnny Tremain*, though undoubtedly inspirational, does not seem to me to be one-sided" (178). C. Anita Tarr also rejects the characterization of *Johnny* as simplistic. "Collier's analysis is, simply, wrong," she writes. Tarr also describes the novel as "antiwar in tone" and notes that Forbes was a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian with knowledge of "the intricacies of interpreting historical events" (179).
2. One of the only books in Taxel's sample that lacks the rite-of-passage motif and also one of the few to incorporate "Progressive-Revisionist" understandings of the American Revolution is Sally Edwards' *When the World's On Fire* (1972). It is the only book Taxel examines that contains an African-American protagonist or confronts directly the paradox posed by the retention of slavery at the Founding moment. Of note is the fact that *When the World's On Fire* is now out-of-print.
3. A number of critics have commented on Otis's speech. Tarr reads it as a "reaffirmation of Satan's rebellious spirit" in the tradition of *Paradise Lost* (182), whereas Taxel takes it as evidence of the novel's portrayal of the War as an "ideologically motivated struggle" as opposed to an economic one (67). Bosmajian argues that such "simplistically formulated slogans" need to be called into question (55).
4. Alternatively or coincidentally, the novel might prompt a kind of lingering desire for what Johnny will become that is experienced as a desire for the other to enact Johnny's development. In other words, I do not want to suggest that the novel produces merely a single reader relation characterized by identification or only identification. It might also work to induce desire either as an alternative to or alongside of that identification.
5. The Sedition Act was allowed to expire in 1800.
6. For example, the case of *Schenck v. United States* (1919) decided against Schenck for distributing anti-war literature to men of draft age during World War I. It is the decision of this case that Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes articulated the "clear and present danger" test that set a bar to the restriction of free speech. Although in the case of *Abrams v. United States* (1919) the Supreme Court upheld the convictions of Jacob Abrams and other anarchists for distributing literature criticizing U.S. troop involvement in defending Czarist Russia against the Bolsheviks, the Holmes/Brandeis dissent proposed the "marketplace of ideas" notion that argued for the right to publicly present ideas for the consideration of others. This dissent called for a stricter interpretation of the "clear and present danger" test. These cases, along with *Debs v. United States* (1919), all decided in 1919, marked a turning point in the interpretation of the First Amendment in the years following World War I.

7. The novel, however, seems itself ambiguous on the matter of race and racism. After Rab lectures Johnny about his impetuosity, Johnny decides to try thinking before speaking. His first test comes when a slave girl accidentally douses him with the dishwater she flings out the kitchen door:

If he had not counted ten, he would have told her what he thought of her, black folk in general, and thrown in a few cutting remark about her master—the most powerful man in Boston. But counting to ten had its rewards. Sukey apologized handsomely. In that past he had never given anyone time to apologize. Her “oh, little master, I’s e so sorry! Now you just step right into de kitchen and I’ll dry up dem close—and you can eat an apple pie as I dries,” pleased him. (109)

Johnny’s begrudging acceptance of the self-deprecating apology of a slave, who has little choice but to appease this white boy, functions here as evidence of his growing maturity. However much an attempt at historical accuracy in depicting this interaction, the novel’s the lesson here, for either Johnny or the reader, is not a terribly progressive one with regards to race relations if Johnny can congratulate himself for simply not abusing a slave girl while offering little comment on her slave status.

8. To this list we might add the more “everyday,” but essential, contributions of child-rearing and domestic work.

## Chapter 5

### The Holocaust in American Children's Culture: *Number the Stars* and *The Upstairs Room*

A substantial number of books for children and adolescents have appeared in English about the Holocaust. Edward Sullivan lists 142 fictional accounts and 15 picture books in his bibliography, *The Holocaust in Literature for Youth*. Many of these books have been published in the United States and written by American authors. Historian Tim Cole argues that the Holocaust is “probably the most talked about and off-represented event of the twentieth century,” and I want to suggest that this has been especially true with regards to children's culture (3). In fact, along with the Revolutionary War, the Holocaust seems to be one of the most written about historical events in American literature for young people. The Holocaust is a subject widely taught in secondary schools throughout the U.S., and the books listed in Sullivan's bibliography are often introduced in an educational setting for the purpose of instruction.

A corollary phenomenon has been the publication of numerous literary studies of such texts. Given the relatively recent emergence of children's literature as a field of scholarly research, the number of conference panels, journal articles, and book-length studies of Holocaust literature for children seems noteworthy, especially in contrast to the relative dearth of scholarship on even some of the most widely read and valued children's books on unrelated subjects.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, a variety of professionals who concern themselves with youth—ranging from educators to fiction writers and university scholars—have invested the Holocaust with tremendous significance vis-à-vis American children.

Since strictly speaking the Holocaust is not an event in which the United States had much direct involvement, it is not necessarily intuitive that the U.S. would produce so many books for any audience on this topic, nor is it intuitive that the Holocaust would come to be understood as so integral to the education of American children. In recent years scholars have begun to explore the reasons for this phenomenon. Peter Novick wonders, “why in 1990s America—fifty years after the fact and thousands of miles from its site—the Holocaust has come to loom so large in our culture” (1). Alvin Rosenfeld notes that “while significant attention has been focused on the Holocaust in recent years, we would do well to remind ourselves that during the war itself and for a number of years afterward, the fate of Europe’s Jews under Hitler was not a matter of central concern within American political and culture life” (123). What is clear is that at the end of the millennium, the Holocaust did attain a notable prominence in the United States that was marked by the production of important novels, films, scholarly works, and museums on the subject.

Rosenfeld uses the phrase “the Americanization of the Holocaust” to describe what happens to the facticity of the event when filtered through a cultural grid of American intelligibility. “The Holocaust has had to enter American consciousness,” he writes, “in ways that Americans could readily understand on their own terms” (125). This notion has had a strong impact on the field of Holocaust Studies, as scholars have reexamined key texts about the Holocaust for how they contribute to this trend. In fact, the number of articles and books published in recent years that explore this phenomenon is staggering. In addition to Rosenfeld’s article, Hilene Flanzbaum edited a collection of essays in 1999 gathered under the title, *The Americanization of the Holocaust*. That same

year, Peter Novick published *The Holocaust in American Life*, and Tim Cole released *Selling the Holocaust*. Norman G. Finkelstein's *The Holocaust Industry*, which deals in part with the prominence of the Holocaust in the U.S., was an enormously controversial bestseller in 2000, and the very next year Alan Mintz came out with his own study, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America*. Flanzbaum poses this question in the introduction to her edited volume: "How has the Holocaust been interpreted through an American ideological framework?" (6); each of these works takes up the multiple, sometimes-conflicting approaches and answers to this question.

Some of the first discussions of this Americanization of the Holocaust centered on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Michael Berenbaum, the Project Director who oversaw the creation of the museum, writes that the "Holocaust is only 'Americanized' insofar as it is explained to Americans and related to their history" (qtd. in Rosenfeld 129). Rosenfeld, however, insists that the creation of the museum was influenced by "the ideological tendencies that inform American political culture," amongst which he includes "a tendency to individualize, heroize, moralize, idealize, and universalize" (123). A component of this trend was the increasing imperative to remember and study the Holocaust, and in the American context, to derive lessons from it that would seem applicable and interesting to Americans. Amongst these lessons, Cole notes, is that in an age of relativism and moral ambiguity there can still be drawn a sharp contrast between good and evil (13).

I want to argue that this Americanization of the Holocaust is first and foremost an American *childization* of the Holocaust, and as such, understanding this phenomenon from the vantage point of childhood studies, of which the criticism of children's literature

is part, proves crucial. Texts that evidence the transformations, reconstructions, and interpretations characterizing this Americanization either imagine children as their implied audience or proffer them as the explicit subject. Thus, the key cultural artifacts or sites of the Americanization of the Holocaust include school curricula; films such as Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, which is now routinely screened in schools; the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and others like it, which not only feature children prominently in their exhibits, but also appeal directly to children as visitors; the diary of the adolescent Anne Frank, which is a virtual industry in itself; and award-winning Holocaust novels for children such as Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* and Johanna Reiss's *The Upstairs Room*.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the key "ideological tendencies" that have shaped representations of the Holocaust in the United States are those that find their strongest expression in children's culture, which I would argue is one of the primary sites for the (re)construction and perpetuation of precisely these tendencies. In other words, to the extent that the Holocaust has been reconceptualized in terms of its implications for lessons involving heroism, moralism, dignity, and prejudice—those qualities that have led scholars to describe the Holocaust as having been "Americanized" in the first place—it is the result of its implantation within children's culture as the pedagogical device par excellence. If the Holocaust has been Americanized, it is because it has come to occupy a privileged position in relation to the construction of the American child.

While the utility of the Holocaust for teaching lessons about hatred, racism, violence, and genocide to American children might appear obvious and uncontroversial to some, and while its historical significance seems largely undisputed (except for a relatively small number of deniers), recent scholars have argued that "the Holocaust"

(and everything that term now entails) gradually came to occupy its current historical and educational prominence—indeed, its very coherence as a singular and significant event—only over the course of several decades following the Second World War. “It was only in the 1960s and 1970s that the nature of the Holocaust began to be grasped by both the academic community and the general public in the United States and Europe,” writes Cole (2). Cole, following scholars Eliezer Don-Yehiya and Charles Liebman, uses the term “the Holocaust myth” to distinguish between the historical event and the ways it has been represented and imagined. He applies this term to the latter in order to understand both the shifting meanings that have compromised “the Holocaust” over the latter half of the twentieth century and the reasons for the very emergence of the myth as such a widespread cultural phenomenon in the U.S. and Europe. As Cole argues, “there was nothing inevitable about us finding ourselves in that situation” (6), and he seeks in *Selling the Holocaust* to explore the reasons for the emergence of that phenomenon. My purpose here is to explore the question of why the Holocaust has been so insistently implanted within American children’s culture in particular and what appeal it has to both the adults who have promoted this phenomenon and the children for whom it has been produced. I believe the investment in a ritual and narrative of love and loss as a catalyst for the development of children into proper and ethical adult citizens has acted as a key precondition for the perception of the Holocaust as pedagogically useful in American cultural life.

The way in which the “myth” of the Holocaust has taken shape in the U.S. is related to the prevailing mythology of childhood itself. How Americans imagine and construct children affects the ways in which the Holocaust has been imagined and

constructed *for* children. Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer list a number of common assumptions about children in North America:

- Children have limited understanding and short attention spans. These are inescapable aspects of childlike thinking, and inherent in human development, which proceeds throughout childhood in clear stages. At any given stage, a child is capable of understanding only a certain amount.
- Children are innocent by nature, blissfully naïve and inherently good. They can't really understand what evil is or what sexuality is.
- Children are emotionally vulnerable, easily upset, and often permanently damaged by exposure to ugly or painful matters. They respond to depictions of evil or deprivation not by becoming evil but by having nightmares, or even by developing permanent neuroses.
- Children are inherently wild—born animal-like and not yet disciplined or cajoled into understanding the need for law, order, and self-control that keeps people safe and sane in their dealings with one another. Exposing children to evil or violence in books merely encourages their most basic, most unfortunate, and most uncontrollable tendencies.
- Although neither inherently innocent nor inherently wild, children are nevertheless not yet fully formed. They are pliable and, therefore, highly suggestible, and they are prone to dangerous experimentation. They respond to depictions of violence by becoming violent themselves. Conversely, thank goodness, they also respond to depictions of good by becoming good. Children will become whatever they read about. (86-87)

To their list we might add several additional assumptions:

- Children are hopeful and need hope to motivate the occupations of childhood such as studying/learning so that they can contribute to society upon reaching adulthood. Children need something to look forward to, and hope enables them to delay gratification.
- Children are inherently valuable as human beings and are crucial to the perpetuation of the family, the nation, and the species. As such, and because children are oppressed or endangered, they require physical, emotional, and legal protection and oversight. They must also be made aware of and reassured about this protection
- Children are an important consumer market for special toys and games, food, music, clothing, amusements/vacations, television programs and films, books, and sporting equipment. All of these things must be developmentally appropriate and reflect the nature of children. Hence, they must be simpler and/or “catchier” than similar products for adults.

Each of these assumptions about children and childhood affects the kinds of cultural products that are made available to children and the ways these products are constructed and marketed. As a result, children’s culture is replete with fairly clear-cut distinctions between heroes and villains, for instance, which is in keeping with notions about the need to train them properly with regards to good and bad behavior. Such distinctions, moreover, are kept simple because children presumably would not be able to comprehend or appreciate more complex or ambiguous material.

We can see how such assumptions would have profound ramifications for how the Holocaust is represented, and given the cultural centrality of children in the United States—rhetorically, if not actually—we can also see how the need to construct the Holocaust in ways that seem appropriate to children would reverberate in those cultural productions that also or primarily target adults. Thus, scholars who have taken note of the Americanization of the Holocaust comment on the tendency to represent it in ways that starkly contrast good and evil and heroes and villains, that retain hope or the possibility of hope even in the context of unspeakable atrocities, that simplify explanations or understandings of the complex events and circumstances that comprise it, that offer reassurance in the face of its most disturbing aspects, and that confirm the universal and inherent value of all human life and the special status of children in particular. All of these tendencies reflect assumptions about children and childhood and evidence the influence of those assumptions on how the Holocaust has been represented in North America. The need or desire to imagine the Holocaust for or to children means that it is less likely representations will reflect complexity, explore questions about the limits of representation or rationality, address instances of moral and behavioral ambiguity, or resist sentimentality and emotional manipulation.

It is possible that the Holocaust has been implanted within children's culture because to deal with the complex issues it raises—including representation, intelligibility, rationality, historical teleology, and the ways it radically undermines these notions—requires more time and effort than most adults can or want to spend on it, and since childhood/adolescence is the primary period designated for effortful study, the examination of the Holocaust has been relegated to children. This tendency, combined

with the common assumptions made about children, has resulted in the phenomenon commonly referred to as the Americanization of the Holocaust. What amounts, in fact, to its *childization* effectively works to contain the potentially disruptive and disturbing ramifications of considering the Holocaust in all of its complexities. That is, it is simplified for children because children require its simplification, and it is imagined as something for children to study because there is some tacit desire to simplify it. The process is cyclical and convenient.

*Number the Stars* and Holocaust Education in the U.S.

It is not sufficient to say that the Holocaust is inherently valuable for instructional purposes. In fact, prominent survivors like Elie Wiesel and scholars such as Lawrence Langer have argued passionately and convincingly about the dangers of deriving lessons from the Holocaust. “The moral implication (if not ‘value’) that one searches for in a tragic drama is often carried over to the Holocaust by those who mistake tragedy for history. When asked if there were any meaning in the Holocaust, historian Raul Hilberg is said to have replied, ‘I hope not,’” writes Langer (*Preempting* xvi). He argues that it is so radically other to any available language or belief system as to make even comprehension impossible. Thus, some explanation other than obviousness or commonsense must be sought for why and how it has been seized upon as such a useful “example” for teaching children. I would argue that it is the predilection for using loss and identification as a technique for promoting the maturation of children in American culture that has enabled the Holocaust to be so easily and enthusiastically received by those involved with children and their education, and the desire to contain its more

disruptive potential has conspired with this tendency to make it a child's matter in the U.S. The number of children's books devoted to this topic therefore becomes more understandable, as does their way of representing the Holocaust.

Lois Lowry's novel *Number the Stars* provides a useful case for examining these ideas. Published in 1989, it was the first Holocaust novel for children to win the Newbery Medal, and the fact of its designation as a "distinguished contribution to American literature for children" evidences the tremendous resonance of the way in which the novel represents the Holocaust to and for American youth. Set in Denmark following the German occupation, the novel details how non-Jewish Danish citizens helped evacuate nearly 7000 Jewish Danes to safety in Sweden after word spread in 1943 that the Germans planned to relocate the Jewish population. *Number the Stars* centers on the non-Jewish Annemarie, whose family works to save a group of Jews that includes Annemarie's friend Ellen. At the climax of the novel, Annemarie is enlisted to play a pivotal role in the escape, which brings her into confrontation with German soldiers. As a result of Annemarie's bravery, Ellen is saved.

In a 1977 article for *The Hornbook Magazine*, Eric Kimmel proposes a typology of Holocaust literature for juveniles. One type, "the Resistance novel," often depicts helpless Jewish victims being rescued by heroic non-Jews. *Number the Stars* is clearly a Holocaust novel of just such a type.

David L. Russell notes, "When we are considering [Holocaust] literature for children, we must inevitably confront the question as to whether such a grim topic is at all appropriate for young minds" (267). Perhaps a better way of getting at the concern this question implies would be to ask *how* to represent the Holocaust to children.<sup>3</sup>

*Number the Stars* addresses precisely this question through the way it deals with how adults in the novel manage information vis-à-vis Annemarie, the 10 year old protagonist. Uncle Henrik and her mother stage a wake for the dead Great Aunt Birte in order to justify the small crowd of Jews who are waiting in Henrik's home to be shuttled to safety in Sweden. Annemarie astutely realizes that they are lying to her and that no such relative exists. When she confronts her uncle, he asks her whether she is brave, and she replies that she is uncertain. He responds, "It is much *easier* to be brave if you do not know everything. And so your mama does not know everything. Neither do I. We know only what we need to know" (76). Annemarie then recalls when German soldiers had stopped her and Ellen running home one day. Annemarie experienced little fear during that confrontation, but the narrator explains that "if she had known everything, it would not have been so easy to be brave" (77). Indeed, at the climactic moment when Annemarie must demonstrate her bravery by delivering a package critical to the escape of Ellen's family, she is able to complete her task largely because she does not know its true import or the likely ramifications if she were to fail. The package contains a handkerchief laced with cocaine used to numb the noses of German dogs, which are trained to search the boats on which the Jews are hidden. Without it, Ellen and her family would be discovered, deported, and possibly killed. While delivering the handkerchief, she is stopped again by German soldiers, and her "bravery," as predicted by Uncle Henrik, is made easier by her ignorance.

Notably, *Number the Stars* makes repeated references to the need for Jews to escape, to their danger, and to their disappearance from their homes. It does not, however, explain that danger, identify the possibility of death or extreme suffering, or

even mention the camps or the Final Solution. The use of the handkerchief, but not the ramifications had she failed, is later explained to Ellen in the penultimate chapter of the book entitled, "I Will Tell You Just a Little." That is, in fact, all the novel tells its child readers. Uncle Henrik explains that his boat was indeed searched by dogs:

'But by then, of course, I had the handkerchief. If I had not, well—' His voiced trailed off, and he didn't finish the sentence. He didn't need to. If she had not found the packet where Mr. Rosen had dropped it. If she had not run through the woods. If the soldiers had taken the basket. If she had not reached the boat in time. All of the ifs whirled in Annemarie's head. (126)

All of the ifs, but none of the thens. The novel is remarkably elusive. The child reader who lacks other knowledge of the Holocaust cannot hope to know what all of this means.<sup>4</sup> The effect is perhaps to sanitize its treatment of atrocity while providing enough intimation of danger and threat to set the stage for Annemarie's adventure in the woods. Given these evasions, though, it is clear that the purpose of the novel is not to provide any kind of thorough introduction to the central events of the Holocaust. In other words, it does not seem that its primary objective is informational. If this were the goal, the novel would be unable to justify these omissions. Of course, it appears that the novel has the more modest objective of encouraging its young readers to be sympathetic to those in need and to be willing, if necessary, to show courage in the face of dangers about which one is only vaguely aware. These are not bad lessons, but the novel raises a set of interesting questions about the uses of the Holocaust, particularly in relation to American children.

First, it seems important to note that focus of the novel is on the non-Jewish Annemarie, which recalls criticism leveled against Spielberg's *Schindler's List* for similarly centering on a non-Jewish rescuer. Art Spiegelman, author of *Maus*, argued in *The Village Voice* that "*Schindler's List* refracts the Holocaust through the central image of a righteous gentile in a world of Jewish bit players and extras. The Jews function as an occasion for Christian redemption" (Hoberman 26-27). In *Number the Stars*, it is Annemarie who is active and competent. Ellen, in contrast, does not do or say much throughout the novel. While Annemarie knows little about what is going on, Ellen knows nothing, and while Annemarie has the opportunity to act brave, Ellen, who is in far greater danger, simply quivers and follows the instructions of the adults around her. Kimmel might have predicted, 12 years before the publication of *Number the Stars*, precisely this pattern of characterization. Writing about Resistance novels, he notes, "The Jews in these novels are seldom major characters but rather helpless unfortunates, threatened as much by their own inertia as by the Germans. They are completely incapable of coping effectively with their danger" (85). In keeping with this description, it is the clumsy Mr. Rosen who drops the packet that contains the handkerchief, which is so crucial to the escape of his family.

The ineptitude of the Jews is what permits Annemarie to shine; it is Annemarie who is the star here. We might say Lowry even rewards Annemarie by allowing her to mature. Russell describes Annemarie as "thrust into the adult world of deception and intrigue" (27). Although this description seems better suited to a spy or romance novel, it indicates that Annemarie can clearly be read as achieving some kind of maturity in the novel, while Ellen never reappears after her escape to Sweden even though the novel

concludes with the war over. After Annemarie confronts her mother and uncle about their lie, Annemarie feels older and wiser: “Annemarie knew that Mama was lying again, and she could see that Mama understood that she knew. They looked at each other for a long time and said nothing. In that moment, with that look, they became equals” (79). In fact, it is her mother who is meant to be brave by accompanying the Jews to Uncle Henrik’s boat, but when she falls and breaks her ankle, Annemarie must deliver the handkerchief instead. So she does not merely become her mother’s equal, but actually replaces her.

And she replaces Ellen as well. Not only does Ellen’s plight allow Annemarie to demonstrate her bravery and sympathy, but Ellen herself also provides an object with which Annemarie can identify, thereby enabling Annemarie to try on being both hero and “victim.” Shortly after Annemarie’s parents take Ellen in to “hide” her from the Germans by claiming her as their daughter, German soldiers raid their home. Annemarie quickly commands Ellen to remove her chain from which hangs a Star of David, but when the bumbling Ellen cannot get it unclasped, the quick-thinking Annemarie tears it from her neck and squeezes it in her palm while the soldiers inspect the apartment. After they leave, Annemarie opens her hand to find her palm imprinted with the Star, clearly symbolizing that she is now marked as Jewish herself through her association with Ellen. After Ellen and her family safely escape into Sweden, Annemarie asks her father to repair the clasp. The novel concludes thusly:

“Yes,” he said. “I can fix it. When the Rosens come home, you can give it back  
to  
Ellen.”

“Until then,” Annemarie told him, “I will wear it myself.” (132)

Russell mentions the earlier imprinting in his essay on the usefulness of *Number the Stars* for teaching about the Holocaust. “The imprint of the Star of David is a symbol of the strength of Annemarie’s conviction, her devotion to her friend, and the sacrifices we make on behalf of our ethical choices,” he writes (269). These incidents of being first physically imprinted and choosing later to wear the Star herself clearly indicate Annemarie’s identification with Ellen, and since the novel seems to invite readers to identify with Annemarie as the protagonist, they/we are similarly encouraged to identify vicariously with Ellen also.<sup>5</sup> The very shift from “her” to “our” in Russell’s explanation of the imprinting scene is telling.

If one accounts for the reader relation in addition to what takes place within the narrative itself, *Number the Stars* represents a chain of identifications that encourages the maturation of each link, Annemarie with Ellen and then the reader with Annemarie. As we have seen, the development of children can be facilitated by the loss of loved objects, whose qualities come to be manifested by the child through a process of identification and introjection, which Freud calls melancholia. The myth of the Holocaust functions as a source of lost objects with whom children can identify, and a novel like *Number the Stars* not only provides such an object, but also represents how that process of melancholic development works. The question is what motives Annemarie might have for making such an identification and what effects it has for her and for readers.

Cole’s work tracing the emergence of the Holocaust myth to the socio-political context of the U.S. in the late 1960s provides a clue to what motivates Annemarie in Lowry’s 1989 novel. He notes, “In a period during which ethnic assertion reversed the

earlier process—experienced by all ethnic minority groups in the United States—of assimilating in silence, American Jews discovered the ‘Holocaust’. It was an event made all the more attractive by fitting into the popular American model which shapes ethnic distinctiveness around a history of victimhood” (12).<sup>6</sup> Film scholar Yosefa Loshitzky, writing about the popular 1978 television mini-series *Holocaust*, which vitalized interest in this subject both in the U.S. and abroad, argues that it “cultivated the idea (which since then has become pervasive in American Jewish discourse) that being Jewish is primarily an ethnic rather than a religious category” (7). The argument that the Holocaust bolstered the reconceptualization of American Jewishness as an ethnic identity helps us, I think, to understand the appeal of Lowry’s novel.<sup>7</sup>

Ellen’s Jewishness is foregrounded as an effect of the girls’ encounters with German soldiers, and hence Ellen’s danger helps to constitute Annemarie’s recognition of Ellen’s Jewish identity. For Annemarie it must seem as though her identity, or at least its intensification, is actually the result of danger. To the extent that Annemarie also seeks to construct her own identity, Ellen and her situation function as a model for how an identity might be constructed. Annemarie is therefore able to reproduce this apparent process of identity formation through her identification with Ellen. Being endangered clearly has its rewards, and Annemarie is able to reap the benefits of danger by identifying with and helping Ellen to escape. Cole writes that “to see the myth of the ‘Holocaust’ simply as a Jewish ethnic marker ... fails to explain why the ‘Holocaust’ has emerged as an icon for the non-Jewish imagination as well” (12). I think, however, his suggestion explains more than he admits. If ethnic or group identity is shaped around victimization, than a greater degree of suffering helps to outline more clearly the

boundaries, if not content, of that identity. Annemarie is clearly fashioning for herself an identity as a Danish citizen and as a young woman.<sup>8</sup> Claiming Ellen's danger and suffering as her own provides the affective force that completes or ensures this process.

In addition to the use of victimhood as a motive for Annemarie's identification with Ellen, and the appeal of such a dynamic to American readers, we might wonder about the extent to which an already-made identification with perpetrators also works to encourage interest in the Holocaust and in representations of non-Jewish rescuers.

Miriam Bratu Hansen suggests that

the popular American fascination with the Holocaust may function as a "screen memory" (*Deckerinnerung*), in the Freudian sense, covering up a traumatic event—another traumatic event—that cannot be approached directly. More than just an ideological displacement (which it is no doubt as well), the fascination with the Holocaust could be read as a kind of screen allegory behind/through which the nation is struggling to find a proper mode of memorializing traumata closer to home. The displaced referents of such memorializing may extend to events as distant as the genocide of Native Americans or as recent as the Vietnam War. (98)

In this way, Americans can be understood as themselves the beneficiaries of the systematic genocide of Native Americans that was, as in the case of Nazi Germany, similarly articulated in racist and utopian terms.<sup>9</sup> That is, the rhetorical and actual dehumanization and coincident extermination of North America's indigenous populations in order to appropriate land for the purpose of constructing a new nation with explicit

utopian objectives seems in many ways to mirror National Socialist rhetoric and plans during the 1930s and 1940s.

Native American scholar and activist Ward Churchill has worked to support historically this analogy between the genocide of Native Americans and the Holocaust, an argument that, as he notes, has been controversial for those all along the ideological spectrum, from Left to Right. He argues that both ideologically and in practice “Columbus and Himmler, nazi *Lebensraumpolitik* and the ‘settlement of the New World’ bear more than causal resemblance to one another” (85). There have been similar comparisons between the Holocaust and the experience of African Americans. It was another Spielberg film, *Amistad*, that provided an occasion for the term “Black Holocaust” to gain more prominence in the U.S. in connection with the Middle Passage. In 1997, after the release of *Amistad*, *The New York Times* reported on the film as being for African Americans what *Schindler’s List* was for Jewish Americans. According to one source for the article, this association is one Spielberg made himself: “Within the last month, the historian Howard Jones, a specialist in the Amistad mutiny who served as a consultant to the film, said that Mr. Spielberg viewed the slave trade ‘as the black Holocaust.’ The same phrase has rounded through black culture in the last few years” (Freedman B7). Notably, Toni Morrison also has invoked the Jewish Holocaust as a way of thinking about the slave trade in the Americas, explaining that in *Beloved* she was trying to write about

[s]omething that has no precedent in the history of the world, in terms of the length of time and nature of and specificity of its devastation. If Hitler had won the war and established his thousand year Reich, at some point he would have

stopped killing people, the ones he didn't want around, because he would have needed some to do the labor for nothing. And the first 200 years of that Reich would have been exactly what that period was in this country for Black people. It would have been just like that. Not for five years, but for 200 years or more.

(Morrison 235)

Morrison has by no means been the only public figure to make this comparison. The availability and ease of such comparisons, whether consciously recognized or not on the part of American readers, might fuel a fascination with adopting and understanding the perspective of German perpetrators, and also with “righteous Gentiles” as rescuers. The latter permits, however limited, a vicarious sense of heroic atonement for past national crimes and for the identification that has already been made with the genocidal, racist, and utopian objectives of Nazi Germany.

Churchill notes that even sympathetic responses to the genocide of Native American peoples tend to invoke the notion that this was either a necessary or inevitable precondition for the formation of the United States as a continental and world power, one that would later be called upon to resist the aggressive march of the Axis Powers.

Morrison seems to point to a similar feeling in the U.S. with regards to African American slavery: the construction of the physical and economic infrastructure of the United States required the labor of a population of slaves. Given this sense of genocidal “necessity” for the achievement of or movement toward America’s utopian objectives, a identification with Nazi Germany cannot help but affect representation of the villains in these novels and films. As Ken Jacobs has argued with regards to *Schindler’s List*:

What's bothering some of us is that this is a trendy movie—it's sexy psychopath season—about a kind of Jekyll and Hyde character split between two major male characters. It is finally a movie about styles of manhood, and how one deals with one's lesser.... I rather expect that what many kids will get from this is another example of a glamorous guy with a perfect complexion consuming screenspace and attention...a commandant, who does what he wants and gets what he wants and goes to his end standing tall. (Hoberman 27)

What Jacobs seems to be suggesting here is that Spielberg's film represents Goeth as one version of successful manhood—cunning, conquering, organized, efficient—which has the potential of eliciting an admiring identification on the part of viewers. The absence of this kind of aggrandized representation of Nazi perpetrators in *Number the Stars* only further compels an identification with Annemarie as the cunning, competent hero-rescuer.<sup>10</sup>

We might speculate about how all of these motives for identifying with Annemarie—and Ellen through Annemarie—translate into possible alterations in the character of the American reader. If what one is attached to is a dual possibility of innocence (for past crimes or present benefits) and identity (as an effect of suffering rather than privilege), then some form of these ideals can be achieved through the kinds of identificatory practices represented in *Number the Stars* and encouraged in readers through its novelistic conventions, namely, the focalization of events through Annemarie and her obvious identification with Ellen. Without actually enacting heroism or victimhood, readers are encouraged to approximate the sense of being both/either hero

and/or victim, to imagine themselves as such, and perhaps to use those approximations as the foundations of an identity-in-process.

Given these suggestions and the emphatic call in recent decades to include Holocaust education as part of the national curriculum for American children, we might see how this process of loss and identification has proved central to instruction about the Holocaust.<sup>11</sup> Although published in 1982, *American Youth and the Holocaust: A Study of Four Major Holocaust Curricula* remains one of the most detailed and useful publications addressing Holocaust instruction in the U.S. In its analysis of how school districts in Brookline, Massachusetts; Great Neck, New York; Philadelphia; and New York City teach the Holocaust in secondary schools, this report by the National Jewish Resource Center in New York City, with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, describes the rationale for these curricula, their implementation, and their effects on students. We can see from the report the way Holocaust education encourages a process of application (applying what the students learn about the Holocaust either to the present moment or to future possibilities) in order to construct it as relevant to American students and to justify its coverage in American schools. This application model promotes the kind of identificatory processes represented in Lowry's *Number the Stars*.

The stated rationales for each of these curricula include references to applying the lessons of the Holocaust to the students' own lives. The rationale for the Massachusetts school district is representative of all four:

Students need a framework within which to study and analyze questions related to atrocities—questions of decision making, conflict resolution, justice, stereotyping,

prejudice, leadership, power, human behavior, government responsibility, citizenship, obedience, and survival. By studying the roles and responsibilities of individuals within a society, students grapple with universal questions of freedom, law, justice and responsibilities of individuals within a society [sic]. The lesson plans require students to make judgments on both a moral and legal level.

Finally, the activities stimulate students to think about their daily lives and the consequences of their activities. (Glynn 15)

The rationale for the Great Neck district includes explicit reference to “the importance of active citizenship participation” (25). New York City’s curriculum encourages students “to understand that injustice exists today and indifference to injustice encourages its growth,” and it also seeks “to inspire students to act with greater humanity” (33). In Philadelphia, “students are to realize that such a horror is not a phenomenon peculiar to one place, people, time or issue” (43). What I am suggesting is that the cognitive acts of “comprehending” the Holocaust, deriving lessons from it, and applying those lessons to another “place, people, time or issue” requires the correspondence between the components of the Holocaust and whatever situation it is being applied to. To the extent that the latter involves the current or future situation of the students themselves, this correspondence cannot help but promote an identification on the part of students with the actors in the original event.

In what might be considered a summative statement of the rationale for such study, Russell writes, “Young readers will emerge from these ‘shards and fragments’ of human experience more serious, more pensive, more wary of humanity. They may also emerge with a deeper sense of the ethical and moral obligations that lie ahead for them—

and therein may lie the ultimate value of Holocaust literature” (279). Irrespective of either the value one sees in these goals or the level of sophistication with which they are articulated, what I have tried to show is that they require an engagement with texts such as Lowry’s through very specific relations of identification, which are motivated by some of the desires and possibilities outlined above as particularly evident in *Number the Stars*. Ultimately, the emphasis on application with regards to Holocaust education promotes the kinds of identity-effects that Annemarie exemplifies, and these effects are enabled by the relations of attachment and loss that provoke identification and encourage some alteration in those who make these identifications. As Ian Buruma writes about the reception of Anne Frank in the U.S., the tendency “to identify with suffering itself, to, as it were, gain virtue from vicarious victimhood, is our modern form of sentimentalism” (8). As we have seen, the use of these texts, and their use in these specific ways, reflects a larger cultural impulse in the U.S. to employ such narratives of love and loss for the purpose of instruction and maturation, especially vis-à-vis children.<sup>12</sup>

#### American Childhood and *The Upstairs Room*

In *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, Foucault tells of a simple-minded villager, who in 1867 was caught obtaining “caresses” from a little girl at the edge of a field and taken into custody by the village authorities:

What is that significant thing about this story? The pettiness of it all; the fact that this everyday occurrence in the life of village sexuality, these inconsequential bucolic pleasures, could become, from a certain time, the object not only of a collective intolerance but of a judicial action, a medical intervention, a careful

clinical examination, and an entire theoretical elaboration.... So it was that our society—and it was doubtless the first in history to take such measures— assembled around these timeless gestures, these barely furtive pleasures between simple-minded adults and alert children, a whole machinery for speechifying, analyzing, and investigating. (Foucault 31-32)

What Foucault is pointing to here is a significant shift in thought concerning children, their bodies, their value, and their need for protection. Along with the elaboration of the management of populations in the nineteenth century came an intensified surveillance of children and a new attention to their physical and mental health. In the domain of law, this intensified concern for children and their bodily health took the form of increased attention to legal protections for children in the workplace and their eventual prohibition from engaging any work deemed potentially harmful. In medicine it focused on vaccinations and inoculations, with providing basic medical care to children in particular, even if that care could not be continued into adulthood.

In the 1896 publication of his essay “The Aetiology of Hysteria,” Freud proposed what came to be known as his “seduction theory,” the notion that hysterical symptoms in adults, both men and women, could be traced back to some kind of actual sexual trauma in early childhood. Although a controversial thesis, and one Freud would later retract, the seduction theory would resonate with fears and anxieties surrounding children and sexuality that had been developing over the course of the nineteenth century. Freud’s theories would inadvertently fuel those concerns about the possible widespread occurrence of sexual abuse and about the incredible dangers associated with precocious sexual activity for mental health and adult functioning. A key lesson of Freud’s work, it

seemed, was that children were endangered at every turn, and the experiences of childhood, whether one had a conscious memories of them or not, had the potential to produce profoundly negative results.

Thus, the figure of the endangered child that had been slowly emerging fully crystallized in the twentieth century and found its expression on work of psychologists and psychoanalysts, educators, legal and medical authorities, and government agencies. An elaborate system for monitoring children and their bodies was founded to combat these dangers while in fact producing this figure of the endangered child and paradoxically increasing its vulnerability to all kinds of traumas, whether of lived or imagined experience. As Foucault suggests in the passage cited above, it is not simply the acts themselves of the simple-minded villager that had the capacity to cause the child harm, but the entire network of meanings attributed to them and the shock and outrage of parents and authorities in response to them. It is the very discourses that invoke and impinge upon childhood that construct these acts as harmful and create the conditions for the child to experience them as violations and trauma. The perception of the child as endangered therefore further heightens the danger to the child. It is in the context of this cyclical continuously unfolding processes that the image of the hidden child came to be one of the key ways of representing the Holocaust in the latter half of the twentieth century.

One figure who has played a pivotal role in the prominence of the Holocaust in American culture, and American children's culture in particular, is Anne Frank.<sup>13</sup> Alvin Rosenfeld has described her as "the most famous child of the twentieth century," and Judith Miller has called her "the Holocaust's most famous victim" (qtd. Cole 23). That

these two distinctions have been attributed to the same person is perhaps no coincidence. Rosenfeld places Frank and her famous diary at the center of the phenomenon he describes as the Americanization of the Holocaust, and Edward Sullivan cites Frank as one of the impetuses of his book-length bibliography, *The Holocaust in Literature for Youth*, where he writes, "If this book accomplishes nothing else, I want it to make teachers aware that there is a lot more to the Holocaust than Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*" (5).<sup>14</sup> This statement betrays his strong feelings about "Anne Frank," who, precisely because of her prominence, proves to be a rather polarizing figure. In this section I want to consider why Frank, and the image of the "secret room" or "hiding place" she immortalized in her diary, has been so passionately received in the U.S. as a significant component of the Americanization of the Holocaust, and I want to think about that reception alongside Johanna Reiss's 1973 Newbery Honor book, *The Upstairs Room*, another autobiographical narrative about a Jewish girl in hiding.

Many others have explored the Anne Frank phenomenon in great detail and from a variety of perspectives, but what I am going to suggest is that the combination of Frank's status as a child (or, to be more precise, an adolescent) with the image of the "hiding place" constitutes the formula for Anne Frank's tremendous American, indeed international, success.<sup>15</sup> As we have seen with regard to how the myth of the Holocaust is constructed in line with a set of assumptions about children, Frank's diary and Reiss's novel clarify some tacit ideas about, and expectations of, children. In particular, the figure of the threatened child kept in an upstairs or secret room works as a metaphor for how childhood itself is currently conceptualized. The extent to which Frank's diary and similar narratives like Reiss's have had such a powerful resonance in American life

reflects understandings of, and desires surrounding, children as endangered/protected, surveilled/concealed, expendable/precious, and burdensome/innocent. Marked in all of these ways, the child is imagined as confined to an upstairs room busily and anxiously awaiting liberation by benevolent and heroic adults or by the achievement of adulthood itself. To imagine children in these ways—as being represented so compellingly by the figure of the hidden child—is an effect in part of the cultural centrality of Freudian thinking, which is itself symptomatic of the broader cultural changes that took place over the nineteenth century to elevate in importance the management of populations and the insurance of the health, vigor, and (re)productivity of the adult citizen through the management of the child.

To understand the image of the child hidden in a secret room, we must begin with Anne Frank, whose diary is arguably most responsible for disseminating this image as a representation of the Holocaust and, ultimately, of twentieth century (American) childhood. First, the numbers themselves are quite telling. By 1997, the diary in its various editions had sold more than 24 million copies around the world and had been translated into more than 55 languages, leading it to be described as “*the canonical ‘Holocaust’ text*” (emphasis in original, Cole 23). In 1955 the popular play based on the diary debuted on Broadway, and the film version, which won three Academy Awards, premiered in 1959. Together, these three texts helped make Anne Frank the best-known victim of the Holocaust across the globe. This is the case despite the fact that the diary records events taking place entirely within a “secret annex” and only makes tangential references to the Holocaust and the Final Solution.<sup>16</sup> As Cole notes, Anne’s status as an

assimilated German-Jew and Dutch immigrant made these texts accessible to a broader audience (32).

Moreover, given that the play and film versions were specifically American productions, they represented the Americanization of an Anne Frank that has been redistributed around the world. “It was in America that what may be termed as the ‘myth of Anne Frank’ was created,” Cole writes (29). Rosenfeld calls the success of the diary “paradigmatic of the American reception of the Holocaust,” and he records the common words used to describe audience reception of the Anne Frank narrative in all of its forms: uplifting, hopeful, inspiring (124). It seems clear how Anne Frank fits into the matrix of desires and processes that constitute the Americanization of the Holocaust outlined earlier. That the central figure of these texts is a child, that her death in Bergen-Belsen is not depicted in the play or the film, that the threat of the German genocide of the Jews operates in these texts as a looming specter and as a backdrop to Anne’s coming-of-age rather than in actual details of atrocity all conspire to make Anne Frank a perfect fit for the memorialization of the Holocaust in American culture, especially given the propensity to construct the myth of the Holocaust in the U.S. as for and about children. For these reasons it is not surprising that Frank’s diary is the most widely read Holocaust narrative in American schools. It simplifies a complex situation, holds out the possibility of hope, omits the horrors of torture and genocide, and offers a lost object with which readers can identify.

Published in 1972, Johanna Reiss’s *The Upstairs Room* bears striking similarities to Anne Frank’s diary.<sup>17</sup> The narrative is told from the first-person point-of-view, and the protagonist, who is referred to as “Annie,” is only a little younger than Anne Frank

herself would have been in 1942. Reiss, like Frank, lived in the Netherlands at the time of the German invasion, and this fictionalized autobiography of her life in hiding similarly takes place almost entirely while she is confined with her older sister to the upstairs room of a small farmhouse. Also like Anne Frank, Annie sometimes depicts her parents, her mother in particular, in an unflattering light, and like the more famous Anne, the protagonist of *The Upstairs Room* spends about two years in hiding until the Allies liberate the Netherlands in April-May 1945.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Frank, Annie is never discovered (although she comes close to being so at one point) and is able to write this novel retrospectively. Its other significant departure from Frank's diary, in addition to adopting novelistic conventions, is the explicit attention paid to the fate of the Jews in Nazi-occupied territories. In this way, *The Upstairs Room* deals much more directly with the Holocaust than does *The Diary of a Young Girl* despite the fact that Reiss, unlike Frank, survives and immigrates to the United States.

Given what I claim about the childization of the Holocaust in the United States, I am interested in exploring why the image of the child in hiding has been so readily accepted as signifying the Holocaust in the American imagination and what such narratives might reveal about the recurring use of loss as a catalyst for development in children's literature. I am arguing that this image functions to represent childhood itself, and its effectiveness as a metaphor is reinforced by its association with "the most famous child of the twentieth century," who perhaps attained this status in part because her circumstances appeared as a particularly concentrated experience of childhood. *The Upstairs Room*, which emerged out of Reiss's interest in recording her childhood experiences for her two daughters, was authored by the adult Reiss with the benefit of

exposure to Frank's diary and the phenomenon surrounding it. Thus, Reiss is able to be much more deliberate about how she represents Annie's experience in hiding because that experience itself had, thanks to the success of Anne Frank, already become conventional by the time her novel was written. For these reasons, and the fact of its award-winning status, *The Upstairs Room* makes a useful case for understanding why the image has worked so effectively as a recognizable convention.

First, the conventions of the hiding narrative foreground a relation characterized by surveillance and concealment, particularly between adults, namely German soldiers or the Gestapo, and (Jewish) children. Annie is acutely conscious of this dynamic, which she references by indicating her yellow star: "But the stars weren't so bad. I fingered mine. It made me look grown-up. Not all Jews had to wear the star, not children who weren't six yet. One little boy had a star on his tricycle. His father had to make him one out of cardboard, because the little boy wasn't old enough for a real one made out of cloth. Like mine" (21). She associates the star, a sign that she is an object of surveillance by others, with her status as a child. Those who are actually grown up don't usually think so explicitly about what makes them appear such. The child who is thus marked and might be discovered must run away and hide. She requires a rescuer who can conceal her and provide her with the essentials necessary for survival, so in that way her condition as one who is sought occasions a relation of extreme dependency on those who hide her, much the way children are made materially dependent on adults. Because of the danger involved and the possibility of extreme suffering or death, the child must be confined to a particularly finite space, tucked away in the back of a building or an

otherwise unused part of a home. Because these spaces are necessarily small, the child is ideally sized to fit them.

The conditions under which the child must hide also represent extremes of endangerment and protection. The child cannot come out from her hiding place without exposing herself or those helping her to extreme danger or punishment. One night before she goes into hiding Annie creeps out of bed to spy on the adults who are discussing what to do. When she hears footsteps approaching, she runs back to her room and climbs into bed. When the neighbors sometimes spy Annie staring out of her window at night, they call, "Get back in bed ... or we'll tell your mother" (3). In these cases, Annie is the generalized child who hides to avoid parental punishment. Later while in hiding to avoid deportation, the amount of time Annie spends lying in bed while confined to the upstairs room cripples her legs, an effect of her status as a Jew in Nazi-occupied Holland. She must hide first to escape punishment by her parents, and later by the Germans. However, she also enjoys the protection of her parents and other adults from the outside forces that threaten her. Her father arranges for her to go into hiding, and the Oosterveld family provides Annie with a hiding place and supplies. The ability of the Oostervelds to conceptualize their efforts to protect Annie and her sister in terms of duty is made easier by the fact that they are adults whose duty it is to protect young people.

The position of Annie as a hidden child who is the sought-after object of the Nazi gaze is made a matter of life and death by the extreme circumstances of the German genocide of European Jewry. As such, that position functions as an intensification of the more quotidian positioning of children as the objects of a generalized and proper adult scrutiny and surveillance. Children also and simultaneously require protection from the

improper gaze of those deemed dangerous, lascivious, or predatory. There is clearly a fine line between the protective monitoring of children and the harmful gaze of, for instance, the pedophile or the overprotective mother, two of the greatest dangers for twentieth-century children. This is not, of course, to equate either maternal fussiness or even sexual exploitation with genocide and torture. Rather, I am suggesting that over the course of the twentieth century children, and children's bodies, increasingly have been made a spectacle, something to both watch and watch over, and their exhibition to the adult gaze is justified in terms of their protection, health, and very life. Given this trend in the construction of childhood, which clearly began before the twentieth century in the medicalization of childhood and child-rearing practices, the cultural resonance of a figure like Anne Frank or Annie in *The Upstairs Room* makes a certain sense as a particularly extreme example of this way of figuring the child as surveilled/concealed and endangered/protected.

Similarly, the enthusiastic reception of such a figure as the hidden and endangered child evidences an ongoing tension between children as expendable and children as precious. Sociologist Viviana Zelizer argues that the social value of the child as something to be cherished and coddled really only emerged in America as the economic value of children declined in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, a notion or recognition of the child as not an inherently valued or valuable object of affective investment still lingers beneath or beside the rhetorical construction of the child as almost sacred. Representations of children as the victims of torture and genocide in Holocaust literature or history threaten to expose the fact that children are not necessarily or inherently valuable, and such an exposure had the potential to radically

undermine what is one of the most frequently cited commonplaces in American culture. Alternatively, such representations may actually bolster these commonplaces. Indeed, the extent to which actual relations between adults and children fail to reflect the extreme social value attached to them in public discourse might work to prime Americans for representations of valueless or expendable children, particularly in contexts that enable the American reader to disavow precisely such feelings.

Miriam Hansen questions the cinematic techniques of *Schindler's List* that encourage viewers to identify with Amon Goeth, the sadistic commandant of the Plaszów concentration camp. In one scene, Goeth shoots a Jewish boy, a camp inmate, from his balcony. The scene is shot from Goeth's point-of-view, leading Hansen to wonder, "Does this mean that, even though he is marked as evil on the level of the diegesis or fictional world of the film, the viewer is nonetheless urged to identify with Goeth's murderous desire on the unconscious level of cinematic discourse?" (83). The question seems to imply that this is precisely what the blocking of the scene encourages. That the object of violence here is a child exemplifies the potential Holocaust texts have for providing opportunities to acknowledge unease with the impossibly extreme value placed on children in American culture. Children are both extremely valuable and extremely burdensome, and thus the adult response to children must be characterized by an ambivalence whose public expression is severely constrained and suppressed.

Texts such as *The Upstairs Room* underscore the ways children are constructed as simultaneously dependent and burdensome. In this way children maintain their innocence despite eliciting resentment on the part of the adults who are charged with their care. Along these lines, *The Upstairs Room* includes a scene in which Dientje Oosterveld

takes the opportunity while her husband, Johan, is away to expel Anne and her sister from her home. The girls are forced to hide in a hole dug for them in the yard of another family until Johan returns ten days later to retrieve them. They are expendable and valueless as Jews in German-occupied Holland, but, in addition, Dientje's willingness to not protect them betrays not only her ambivalence about the dangerous role of rescuer, but also the very contingent nature of the social value of children. The children are also burdensome because they tax the limited resources of the family in the same way that children in general can be both materially and emotionally burdensome on their adult caretakers.

Still, Annie and her sister do nothing to produce the circumstances that compel their dependency, and hence they are themselves quite innocent of any wrongdoing. Children are similarly constructed by dominant notions of childhood as dependent irrespective of how capable individual children might be, and efforts to keep children innocent by denying them access to the knowledge, tools, or training that would make them less so can also work to foster the ill-will towards children from the adults who participate in creating precisely that relation of dependency.

These Holocaust novels reveal something about the narrative of loss and development in that it is the child in each of them who operates as the lost object for the reader. Anne Frank is lost in Bergen-Belsen. Though Annie survives the war, the child who was confined is no more. *The Upstairs Room* concludes with Annie returning as an adult to the farmhouse in which she hid. Her daughters, who accompany her, ask her to show them how to climb into the hiding place, but she cannot. *The Diary of a Young Girl* and *The Upstairs Room* therefore represent two possible outcomes. Anne Frank, still

“perfect,” is killed in her perfection; Annie, who lives, is crippled and damaged by her confinement. In terms of children and childhood, the outcomes are the same in that both girls cease to be. It is clear, given the levels of sentimentality and pathos surrounding figures like Anne Frank and Annie, that they work to represent what all children must be: lost.

Given that the relation between adults and children can be characterized in the above ways, the image of the child in hiding found in Anne Frank’s diary and Reiss’s novel resonates as the extreme of a generalized condition. Thus, children are imagined as oppressed, childhood as a state of temporary danger and confinement. Children are busily awaiting their liberation from the constraints of childhood, assuming they survive the many dangers that assail them and that necessitate the protection of their adult caretakers. These texts work to make visible certain desires and expectations involving children, who are made the objects of intense surveillance, largely dependent on adults for material subsistence, particularly endangered and hence in need of exhausting protections, and unable to approximate the impossible idealizations popularized in public discourse. In particular, these texts also point to adult ambivalence about how childhood is currently constructed in the U.S. And here perhaps is another effect (or motive?) of the childization of the Holocaust, which involves locating children as the primary consumers or subjects of Holocaust texts. The texts that evidence and (re)produce this phenomenon reveal a possibility of pleasure in seeing children suffer, of pleasure in suffering as a rite for the attainment of adulthood and as a price for the idealized experience of children as almost sacred beings.

## Notes

1. Each year the Children's Literature Association honors the best book of literary criticism that addresses children's literature. In 2004, both the winner, Bosmajian's *Sparing the Child: Grief and the Unspeakable about Nazism and the Holocaust*, and the runner-up, Kertzer's *My Mother's Voice: Children, Literature, and the Holocaust*, were books dealing with this topic.
  
2. *Schindler's List* was almost immediately seized upon after its release as an educational tool for use in schools. Yosefa Loshitzky notes that even in Germany and Israel, "it was recommended that the film be screened for school children and integrated into the educational curriculum" (9). When the film was screened for high school students in Oakland, California, the audience's laughter and jeering resulted in a visit from Spielberg himself to their school ("Laughter" B11). In addition, the only colored object in this otherwise black-and-white movie is a child, and Annette Insdorf notes that the scene involving a young Jewish boy who works for the Nazis was altered from book, in which the character is a teenager or young man. In Spielberg's film he appears to be about seven or eight. The child first exposes an older woman, but upon realizing that he knows, assists in hiding her. As Insdorf claim, casting the character as a young boy enables to film to represent "the savior" as "an innocent child" (Hoberman 27). More significantly perhaps is the way Schindler's Jews are positioned in such a state of dependency on the Schindlers as to suggest the relationship between parents and children. Film scholar Gertrud explains that she was "repulsed by the idea that the victims were depicted as children, and therefore not able to deal the right way" (Hoberman 26).
  
3. Barbara Harrison poses the question similarly: "The question is not then what we should tell, but how it should be told" (87).
  
4. In her study of how a group of 6<sup>th</sup>-graders read *Number the Stars*, April D. Nauman demonstrates the difficulty of using this book as Holocaust education without providing additional information and historical context. In a questionnaire given to students, Nauman included an incidental question about the motives of the Nazi soldiers who confront Annemarie in the woods. In that scene, the soldiers toss to their dogs the bread Annemarie carries to conceal the handkerchief needed for the Jews to escape detection. What is meant to be an easy question proves to be a difficult one for the 6<sup>th</sup>-graders, and the students do not provide the answer Nauman expects, which is that the soldiers are simply "mean." Not understanding the context, they suggest that the soldiers are being nice to the dogs or that the country is suffering from a bread shortage. Nauman argues it was the lack of knowledge on the part of these students, many of whom were recent immigrants to the U.S. from Asia, about either the Holocaust or the conventions of representing Nazi soldiers as brutish and mean-spirited that led to their difficulty with the question.
  
5. Nauman describes one telling moment when a female student, whom she describes as "deeply invested in her Jewish heritage," misidentifies Annemarie as herself Jewish after reading the book. Nauman seems surprised, but it appears clear that the novel's work to

identify Annemarie with Ellen also works to trigger an identification on the part of the reader.

6. Novick also comments on this trend in American culture: “If one of the contexts in which a Holocaust-centered Jewish identity developed was survival anxiety, another was the growth in American society of ‘the new ethnicity and ‘identity politics’.... The ‘culture of victimization’ didn’t *cause* Jews to embrace the victim identity based on the Holocaust; it *allowed* this sort of identity to become dominant” (188, 190).

7. In this way, the Holocaust can function as an occasion for the formation of counter-identifications. Here what is lost is the impossible opportunity to atone for these crimes and to play the actual role of rescuers. That possibility is represented by Annemarie, and thus her opportunity to rescue Ellen presents a desirable object of identification for American readers. The object is not merely Annemarie, but what Annemarie can do. Thus, *Number the Stars* demonstrates how abilities themselves can serve as desired “objects.”

8. The chapter entitled “Who Is the Man Who Rides Past?” indicates Annemarie’s interest in national identity. It details Danish King Christian X’s practice of riding through the streets of Copenhagen on horseback during the German occupation. Annemarie finds encouragement for her own bravery in King Christian, whom her father encourages her to emulate. Annemarie is concerned not just with being a brave girl, but also with being a brave Dane.

9. The use of the term “Black Holocaust” also appears in discussions of reparations for African Americans in what are clear parallels to the efforts on the part of Jewish Holocaust survivors and their families to claim reparations. Whatever the flaws of the comparison between the Jewish Holocaust and slavery in the Americas, the comparison has clearly resonated for some as a useful rhetorical device. Among those making use of the phrase have been representatives of the Nation of Islam, who have stirred controversy for their claims that the Black Holocaust was worse than Hitler’s treatment of Jews (Freedman B7).

10. Churchill cites these figures with regard to the effects of Columbus’ colonization of Española (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic) on the native population:

Columbus’ programs reduced Taino numbers from as many as eight million at the outset of his regime to about three million in 1496. Only 100,000 were left by the governor’s departure in 1500. His policies, however, remained, with the result that by 1514 the Spanish census of the island showed barely 22,000 Indians still alive. In 1542, only two hundred were recorded. Thereafter, they were considered extinct, as were Indians throughout the Caribbean Basin, an aggregate population which totaled more than fifteen million at the point the Columbian adventure began. (86)

11. In 1978 Jimmy Carter formed the President’s Commission on the Holocaust by executive order (the NBC mini-series *Holocaust* had aired earlier that year). In

September of 1979, the Commission released its report on how to memorialize the Holocaust in the United States. Included amongst its suggestions was the recommendation that “the study of the Holocaust become part of the curriculum in every school system in the country.” The full text of the report is available online at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/HOLO/holo.htm>.

12. This is not an argument against Holocaust education in the U.S. Claims against its inclusion in public schools tend to come from spurious quarters and rely on historical distortions. My intent is to show how the “myth” of the Holocaust, as represented in such works as Lowry’s novel, gets constructed to evoke particular kinds of reader relations that play on desires for identity and to provoke identifications with different kinds of “lost” objects in order to secure those identities.

13. Hilene Flanzbaum notes that “*The Diary of Anne Frank* [sic] has long been the most important landmark in the Americanization of the Holocaust.... *The Diary of Anne Frank* has been the most widely read book about the Holocaust in America. In a survey conducted in 1996 at the University of Michigan, it was still named as the predominant source of Holocaust education: the text was required reading in high school for over half the students surveyed” (1).

14. Sullivan goes on to explain, “I am, by no means, disparaging that work. It is rightfully regarded as a classic and should be read. I find it disturbing, however, that that book alone will be the only exposure students will have to Holocaust literature. In addition to a few boldfaced facts in a history book, it is likely to be all the students graduating from high school will know of the Holocaust” (5).

15. In “The Afterlife of Anne Frank,” Ian Buruma summarizes what he considers to be the reasons for her success. Amongst those reasons are her premature death, her precocity and potential, and the availability of the diary to being appropriated as sentimental kitsch. In addition to these, he notes, “What lifts the dairy above the level of a mere witness account is the author’s capacity to grapple with problems to which there are no easy answers. These include the problems of sexuality, growing up, and relations between parents and children, but also of being Jewish, of national belonging, religious faith, fate and personal freedom, the meaning of life, and of being denied the right to live” (4).

16. This fact has raised the ire of a number of critics and scholars, including Sullivan, Rosenfeld, Ozick, Langer, and others.

17. Its publishers had to anticipate that *The Upstairs Room* would be received in the vein of Anne Frank’s diary, and one might wonder about the extent to which it was marketed precisely to appeal to Frank’s readers. A review by Elie Wiesel printed on the back cover makes this connection explicit: “This admirable account is important in every respect as the one bequeathed to us by Anne Frank.”

18. Annie clearly makes the case that her mother's obstinacy about not leaving the Netherlands while it was still possible was responsible for the family's failure to escape the German threat. To Annie and her father's frustration and dismay, her mother cites her "headaches" as a reason for not leaving. Her refusal to recognize the seriousness of their situation, the novel suggests, dooms the family to their two-year confinement. Annie's mother herself dies in a hospital. Her father does not fare much better in how he is depicted, since he allows one of his daughters to care for his ailing wife while he himself goes into hiding. Annie's sister Sini later confesses that whenever farmers to whom their father sold cows refused to pay, he would send her to collect the money because he himself was afraid of them.

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