

# Mapping this dark country: Psychoanalytic perspectives on young adult literature

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**Résumé:** *Les auteurs examinent, dans les romans pour la jeunesse, le processus d'accession à l'âge adulte chez les garçons et les filles, à l'aide de grilles d'analyse quelquefois contradictoires: par exemple, pour Otto Rank, la maturité n'est acquise qu'après la séparation de l'individu de l'ensemble du groupe social; pour Carol Gilligan, au contraire, la maturité provient de l'acceptation des contraintes et des liens sociaux. La recherche de Mitchell et de Reid-Walsh montre qu'à part certaines exceptions, les personnages masculins suivent le modèle défini par Rank tandis que les héroïnes romanesques correspondent plutôt à celui de C. Gilligan. L'article soulève aussi les questions des rapports oedipiens et de l'utilisation des scènes de fusillade dans les romans pour garçons. On s'interroge enfin sur le caractère asexué des jeunes filles dans les oeuvres destinées à l'adolescence, car la sexualité semble y appartenir en exclusivité à la nature masculine.*

Psychoanalysis is a theory about the construction of the self; a hypothesis, a possible map for this dark country. (Duncker 74)

As I and my horse stood there on the ridge, I was torn between two feelings, equally strong, that tugged my heart in opposite directions. The feelings were like heavy ropes pulling hard at me; the feelings threatened to tear me in half. On one side pulled the oxen, the unfinished log house, the land, my horse and my pa; on the other pulled an elephant, a ship, the sea and a woman so like the mother I had lost in the fire. What could I do? (Cummings *Mogul and me* 54)

For characters like the twelve-year-old nameless boy in Peter Cummings' *Mogul and me*, navigating this dark country means standing on a rise of land and looking one way towards the world, and another homeward, contemplating what psychoanalytic theorist Otto Rank would describe as the tension between a life force and a death force. Feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan has recast the process of becoming within a relational framework, so that for characters like thirteen-year-old Polly in Sarah Ellis' *Pick-up sticks* learning to navigate this dark country means looking into the stained glass window in her bedroom and seeing the world, not in terms of separation, or as isolated pieces, but rather as a kaleidoscope with each configuration representing new relationships:

... she stretched out and tilted her head back to look at her stained-glass window, imagining, as always, its colors shining out into the darkness, joining the other lights of the city. (10-11)

Literary critics such as Perry Nodelman and Sheila Egoff define the young adult novel as the novel of becoming. Psychoanalytic theory as argued by developmental and critical theorists from Luce Irigaray and Carol Gilligan to Patricia Duncker provides a coherent theory of becoming. Traditional psychoanalytic theory offers a theory of becoming which rests on a process of achieving individual identity through separation, which Brown and Gilligan believe describes male becoming. Therefore, we might see the dramatic experience of separation felt by Cummings' hero as being an amplification of the male process of becoming. Female development, on the other hand, is described by Brown and Gilligan as existing within a relational framework. We could then see Polly's imaginative fusion of the rays of multi-coloured glass with the stars as being a heightened rendering of this relational development.

In this paper it is our purpose to explore the contemporary young adult novel using psychoanalytic concepts. Drawing from the work of Otto Rank on development-as-separation, and the work of Carol Gilligan on development-as-relational, it will be central to our exploration to offer insights about how and why characters in a novel "work," to offer possible links between gender and genre in terms of considering the appeal of certain young adult novels, and finally to contribute to an understanding of the young adult novel as a genre that might be read and enjoyed by both young adults and former young adults. In essence, we will use psychoanalytic perspectives as interpretive devices in describing the process of becoming in novels of becoming.

The focus of our investigation is on very recent Canadian literary texts published for the young adult market: *Pick-up sticks* by Sarah Ellis; *Foghorn passage* by Alison Lohans; *Fish House secrets* by Kathy Stinson; *Wrong time, wrong place* by Lesley Choyce; *Yuletide blues* by R.P. MacIntyre; *Oliver's wars* by Budge Wilson; and *Riptide!* by Marion Crook. While comparable texts of high quality exist in the United States, Britain, Australia and New Zealand, it is our contention that of the prose genres in Canadian publishing, the novel of becoming (vis-à-vis the work of an Alice Munro or a Margaret Laurence), as well as novels directed towards readers who are themselves in the process of "becoming," is an important component of Canadian writing. Kevin Major (1990) calls this "writing about adolescence" rather than strictly "for adolescents."<sup>1</sup>

Following this introduction, we describe the interpretive framework within which we situate psychoanalytic perspectives on the young adult novel. In the next section, we provide an overview of the seven novels which we have chosen as literary "case studies" of adolescent development, and discuss the depiction of the unconscious in each. In section three we provide close readings of the texts, showing how our interpretive framework applies to the novels that we have selected, noting too, the limitations of this interpretive framework.

## Section One

### *Towards developing an interpretive framework: Psychoanalytic perspectives on literature*

An account of the creation of psycho-sexual identity and the construction of gender is, of course, of critical importance to the reading and writing of literature. All fiction—fairy-tales, short stories, novels—necessarily places sexual politics and sexual difference at the core of the text, so that a theoretical challenge to the supposedly natural categories of male and female in the splintering of masculinity and femininity would indeed be revolutionary in its implications. (Duncker 8)

Our reading of psycho-sexual identity in young adult literature has been guided by two particular models: (1) Rankian development according to separation or, the “objective and disembodied” voice that Brown and Gilligan have described as presuming a male body (21), and (2) development “recast” as relational practice which Gilligan and others believe accords more with female experience. In this section we use as directly as possible the words of Otto Rank, Patricia Duncker, Luce Irigaray, Carol Gilligan, Nancy Chodorow, Nancy Harstock and Michele Fine as evidence of the possibilities for a psychoanalytic framework for looking at young adult literature, qualifying at the same time that much of what has been written by these theorists has not been applied to the young adult novel so much as to the experience of becoming an adult.

Much of traditional developmental psychology based on the work of Freud, Jung, Erickson and Rank looks at the emergence of identity through separation and the achieving of individuation. Otto Rank, in particular, looks at critical stages of development according to a tension between a life fear and a death fear:

The life fear is the anxiety which occurs when the individual becomes aware of creative capacities within himself the assertion of which would bring about the threat of separation from existing relationships; it is ‘the fear of having to live as an isolated individual.’ The death fear, on the other hand, is the fear of losing one’s individuality, of being swallowed up in the whole. All his life each human being is pushed forward by the need to be an individual and express himself more fully, and drawn back by the fear that by so doing he will cut himself off from the rest of society. (Brown, *Freud* 53)

At certain critical points in development this tension becomes stronger. For example, we have the toddler who wants to explore and the toddler who wants the security of the caregiver; the adolescent who fears being smothered at home or fears missing all the fun, and the adolescent who misses the security of home and finds the peer group really isn’t all that interesting anyway (the party/shopping trip/whatever never lives up to its billing). Young adult literature very much addresses these critical tensions. Peter Cummings uses this device with great success in *Mogul and me*. Much of the survival literature of Farley Mowat and James Houston, concerning primarily male protagonists, fits very nicely with Otto Rank’s work on psychological development. The protagonist must come to see himself as a separate identity, whether this be through the death of parents, separation from the father, learning to stand up to peer pressure, and so on. In essence, these critical tensions emerge as “a

story about relationship that is, at its centre, a story about separation, and a society that men govern within the framework of Western civilization” (Brown and Gilligan 22).

Brown and Gilligan challenge this traditional perspective on development, particularly male development, offering in its place a relational psychology which addresses directly the experiences of females:

A relational psychology informed by literary theory, by the insights of feminist literary critics, and by clinical insights about psychodynamic processes—that is, a voiced, resonant, resistant psychology—offers an opening, a way of voicing the relational nature of human life. (41)

Several other scholars also focus on gender differences in development. For instance, Nancy Harstock in *Money, sex, and power* (1985), explores the different developmental paths for males and females, arguing that for girls their developmental path is experienced as continuous with the world, while for males, it is necessary to experience the world in a discontinuous fashion. The work of Nancy Chodorow is particularly significant here to a discussion of the construction of opposing and gendered epistemologies in the experiences of early childhood. As Michele Fine analyzes the argument: “(girls) because of female parenting, are less differentiated from others than boys, more continuous with and related to the external object world.” (83). Fine, in continuing the argument, notes:

Such a division of labour in parenting ... means that girls can identify with a concrete example present in daily life, while boys must identify with an abstract set of maxims only occasionally present in the form of the father. (83)

Chodorow, Harstock, Gilligan, and Brown and Gilligan all offer insights into women’s capacity for relatedness. As Fine observes:

... relational potential renders women well suited to cooperate, empathize, affiliate, examine the interpersonal dimensions of moral questions, anticipate other’s needs.... (158)

Interestingly, Luce Irigaray’s account of male and female patients undergoing psychoanalytic treatment offers similar interpretations of individuation and relationship:

In men, the I is asserted in different ways; it is significantly more important than the you and the world. With women, the I often makes way for the you, the world, for the objectivity of words and things. From that point of view, women appear to be more capable of listening to, discovering or accommodating the other and the world, of remaining open to objective invention or creation, provided they can also say I. (Whitford 146)

Such differentiation, then, allows for opposing accounts of “becoming” by males and females as represented in the young adult novel; contributes to an understanding of differing moral dilemmas in the lives of male and female protagonists; and offers possible insights into why certain characters and certain novelists appeal to males rather than females, and vice versa. It is our focus in the rest of this paper to map paths of becoming in the young adult novel-as-literary-case study, according to psychoanalytic constructs.

## Section Two

### *Literary case studies*

The books that we have chosen as "literary case studies" display a range of male and female protagonists varying in age from eleven to seventeen years of age and are written by male and female authors. Two of the novels are set in Western Canada: *Foghorn passage* and *Pick-up sticks* both taking place in Vancouver and environs, while four are set in Eastern Canada. *Riptide!*, *Oliver's wars*, and *Wrong time, wrong place* are set in Halifax; and *Fish House secrets* is set in rural Nova Scotia. Only *Yuletide blues* is set in the interior. The regional nature of the books is sometimes essential to the plot. In *Wrong time, wrong place*, for example, Corey must deal with the racism in his school and with his Africville heritage. In *Oliver's wars* the pre-teen twin boys must adapt to their sudden move to Halifax due to their father being posted to Saudi Arabia where he is serving as a nurse in the Gulf War. The other plots are less topical but the situations are equally contemporary. For instance, in *Riptide!* the sudden move from rural Nova Scotia to Halifax unsettles Rory so much that he becomes involved with a shoplifting gang. In *Yuletide blues*, fifteen-year-old Lanny is left alone at Christmas with relatives because his parents are trying to have a holiday on their own.

Several books deal with a tragic incident or permanent instances of loss. For instance, the protagonists must come to terms with living in a single parent family in *Fish House secrets*, *Foghorn passage* and *Pick-up sticks*. In the first, Chad must come to terms with the recent death of his mother, while in the second, Sammie must accept the death of her father; in *Pick-up sticks*, Polly must come to accept that her family consists of herself and her mother, with her mother being a single mother by choice.

As these brief summaries suggest, the books address a variety of identity issues: being uprooted either physically or emotionally, trying to cope with school, friends and family, but especially trying to come to terms with oneself, to accept what one is. Corey's voicing of his realization at the end of *Wrong time, wrong place* expresses the aim of all the adolescent protagonists:

I was going to look straight at myself, smile, and be perfectly happy with what I looked like and who I was. And I decided right then and there ... that nothing was ever going to be easy. But that wouldn't worry me any more. (114)

Because the process of learning about oneself and accepting oneself is also the project of patients who undergo psychoanalytic treatment, psychoanalytic theory seems to be a feasible way to discuss young adult fiction. One potential difficulty, however, lies in the form of the novels themselves in that they are not "stream of consciousness," although there are aspects of this technique in several of them. The novels are rather realistic fiction and present everyday social and personal problems as their focus. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, is not interested in the realistic, rational dimension, but rather in the hidden

dimensions—dreams and the unconscious (Walkerdine 92). Accordingly, to overcome this potential impasse we read the novels with two criteria in mind. First, we were interested in whether the major characters were imbued with an unconscious life, whether in dreams, overpowering concerns, and so on. Second, we examined the overall behaviour of the protagonists to determine whether either Rank's psychological theory of development as separation and individuation seemed to apply, or whether Gilligan's belief in development according to connection and relationality seemed a more valid description of the characters' personalities. By overall behaviour we refer to both the unconscious and conscious dimensions of existence.

### *The dark country: The unconscious*

The unconscious is rather like God. If it exists it will have an effect on us whether we like it or not; but it is perfectly possible to live, love, write, think, speak, and take political action as if it did not exist. (Duncker 58)

All of the books that we selected deal, to varying degrees, with the unconscious: the protagonists have dreams, or fantasies or visions and irrational, overpowering fears. We were surprised how in many cases basic Freudian terms could be used to describe the depiction of the unconscious. In terms of the male protagonists who are pubescent, the Oedipus complex seems to be present to a varying degree. At the one end of the spectrum is *Fish House secrets* where Chad has recurring visions about his mother to whom he was very close temperamentally. To mark Chad's acceptance of her death, Stinson describes a scene where Chad imagines seeing his mother's shape in the mist and tries to embrace her:

Gradually, near where I'm standing, the mist becomes less—I don't know—misty. There's colour in it, the shapes it's swirling in more defined. Like a woman. The sea is lapping at her ankles and the edge of her long skirt. One hand is resting on her hip, the other is reaching—toward me? No, she's at an easel. The woman turns her head and I see her face. What has appeared, not twenty feet away, is my mother.

I step toward her, elated. I must take five or six fumbling steps—and almost touch her—before she, the mist, turns and whispers something that gets lost in the *swish* of a wave and disappears. I fall to my knees at the water's edge. The waves wash away the last traces of her, the impressions of her feet in the wet sand. (69)

Chad then regresses in his imagination to an infantile stage and symbolically reconnects with his father whom he has been spurning.

Stinson's powerful symbolic rendering of grief is sexualized by her plotting. By juxtaposing the sexually mature heroine's stripping immediately after the sequence with Chad's dead mother, the girl becomes a substitute for the mother (79-80). This substitution is even more apparent at the end of the book. Immediately after Jill's departure, Chad senses that his mother is once again going to appear in the mist. He runs away "to escape her." He literally runs into his father and cries out that "her" going is his fault. The juxtaposition so confuses his father that he thinks Chad is talking about Jill. Significantly, Chad seems to

be running away from both women (119).

In contrast to Stinson's symbolic depiction of adolescent male sexuality in terms of an implied Oedipal relation, are *Wrong time, wrong place* and *Yuletide blues* which have protagonists who are more sexually mature in that they have girlfriends. In each case, there is a sequence where the boy comes to the startled realization that his mother is physically attractive. In *Wrong time, wrong place*, Corey has the further unsettling intimation that his ex-girlfriend looks like his mother:

When the tape was over and I opened my eyes, there was my mom, standing in the doorway looking at me. I swear she is the best looking older woman anywhere around. I like her dark eyes, her milk-and-coffee brown skin. I had to look away real quick because it was just too weird ... too weird because I realized that she looked an awful lot like Denise, only older. (31)

In Lanny's case, in *Yuletide blues*, he has the added embarrassment of being caught ogling his own mother with his buddies while she is jogging. The vernacular language of the boys captures the scene effectively:

'I wouldn't kick her out of bed for eating crackers,' says Boog ... We turn back to the window. 'Yeah, she's not bad,' I say. As these words leave my lips, the woman passes under the street light at the end of the parking lot.

I recognize who it is. 'Holy shit!'

'You know her?' says Dozen.

'It's my Mom!' They just about die laughing. I fail to see the humour of the situation. Lusting after my own mother. Frankly, it's disgusting. (31)

In contrast to the depiction of the older teen boys, there is little intimation of a sexualized unconscious in the female protagonists. Indeed, the only heroine who has a sexual dimension is Jill in *Fish House secrets* and she is definitely subsidiary to Chad. Interestingly, the asexual nature of female protagonists in comparison with adolescent boys has been remarked upon by Sheila Egoff as being an omission in contemporary Canadian young adult fiction (76).

This is not to imply that the heroines and the pre-pubescent boys do not have an unconscious life, for they do have dreams or visions, or overpowering fears. In *Pick-up sticks* Polly has recurring fantasies about her unknown father which resemble Freud's notion of the "family romance" whereby the child imagines she comes from a higher level of society and has more exciting parents than she does. Sarah Ellis includes a beautifully crafted sequence where Polly is in the laundromat imagining that one of the strangers is her father. The fantasy is incorporated into the text so smoothly that the reader is momentarily lulled into the visionary state with Polly. Although there are cues that Polly is imagining, the end of the sequence with its dose of reality, namely her mother, comes as a shock to the reader as well as Polly!:

Suddenly he dropped the sheet he was folding and came to stand in front of Polly. He had crisp, black curly hair, and this time he wore a mustache. He stared deep into Polly's eyes. 'Can it be true? Are you ... Are you my daughter? You are! I would recognize you anywhere. I've been looking for you for thirteen years. Finally, my search is over. Oh, Polly, I want to make up to you for all the years we've missed.' Then he picked up Polly's laundry, and together they walked out to his sports car and drove to the big, perfect house that he owned, and he and Mum fell in love all over again and ... Here the fantasy ran into a brick wall.... (42)

Another instance of effective presentation of a teenage girl's unconscious occurs in *Foghorn passage* where Sammie is mourning her father's death. She is also worried about a male friend who was seriously hurt in a car accident and, finally, about her mother who becomes exhausted from overwork and is hospitalized. Sammie's dreams are recurring and frightening. They are so disturbing that she and her mother consider therapy, but they cannot afford it. Here is part of one nightmare:

I dreamed. We were together. Dad, Mom, Deena, me. We were leaving for a picnic on Waite Island. A gale was blowing and I knew the flat open ferry would be tossed like a cast-off paper plate on the heaving sea. But we hadn't gone out the door yet. Dad's face changed, got skinnier, until a fleshless skull grinned at us. 'Bill,' Mom said, 'I think we'd better not go. It's too stormy.' Couldn't she see that it wasn't Dad anymore? I tried to warn her, but my voice didn't work. 'It's time to go, the skeleton-Dad insisted, and as I watched, the numbers fell off the clock, leaving a terrifying blank face, and Mom shrank into an old woman in a blue hospital gown with electrodes attached to her chest.... (168)

Because she reaches the point where she is afraid to go to sleep, Sammie finally resorts to keeping a secret journal (177).

In the two novels featuring younger teen or pre-teen boys, the unconscious is presented as being a less intense force. In *Riptide!* fourteen-year-old Rory has recurring dreams about his grandfather as a symbolic conscience which chastises him for his shoplifting. This Nemesis-like figure is, however, given a supernatural dimension which reduces the psychological impact. Twelve-year-old Oliver in *Oliver's wars* is beset with inexpressible fears for his father who was fighting in the Gulf. He feels paralysed with worry. Because he is a talented painter, his art teacher notices him. She encourages Oliver to try to express his fears in "letters" to his father which would not necessarily be sent (59), thereby engaging, like Sammie, in a kind of "writing therapy."

As this overview indicates, young adult writers are aware of how the adolescent's search for self must occur on the unconscious level as well as on the behavioural level, although all the writers are not equally adept at an integrated portrayal. All present their characters in the process of becoming and in their novels show selected phases in a young person's life. Their presentations illustrate Patricia Duncker's belief in the permanence of the unconscious and, more importantly, her contention that in order to be responsible, mature human beings we must strive to understand and question our unconscious selves as well as the conscious:

We can choose on what terms we want to understand ourselves. We can interrogate our rational and irrational desire. We may be strangers to ourselves, but we need not be our own victims. It is both an existential gesture and an affirmation of political responsibility to undertake the making of ourselves. For, of course, our self is constructed. It makes no sense at all to dream about discovering who we really are, as if there was a perfect doll hidden in us under layers of seaweed.... (58)

### **Section Three: Developmental paths**

#### *Pushed forward and drawn back*

In this section of our paper we will address how the developmental theories of Otto Rank and Carol Gilligan can be used to explore the young adult novels as narratives



of becoming that encompass the unconscious and conscious dimensions in a holistic conception of self. To do so we will first examine those novels which seem to exhibit either Rank's or Gilligan's theories alone. Then we will discuss those novels which appear to express adolescent development as being a combination of both separation and individuation as well as relationality and connection.

*Wrong time, wrong place* provides a fine example of a boy's development according to Rank's notion of fear of life and fear of death. Corey sees himself as black, but due to his light skin and blue eyes, he passes for Caucasian. At the beginning of the novel, his girlfriend has rejected him because he does not look black enough. Constantly in trouble with a principal who refuses to acknowledge the racism that divides the school, Corey is precipitated into a crisis.

Chapter Two contains a dramatic incident which symbolizes the sharp opposition of two alternatives that Corey must choose between. Corey is skipping school. Missing his bus, he decides to walk to Halifax Harbour. When he comes to the Angus MacDonald bridge, it is closed to pedestrians but he decides to cross anyway, "walking toward Halifax right down the middle of the bridge, on the yellow line" (5). The drivers start honking but Corey deliberately flirts with danger, his precarious middle position symbolizing his situation in life: "I don't belong anywhere. I'm almost dizzy with the way I feel right now, finally standing up against the whole lousy world. I really am breaking the rules for once" (5-6). While walking, Corey falls into a meditation about his school and his social problems—all related to his "middle" status regarding race. Lost in thought, Corey wanders off his precarious line of safety and is almost killed:

I look back out to sea, away from the jammed up cars. There's McNab's Island, and, further out, Devil's Island. Beyond that, nothing but the ocean. I'm not paying attention to where I'm walking and I guess I walk right out in front of some guy driving toward Dartmouth. He slams on his brakes and I fall face-down on the hood of his car. I'm a little surprised but not hurt.

And as I'm shaking my head trying to clear my thoughts, I guess the guy behind him wasn't looking ... wham! I hear somebody else smack into the rear of his car. I'm jolted forward on to the pavement and get the wind knocked out of me. Everything happens so quick. (7)

While Corey's behaviour could be interpreted as enacting a Freudian death-wish, Rank's description seems to be more appropriate because Corey sees himself as trying to find out who he is and sees himself as being torn between two mutually exclusive worlds. He physically separates himself from the perimeters of his world, home and school, and sets off alone. His bizarre actions, and "punch-drunk" mood seem to be the result of the clash between what Rank calls the life fear and the death fear. Significantly, Corey is walking a "yellow" line, for he is neither white nor black. Because his situation in traffic, as in his world, is so fragile, the minute he loses self-control he is almost killed. Miraculously, he is rescued by his black great-uncle, who coincidentally is crossing the bridge in his car (9).

The climax of the action of the novel is a fight scene with the white school bully that recalls the western "shoot-out." This device from a traditional male genre symbolizes the most extreme form of Rank's theory of development

regarding individuation and separation. Interestingly, this device appears in all the novels with boy protagonists and it always occurs near the end. How the heroes handle themselves is, in each case, symbolic of their emotional and mental development. In *Wrong time, wrong place*, the fight is connected with Corey's black heritage and helps form his sense of belonging to the black community since his grandfather was a noted professional fighter.

### *Making connections in a relational world*

Two books seem to exemplify Gilligan's theory of development: *Pick-up sticks* and *Foghorn passage*. Both feature adolescent girls, who, as mentioned earlier, are trying to come to terms with the lack of a father, and accordingly must find a new closer and maturer relationship with their mothers in order for themselves to grow psychologically (Belenky 183-186). Significantly, in *Pick-up sticks* the heroine, Polly, is thirteen years old. She is having an emotional crisis because she and her mother have to leave the security of their home. In the course of the book, Polly temporarily rejects her mother's world for the apparently "safe" world of middle-class suburbia with her uncle and aunt—appropriately named "Barbie"! Realizing that their values are hollow, Polly is precipitately forced to make her own way "home" when her joyriding cousin and friends literally throw her out of the car. Instinctively, she returns to her mother, who is now living in her artist's studio.

Polly's age is extremely important. According to Gilligan's theory of adolescent female development, this is the age when girls begin to undergo the subtle "voice and ear training" which socializes middle-class girls into women in North America. Gilligan believes this age is crucial, because the girls are in danger of losing their own voice and their ability to criticize or "resist" conventional social influences. If this happens, the girls may become "resistant" in the psychological sense of being afraid to acknowledge that they do possess valuable knowledge and a distinctive voice (Gilligan, "Joining the Resistance" 4, 18). According to Gilligan's theory, then, Polly's realization and decision to reject her relatives and identify with her mother is symbolic of the direction her future will take. At the end of the book, the two of them are eating hamburgers in their favourite "greasy spoon" restaurant. Polly asks her mother why she decided to have a daughter by herself. Her mother replies that she and her girlfriend years before had talked about being the single parent of a daughter in the same restaurant and mentally catalogued all the men they knew in terms of their genes (122). Then, her friend had asked what would Joan do when her daughter asked her why she decided to become a single parent. Interestingly, Polly's mother's response does not address the father question at all; rather she talks about her love of humans as a race (123).

In the same spirit as her mother, Polly imagines her mother as a younger woman laughing with her female friend and realizes that inadvertently she had maligned her mother in her imaginings:

Polly studied her and saw, superimposed on the Mum of right now, a thirteen-years-younger Mum,

eating pie, giggling with Marcie, finding the world suddenly beautiful. She realized that she had never put any energy into imagining Mum back then. She had used all her imaginings trying to visualize her father ... just at the moment, she didn't need him. He wasn't the point. (123-24)

By concluding with the double negative about her father, Polly shows that her sudden insight has profoundly affected her so she can act in a relational, caring manner. Mother and daughter crying together at the end and their subsequent departure "home" is presented in a realistically yet psychologically satisfying denouement which establishes Polly and her mother on a more equal footing. Although open-ended, at the novel's close a new-found confidence surrounds the mother and daughter as they leave, suggesting a potential positive outcome for their search for a new place to live.

*Foghorn passage* features an older teen-age girl as heroine: Sammie is sixteen, turning seventeen, in the book, and she must come to accept the recent loss of her father, as well as to help a recently disabled and bereaved boy she is attracted to understand and accept his new condition in life. This book contains the oldest protagonist in the novels read, and it contains the most difficult situations and problems. At the beginning, Sammie tells how she used to be attracted to a boy in her school but that his image is fading; instead, she listens to the foghorns:

Adam. Adam Hoover at school. Every night he filled my mind, bigger than life. But tonight he kept fading. So I listened to the foghorns. Sometimes Uncle Amos was out there on his fishboat, the Ellen Marie. I imagined the feel of mist on my cheeks, the air thick with the smell of low tide, in a ghostly world where spirits hovered just above the water. The air would tremble with throbbing engines, with the chanting foghorns and clanging bell buoys; waves would slap against the hulls of boats at their moorings.... (15)

The shift from the expected interest of a female heterosexual adolescent, namely, a boy-friend, to the imagery of foghorns serves several functions in the novel. On the one hand, foghorns represent Sammie's own talent in playing the French horn; on the other hand, the way their ghostly nature is emphasized suggests the power of the unconscious world in Sammie's life. The foghorns at this point forecast symbolically how the problems Sammie will have to resolve are centred in the non-worldly. She is thereby leaving the range of typical female adolescent development and moving into the exceptional.

As mentioned earlier in our discussion of the unconscious, Sammie has recurring nightmares that almost completely debilitate her. She eventually overcomes them through the support of a community of women: her friend Julie, her older half-sister Glenna, and her mother. The incident in Sammie's life that propels her into accepting responsibility in terms of a caring code of morality is the unexpected (from the child's perspective) collapse of her mother. The shock propels the family into action—the girls themselves, but also the extended family of relatives who had been letting the "strong" mother cope with everything.

The final section of the book parallels the mother's recovery with Sammie's and Matt's. This counterpoint is structured in almost a musical way, and Sammie's growing friendship is delicately and ambiguously presented in musical terms. They are never girlfriend and boyfriend, but Sammie is recognized as being a major

reason for Matt's eventual reentering into life instead of giving up and further attempting to kill himself (96, 179). Significantly it is his mother who appreciates what Sammie has done (179), and her mother who understands the special closeness Sammie and Matt share: "Let's say Sammie is attuned to someone" (182).

At the end of the novel, Sammie and her mother share an unexpected and unexpectedly moving moment related to their dead father and husband. The scene is powerful because Sammie is not presented as mature for her age. Her mother has just found her secret notebook, and is praising her for her maturity. Sammie is not interested: "I stretched impatiently. I wasn't in the mood for a lecture, not even a friendly one" (214). She wants to act like the seventeen-year-old girl she is. Notice that Sammie's list of "wants" returns her to the typical world of adolescence that she had left at the beginning: "What I really wanted to do was sprawl on my bed. Read Matt's letter a hundred times, hold the dog against my cheek. Cry. And phone Julie, eventually" (214). Her mother notes, smiles, gently repeats her suggestion, but gives Sammie time to luxuriate in her youthful emotions. What the mother does is give Sammie the last photograph of her and her father. The photo's symbolism, by its reversal, finely balances the misty, foghorn passage quoted earlier:

A man in a wheelchair was looking out a window. The picture was taken from behind, but there was no question about the identity of the two people in it. I was sitting on a chair arm next to my father. My arm was around his shoulder. We were both looking out the window, into the sunlight. (215)

### *"Meeting at the Crossroads"*

Of the novels read, four have protagonists who mature psychologically according to what we perceive to be a combination of Rank's and Gilligan's theories of development. Interestingly, the protagonists are both male and female (Chad, Jill, Lanny, Rory and Megan), and the authors masculine and feminine (Stinson, Wilson, McIntyre and Crook). This is not to say that the novels are equally successful in portraying adolescent growth in a plausible way. *Fish House secrets* is an instance of this. Here the role, plots and developmental patterns of the hero Chad and heroine Jill seem reversed in that she has the "adventure" while he has the "domestic" drama, and she is the aggressor or initiator of action, while he is the passive respondent to her overtures. Chad learns that in order to accept his mother's death he must accept and connect with the living members of his family, particularly his grandfather and his father. The former reconciliation is achieved through the mutual discovery that the "Fish House" has been the secret place for artistry, on his grandfather's side by writing, on Chad's side by continuing to paint like his artist mother. The reconciliation with his father is in terms of their mutual recognition of their anger, guilt and grief.

Jill, on the other hand, must come to realize that her family's imperfections, namely her mother staying with a father whom Jill considers worthless, and her brother's sudden departure due to the pregnancy of his girlfriend, must be accepted

by her. They are still her family, although not as wealthy and attractive as Chad's. This class bias is disturbing and the pattern of gender/genre reversal, which could be very interesting, is rather disappointing since the narrative technique does not quite accord with the importance of the characters. Jill is a secondary character; yet her story is presented as if it were equally important as Chad's due to the interesting narrative technique of using two parallel voices organized like a diary. At the end, however, Jill is essentially rejected by the middle-class Merrill family, and so forced to return home. The conclusion regarding Jill is unsatisfying; she seems to be only of interest to Stinson as long as she serves the purpose of helping Chad accept his mother's death. If she is to be a subsidiary character, she should have been presented as such and not given her own diary-voice. The narrative technique thereby gives a misleading importance to a character who is treated in a disappointingly stereotypical manner.

In contrast to this reversed pattern of development, *Oliver's wars* and *Yuletide blues* have male protagonists who mature according to a pattern of development that combines features of both Rank's and Gilligan's theories. Oliver is the youngest male protagonist. At twelve years of age he and his twin brother must come to terms with forced separation (because of the Gulf war) from a father they admire, a sudden move to their strict grandparents' place in Halifax, and integrating into a new school. While Jerry has no problems because of his athletic and outgoing nature, Oliver, while appearing fine, is actually deeply introverted and locks all his fears and concerns inside.

To convey Oliver's introversion and deep-rooted worries, Wilson has Oliver escape several times to the privacy and safety of the attic, where he can safely let go of his emotions. On the one hand, these retreats seem to accord with a Freudian regression: Oliver sits in an old chair and wraps himself up in a blanket, reminiscent of a small child with a beloved "blankey:" "Oliver searched the attic for two things he wanted—a blanket and a comfortable place to sit ... Wrapping himself in the blanket, Oliver curled up on the chair and let himself think about all the things he needed to think about" (17). On the other hand, Oliver's actions are also a search for individuation and separation; he has to get away from the blaring "T.V. war" so he will not go mad. By this behaviour, Oliver is beginning to separate himself from uncongenial members of his family and refuel himself. As mentioned earlier in our section on the unconscious, Oliver comes to terms with his fears through a form of writing therapy.

Two more aspects in *Oliver's wars* are particularly relevant to our discussion. First, the depiction of the absent father and Oliver's similarity and relationship to him are interesting. Oliver's father is a nurse in the armed forces. While the school bully considers this to be a "sissy" occupation, Oliver knows differently. Budge Wilson's description of Capt. Kovak, although described as perfection by the adoring son, represents a deliberate attempt to describe a "new" man: he is athletic, strong, but caring and deeply connected to his boys and his family:

"When he wasn't working at the hospital, the thing his dad seemed to want most of all was just to be with his family. He was stern sometimes, but never mean or mad" (4). Oliver, who is not athletic, has spent long hours being coached by his dad in the obligatory "macho" Canadian sport, hockey. His dad tries to explain to Oliver that he is talented in swimming and art, that hockey is not important in the larger scheme of things, that "there are sometimes things that you just have to let go of" (33). Capt. Kovak seems very wise, yet unconventional, and close to his sons in a manner associated typically with "mothering:" that he is a nurse marks his caring and relational nature.

The second time in *Oliver's wars* where a male acts according to relational rather than separational thinking occurs in Oliver's unusual resolution of his conflict with the school bully, Gus. Instead of the expected confrontation, Oliver learns that Gus's father, who is an American, has been wounded in the Gulf War. Instead of gloating, Oliver goes over instinctively to Gus, and says he is sorry about his father (87). Despite being reviled by Gus, Oliver manages to both defend his father and effect a reconciliation with Gus so they become friends (92). This unexpected denouement stands in contrast to all the other novels featuring adolescent boys in that Oliver resists the masculine "fight" scene. Rather, his ultimate growth concerns achieving an appreciation of his own identity in terms of connection rather than in terms of separation. Oliver is thereby modelling himself on his father, a caring and relational man. While laudable generally, the only criticism of this very nonconfrontational resolution is that Oliver is not a very realistic portrayal of a twelve-year-old boy.<sup>2</sup>

*Yuletide blues* has a fifteen-year-old boy as protagonist. The narrative traces Lanny's development from being a typical Canadian boy in that he hangs out in malls, is interested in sex and plays hockey—indeed he gains his sense of identity from the sport—to a more exceptional person who has learnt the importance of sensitivity to others, especially women: old women, middle-aged women and girls. Lanny could thereby be seen as moving from a sense of development based on separation toward a sense of developing based on care, represented symbolically by his playing "the blues" at the end of the book.

Throughout, certain key episodes mark the points of Lanny's development; for instance, the sequence discussed earlier regarding a possible Oedipal relation with his mother can also be viewed as marking the beginning of Lanny's shift away from typical male posturing. Lanny's revulsion and embarrassment could also signal his instinctive dislike of objectifying women into sex objects, although as yet he is unaware what he is doing. Indeed, subsequently he will objectify his girlfriend in such a way by calling her a slut (55). (Interestingly, again as in *Fish House secrets*, girls of fifteen and sixteen are presented both as sexually advanced and the aggressors in physical relationships, a disturbingly sexist parallel.) By the end of the book, Lanny not only realizes that he was wrong but can express both to his girlfriend and to the reader just what he was doing:

'I don't know, because I really like you. And if I really like you, Shawna, the person, then how can I hurt you? So I call you a slut, and you're not Shawna anymore, just a thing, then I can hurt you. If you want to hurt someone, you turn them into a thing first. So that's what I did to you. I turned you into a thing, a slut.' (162)

The reason for Lanny's reversal is depicted in the text in terms of his evolving relations with two key female relatives: first, his aunt Daphne with whom he is supposed to stay until she attempts to kill herself and ends up in hospital; and then, his Great-Aunt Florence who is confined to a wheelchair. Lanny is forced to deal with these two eccentric, unhappy women, and learn what it is like not to be privileged. The first key incident occurs in hospital where Lanny and his family are visiting Aunt Daphne in the psychiatric wing. Lanny is forced to realize how, despite her sustained youthful and "hippyish" appearance, his aunt is essentially lonely and miserable. The realization comes suddenly in a kind of Joycean epiphanic moment.

I am still thinking about how normal the people look. The thing about people is they look fine on the outside. But the next thing you know, they're dead. That's one kind of people. And then of course there's the other kind, the kind who look like their faces are on inside out and backwards ... but they hum along just fine, thank you, like nothing's wrong at all. (122)

Rank's theory about the tension between the fear of life and fear of death seems to be well exhibited here. Lanny realizes that despite appearances some people suddenly and unexpectedly overcome their fear of death and kill themselves; while others, although they look bizarre, can face life with equanimity. While the decision to commit suicide is absolute, in Aunt Daphne's case it was mitigated by her calling for help. As Lanny remarks, "She really is alone" (123).

As a consequence of visiting his aunt, Lanny suddenly realizes that he now believes the opposite of what he had always thought about the important issues of life: "It suddenly occurs to me that I am nuts and everyone around me is sane. I know nothing and everybody around me knows too much, and if someone was to stop me right now, I couldn't prove who I am, or who I think I am" (126). Subsequently, when Lanny is in hospital himself with a broken leg and his parents are away on holiday, he realizes that he too is alone. MacIntyre writes this sequence not as a regression into self-pity but a regression that is a stripping away of Lanny's youthful male ego. This frees him to realize that everyone is alone, and to empathize with his aunt whom he had previously considered only as odd, as her nickname "Day-glow" suggests (134-35).

The character who helps Lanny mature into a fuller realization of human interconnectedness is his old Great-Aunt Florence. While staying with her, Lanny learns of the dramatic and violent way that she lost her ability to play the piano at concert level: rescuing a child from the flames caused by bombing raids in Germany in the Second World War (143-44). Lanny realizes that the old are people too, not only with pasts, but with pasts that shaped them to be the way they are now. Immediately afterwards he realizes that old women still have feelings when Aunt Florence is rejected by her male escort because of her wheel-chair (145-6).

While in *Yuletide blues* MacIntyre implicitly presents women as mentors for a teenage boy, in *Riptide!* the teacher/pupil gender relation is made explicit. Significantly, according to Gilligan's theory of development, the heroine-teacher is an eleven-year-old girl, Megan, who teaches her fourteen-year-old cousin Rory how to resist the blandishments of a tough gang of shoplifters and house-breakers. Her voice stands alone against the sophisticated arguments of the gang-leader Derrick, and ultimately Rory comes to understand how he has to act according to his own code of morality, and not go along with the gang. Megan tells Rory when he is worried about how he will be regarded: "You're not a wimp ... Maybe it's harder sometimes to say no, like maybe it's harder to be the one who's different" (74). Megan seems to be advocating a rights morality through relational and caring morality, thereby combining both traditional male and female ways of knowing. She is also advocating a version of Rank's idea of separation and individuation, but through a Gilligan logic of connection.

During the course of the book, Rory's stealing has progressively worsened from a prank, as in the "initiation" test of stealing a radio (21), to systematically stealing from the stores in the mall, to house-breaking (56-60). Although they are not caught, Rory belatedly has an attack of conscience when he stops objectifying the people who own the house, and considers them as people to whom he owes basic courtesy: "The owners were a family. People his Uncle Rory knew" (60). Rory is thereby already swaying in his allegiance to the gang.

Typically, the resolution of Rory's difference with the gang leader Derrick is through the device of the fight. As in the western, Rory is also defending the less physically strong female, in this case his cousin Megan. By allowing Megan to play an active role, however, Crook modifies the standard "shootout" to allow the girl, although frightened, to also fight:

'Run, Megan!' he yelled. But Megan didn't run away; she ran forward, her head down, straight into Colin's diaphragm. Megan may have been small, but she rammed Colin with enough force to knock the breath out of him. He dropped to the ground, his mouth open, struggling for breath like a flounder on the shore. (97-98)

When asked why, she retorts, "Because you're my cousin ... Would I leave you?" (101). By modifying the (western) genre to include Megan, Crook emphasizes the importance of the two as a team. Crook also emphasizes how Megan is more than a sometimes sarcastic commentator and aloof counsellor about events, for she can also function at the "boys'" level of interaction by fighting.

## Conclusion

As Patricia Duncker observes, psychoanalysis "is a suggested explanation of how we acquire an identity and take up our posts in the normative categories: mother, father, woman, man" (74). The protagonists' development that we have observed in the seven novels raises important questions about male and female patterns of "becoming." We have applied two opposing models of development:



Rank's model of development according to separation and individuation, and a relational model of development proposed by Gilligan and other women theorists. Significantly, Gilligan's work has been criticized as being essentialist, yet she denies the charge. Rather, Gilligan distinguishes between the traditional male voice of equality, reciprocity, justice and rights, and the voice that she heard, mainly in women's talk, of connection, not hurting, care and response. She believes these respective patterns of predominance are not gender specific but rather gender related (*Mapping the moral domain* 8). We argue that the novels appear to support Gilligan's contention: while the female protagonists seem to be in a pattern of discovering, they are maturing according to connection; the boys seem to learn that maturity is individuation, but individuation in relation to the complex needs of others. In our paper we have attempted to map these patterns of development, not as essentialist and thereby opposing routes, but complex schemes of developmental unfolding. Indeed, Brown and Gilligan have proposed that the interconnected relation between the two themes or "voices" of separation and care is similar to that of a musical fugue (*Making connections* 315-21).

The validity of our mapping is heightened, we believe, because the texts we are using as "literary case studies" have not been written explicitly or self-consciously as psychoanalytic texts. Indeed, our point is not that young adult writers necessarily read Gilligan, Rank or other developmental theorists, but rather, that they are able to represent young adult development through the creation of plausible characters who possess both a conscious and unconscious life. The process of becoming necessarily involves coming to terms with both rational and irrational dimensions of one's self. Characters, in essence "work" because of the depiction of this integrated sense of self, which might now be seen as a literary convention in contemporary realistic fiction for young adults.

Virginia Woolf believed that nineteenth-century women's lives had "an anonymous character which is baffling and puzzling in the extreme," but that in early twentieth-century women's fiction "for the first time this dark country is beginning to be explored" (49-50). Patricia Duncker seizes on Woolf's metaphor and applies it to psychoanalysis, believing that the technique provides a possible "map" for the "dark country" of the self (74). We apply Woolf's statements to contemporary adolescents and to Canadian Young Adult fiction today: the lives of adolescents may be unknown, baffling and puzzling, but Young Adult fiction is now exploring their "dark country." We have mapped the literary lives of the protagonists according to psychoanalytic concepts in an attempt to confer visibility on the shadowy world of becoming.

## NOTES

- 1 This remark was made at the "Canadian Images" conference in October 1990.
- 2 Here we are grateful to the graduate class in children's literature in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, McGill University in the fall of 1992 for their willingness to share their insights on the young adult novel.

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