

Exegesis

Doctorate in Communication

University of Canberra

Alyssa Brugman

Qualities of Friendship

Unreliable Narration in Young Adult Fiction

Abstract

Why is a young adult character's unreliability a useful narrative strategy in one novel and a hindrance in another? Is the writer's allegiance to the reader or to the character they create? These are questions specific to young adult fiction, since the protagonist is inherently unreliable, and the readers are generally inexperienced interpreters of narrative strategies.

This research seeks to identify narrative devices from the field of narratology, and determine how they can be used to address the limitations of unreliable narrators in young adult fiction.

Five texts have been examined for specific narrative strategies, identified in the structural narratology literature (among these - frequency, anachrony, embedded text, metafiction, and assigning a narratee).

Three theorists were particularly inspiring for this research. Many of the texts in narratology do not address the actual author, but instead focus on the reader's interpretation of the text. Concepts put forward by Wayne Booth, Mike Cadden and Theresa Hyde each influenced this research, having perspectives on the obligations of the author to their readership.

A number of tactics have been identified in the texts that do not appear in the narratology literature, or seem to have the opposite effect to that which the literature would indicate.

The exegesis discusses these narrative strategies and how they contribute to overcoming the limitations of unreliable narrators in young adult fiction. An accompanying manuscript demonstrates some of the strategies discussed in the exegesis.

Prefatory comments

This research was carried out under the guidance of Emeritus Professor Belle Alderman. I am very grateful for her ongoing support.

Many thanks to the other members of my supervisory panel, Dr Jennifer Webb and Dr Anthony Eaton. I would also like to thank the members of the panels who assessed the progress seminars of this research for their advice, Dr Christine Trimmingham Jack, Dr Jordan Williams and Dr John Cohen.

Thanks to Rosalind Price and Mike Shuttleworth who supported my initial application to pursue postgraduate studies at the University of Canberra.

As an off-campus student I am also indebted to the library staff at the University of Canberra who always sent me resources swiftly and without incident.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my partner Chris Watts for his unwavering confidence in me, and to my children Isaac, Theodore and Scarlett for being so patient.

Table of Contents

1. <i>Introduction</i> _____	1
A Young Adult (YA) predicament _____	3
Aim _____	9
Overview of the study _____	9
Contribution of this research _____	10
2. <i>Section One - Background</i> _____	11
Young adult fiction _____	12
Narratology _____	22
Narratology – structural, postclassical, poststructural _____	24
Key Narrative Devices _____	27
Unreliable Narration and Implied Author _____	27
Dramatic irony and distance _____	30
Embedded text (levels in narrative) _____	32
Secondary fabula explains _____	32
Secondary fabula resembles _____	33
Focalisation _____	33
Slant and Filter _____	34

Multiple focalisation	34
Anachrony and ordering of events	36
Metafiction, metanarrative and metalepsis	37
Dissertations – narratology and young adult fiction	39
Ethics and Unreliable Narrators	45
Mike Cadden -"The Irony of Narration in the Young Adult Novel" 2000	45
Wayne Booth – The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction 1988	47
3. <i>Section two – Research Design</i>	53
Why I have chosen the structural approach	54
Selection of texts for close study	55
4. <i>Section three - Examination of Selected Texts</i>	60
Elizabeth Fensham – ‘Helicopter Man’	61
Narrative Strategies Applied	61
Unreliable narration – withholding information	62
Filter and the narratee	66
Anachrony – order of events	68
Embedded text	72
Other techniques	74
Lessons from Helicopter Man	78
Melina Marchetta – ‘Saving Francesca’	80

Narrative Strategies Applied _____	80
Acknowledging a ‘you’ and forms of unreliability _____	81
Unreliability in relation to static minor characters _____	84
Tense and frequency _____	84
Secondary and Tertiary Fabulas – rescues, word choice and ways to be a woman ____	88
Lessons from Saving Francesca _____	96
Cassandra Golds – ‘The Museum of Mary Child’ _____	98
Unreliable Narration and Point of View _____	99
Metafiction _____	102
Willing suspension of disbelief - making the implausible plausible _____	104
Motifs and repetitions _____	107
Dolls _____	108
Prisons and cages _____	110
Lessons from ‘The Museum of Mary Child’ _____	112
Ursula Dubosarsky – ‘The Red Shoe’ _____	114
Narrative Strategies Applied _____	116
Ways Matilda is unreliable _____	117
Temporal techniques _____	119
Embedded Text – The Fairytale and Symbols _____	120
Embedded text - The Petrov Affair and Newspaper Articles _____	122

Multiple focalisation _____	124
Floreal – an adult consciousness _____	126
Lessons from ‘The Red Shoe’ _____	130
Justine Larbalestier - ‘Liar’ _____	133
Ways in which Micah is unreliable _____	135
Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Fabulas _____	136
Absence of the implied author _____	137
Author colluding in the unreliability _____	138
Metafiction _____	142
Lessons from ‘Liar’ _____	144
5. <i>Conclusions</i> _____	146
Ways that characters were unreliable in the selected texts _____	149
Temporal techniques _____	151
Point of view _____	153
Symbols, motifs and embedded text _____	155
Situating the Creative Work within Young Adult Fiction _____	157
6. <i>References</i> _____	166
Appendix A – Review of ‘Girl Next Door’ _____	174

1. Introduction

This dissertation is about unreliable narration in young adult fiction.

As a writer of young adult fiction, I have often asked what is or is not young adult fiction, and what should or should not be? It is less often a question of content as the appropriateness and quality of the company a book provides to its readership. This is because the young adult readers are generally inexperienced interpreters of narrative strategies, and therefore less able to negotiate texts than adults, who have read more over a longer time, and can apply that cumulative experience to each new text they encounter.

Is the writer's allegiance to the reader or to the character they create? Are they mutually exclusive? Why is a young adult character's unreliability an illuminating narrative strategy in one novel and a method to hinder and conceal information from the reader in another? These are questions specific to young adult fiction, since the protagonist is inherently unreliable, and the reader is vulnerable too.

The study examines five works of contemporary Australian young adult fiction – all of which tackle complex material, such as mental illness, suicide, murder, and abandonment. It seeks to identify narrative devices within those texts, and determine how they can be used to address the limitations of unreliable narrators in young adult fiction.

An accompanying manuscript demonstrates some of the strategies discussed in the exegesis.

This research is different from what has been researched before, because little research in narratology focuses on young adult literature specifically. Most narratological studies

examine existing fiction to discuss the narrative devices therein, whereas this research examines existing narrative devices in order to develop new fiction.

I embarked upon this research in order to improve the quality of the friendships my books offer to their readers, and to offer some insight into the nature of these friendships that other writers might find useful in approaching their work.

A Young Adult (YA) predicament

Young adult and child characters in fiction are inherently unreliable by virtue of their youth. By definition, a reliable narrator in this genre would need to be an adult. (Fludernik 2009, p 71). Young adult fiction writers tend not to choose an adult narrator, unless that adult is the same character recollecting events from some time in their future life. In YA, as opposed to children's books or general fiction, an external adult narrator providing reliable commentary is relatively rare. (Schuhmann 1999, p 314 – this is still the case today).

When a character tells his/her own story instantaneously, or within the immediate future, also called 'immediate-engaging-first-person' (Wylie 1999), the writer is faced with the predicament of showing the reader matters that have a bearing on events, but are beyond the young character's understanding. This could be because the events have occurred when the protagonist was not present (which is a challenge for writers of all characters – not just young ones), or because they are not mature enough to comprehend what has happened.

Take, for example, my novel, *Girl Next Door* (Brugman 2009), which is written in this immediate-engaging-first-person style. Jenna-Belle tells the story of her family's bankruptcy and subsequent eviction in the first person, but also in present tense. There is no distance between the narrator Jenna-Belle who tells the story and the focaliser Jenna-Belle who experiences the story. She is unreliable because she is young, but she is also unreliable because she has no opportunity to reflect on events as they unfold the way an external adult

narrator, or an older Jenna-Belle would, who has since gained some life experience (and in this character's case, some humility).

Also, importantly, an older Jenna-Belle would know how things turned out in the end, and could therefore recognise a significant incident, or a clue within the dialogue, and point those out to the reader along the way, which would significantly aid the reader's comprehension.

One of the major contributing factors to the family's plight is a love affair that Jenna-Belle's mother has had with their next-door neighbour, resulting in an unwanted pregnancy. An adult reader would understand that Jenna-Belle's mother has probably developed a labyrinth of lies to conceal this affair – not only from her husband, but from her children as well. She has perhaps withdrawn from her network of friends. Her lies and clandestine behaviour might have strained relationships with people who, before her affair, she would have turned to in a situation like this. She would be experiencing shame and guilt, but has possibly also developed some sort of self-justification for her actions. Her pain and confusion about the pregnancy, which is lost early in the novel, would only magnify this jumble of emotions.

None of these complications are matters that Jenna-Belle, as a teenager, who has not even experienced a romantic relationship, or infidelity, let alone a marriage, would comprehend – nor is her mother likely to discuss it with her candidly.

It is up to the reader to infer this whole layer of complexity from the clues laid within the text. The reader, like Jenna-Belle, might not have experienced these things either.

It was tempting to offer more substantive pointers to the reader about the mother, but instead I decided that I was concerned primarily with Jenna-Belle's journey, and so I remained entirely true to her vision of the world and her version of events. In doing so I was aware that many

readers, young and adult, will find Jenna-Belle's mother pathetic, inconsistent and remote. They may find her actions unfathomable at times. Many readers will view her as a weakness in the novel as a whole.

I have evidence that the novel has indeed been read in this way. In appendix A I have attached comments from a reader who was not familiar with the structure of bildungsroman ('coming of age' or 'maturation' stories), was not able to draw clues about minor characters from the text, and was not able to distinguish between the perspectives of the protagonist, the 'implied author' and the real author. The reader, as naïve as Jenna-Belle herself, missed the irony within the piece, and therefore failed to understand any of the ideas explored. Her interpretation of the text was, in fact, the opposite of what I intended.

How could I have approached this novel differently so that inexperienced readers like this one could not miss the irony? At the same time, not patronise the more practiced readers with what might be perceived as handholding?

I am not the first to have recognised this problem.

...Certain character information conveyed through these observations [of the young adult, first person narrator] is necessarily biased by the singularity of its source and the biases of that same source. Sometimes these limitations that first person narration imposes on characterization can result in the reduction of some characters to mere stereotyped figures. (Schuhmann 1982, p 315)

Mike Cadden (Cadden 2000) argues that it is not only a conundrum of technique, but an ethical responsibility for the writer to ensure the reader understands the irony:

By employing an all-too-reliable young adult's consciousness, the YA novelist often intentionally communicates to the immature reader a single and limited awareness of the world that the novelist knows to be incomplete and insufficient. It is a sophisticated representation of a lack of sophistication; it is an artful depiction of artlessness...

... All of this matters because the narrative situation in question involves social power relations that are fundamentally different from those between adults. (Cadden 2000, p 146).

On the other hand, Amy Faulds Sandefur argues that the presentation of a young unreliable narrator, particularly one who presents events to the reader as they unfold, is more frank. The character 'has not had the opportunity to edit him or herself'. 'The text is the unfiltered, raw, account,' and therefore more candid (Sandefur 2003, p 16).

Is it my ethical responsibility as a writer, who knows even as I am crafting the work that many of my readers are likely to be convinced by my unreliable narrator, to ensure that the readers comprehend the inherent irony of my 'artful artlessness'?

Do readers expect a convincing impersonation? Do they hope to be taken in?

In other novels the unreliability or naivety of the protagonist can be a strength, even *the* strength of the novel. It becomes a tool for examining broader issues. The character's innocence is a blank canvas against which the failings, weaknesses, or wondrousness of humankind can be thrown.

For example, innocent Bruno from Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (Boyne 2006), son of the man running a Nazi death camp, poses a number of questions throughout the novel, which rely on the reader's prior knowledge of the holocaust for their impact:

'Who are all those people outside?' (p 52)

'[Regarding Poland] That's not as good as Germany is it?' (p 111)

'Are we Jews?' (p 182)

And perhaps most affectingly, to his friend Shmuel, a prisoner, 'You could come on a holiday to Berlin. You can't stay here for ever after all. Can you?' (p 196). It is affecting, precisely because of Bruno's naivety as to why his Jewish friend Shmuel is incarcerated. Unreliability in this case is a device deliberately employed to convey to the reader the hideousness and horror of what they are witnessing.

Consider the scene outside the jail in Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee 1960), where Atticus Finch faces a lynch mob. His daughter addresses the father of one of her school friends in the crowd: 'Don't you remember me, Mr Cunningham? I'm Jean Louise Finch. You brought us some hickory nuts one time, remember?' (p 157) Scout's addressing Mr Cunningham with familiarity and courtesy reminds the reader, and all of the lynch mob assembled, of the etiquette and social bonds they are breaching. The poignancy of the scene is on account of Scout's not understanding the mob's purpose.

Why is the character's youthfulness and unreliability a useful instrument in the two examples above, and a hindrance in *Girl Next Door*? Clearly it is not because of the complexity or gravity of the themes being tackled.

Is my foremost responsibility to ensure all readers comprehend the irony, or am I obliged to be true to my protagonist's view, even if the comprehension of some readers is sacrificed? This has been a perennial problem in my writing. This research endeavours to explore these ideas, both to enrich my own writing, and hopefully to provoke other YA writers to consider new and different ways of approaching their writing.

Aim

This research seeks to identify narrative devices, and determine how they can be used to address the limitations of unreliable narrators in young adult fiction.

This will be explored through an exegesis, and also demonstrated in a companion creative piece.

Overview of the study

There are seven sections to this study. What immediately follows is a review of young adult fiction generally and also the major narratological theories, isolating the particular narrative devices that I anticipate might be useful. The proceeding section discusses the design of the research and how the texts were selected. Following that is an examination of the selected texts for the devices identified in section two. Section four identifies previously unidentified narrative devices in the selected texts that address the limitations of narrative unreliability. Section five contains the conclusions drawn. Section six lists the references cited. Lastly, is the manuscript applying a selection of those narrative devices from sections three and four to a new work of fiction.

Contribution of this research

Narrative theories (the discipline devoted to how narratives operate is discussed at length in the following section) are generally used to analyse and interpret existing texts. This exegesis reverses that typical study design. In my study I am analysing and interpreting narrative theory in order to create a new text. It is heuristic, identifying a suite of techniques that may be applicable in a range of situations, rather than one single answer. This approach seems to be the best fit to develop a creative work (and future works). This process of selecting some theories to apply and disregarding others would seem to an efficient method of approaching the research, and helps to limit the study to a manageable endeavour within the timeframe allowed.

The study may encourage other children's and young adult fiction writers to apply narrative theory to their own new texts, or to engage with academia – to study and evaluate how the theories translate into practice, rather than the other way around.

2. Section One - Background

This background section is in two parts. The first part discusses how and why young adult literature has evolved, its major characteristics over time, how it is in a constant state of flux and development, and how young adult fiction fits within the broader fields of children's and adults' literature.

The purpose of this discussion is to situate the creative work, *Alex as Well*, within the field of YA literature and how this work reflects, differs, leads, and contributes to the overall YA field.

While there are no discernible 'rules' of young adult fiction, there are common markers. One of the areas under a great deal of development is queer/transsexual/intersex fiction, which meets many of the traditions of this genre, but also challenges them. The discussion below places *Alex as Well* (which has an intersex protagonist) and my previous novels, alongside and within what has developed over time.

The second part of the section will provide a brief background to narratology and the key narrative strategies that are explored in this exegesis.

Young adult fiction

Young adult fiction has its origins in the early 1900s. Rather than joining the workforce after only a few years of schooling, which had been the norm until that point, young people continued their education. This provided adolescents with more leisure time and fewer responsibilities than their forebears. Popular culture developed to meet the entertainment and educational needs of this new ‘adolescent’ group, including literature. (Cart 2006, p 4)

Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) is often raised as an early example having characteristics that we would now identify as young adult (Nikolajeva 2012) – a teenage protagonist, with a contemporary voice, featuring generally incompetent adults, and reflecting the concerns of the youth of a particular time. (Heuschele 2007).

While Cart (2006), Hunt (1996) and Trites (2000) refer to the earlier work *Seventeenth Summer* from 1942 as the accepted starting point, Nikolajeva (2012) argues that ‘young adult fiction’ did not evolve from these beginnings until the 1950s.

Post-war prosperity from the 1950s led to a rise in young people’s consumption of goods, and the media – firstly radio, then television and eventually home video – extended the range of style and self-fashioning possibilities. It was in the context of these new freedoms for youth that J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, of 1951, founded the Young Adult canon, reinvoking the old relationship of Mark Twain’s Huckleberry to “sivilisation”, between the subversive adolescent, and a critique of wider society, and dazzlingly provided the genre with new psychological depth. (Nikolajeva 2012, p 7)

What separates young adult fiction from children's fiction, according to Trites, is how social power is deployed. Children's literature is about personal power, whereas young adults must "learn to negotiate the levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions within which they must function" (Trites 2000, p 3). She also refers to growth being a typical characteristic – not growth that is incidental to the plot, but the deliberate emotional, intellectual and physical development of the character by the novel's end (Trites 2000, p 10).

McCallum (1999) also discusses empowerment in adolescent fiction.

...The image of empowered individuals capable of acting independently and making choices about their lives presents young readers with a worldview which for many is simply idealistic and unattainable. Alternatively, to overemphasize the construction of subjectivity within society implies a mechanistic view of individuals constructed within and determined by social institutions. Such visions offer young readers relatively negative worldviews and more recent "bleak" fiction for adolescents in Australia, which depicts young people in irresolvable states of alienation, is perhaps characterized by this implication and might be criticized on the grounds it does not offer its young readers the possibility of making empowered choices. (p 257)

The space between unrealistically empowered, and irresolvably alienated would seem to be the ideal room for writers to manoeuvre within YA.

Nikolajeva (2012) refers to agency and authenticity of young adult voices thus:

Two important foci for authorial projects in relation to young adult writing are the portrayal of the adolescent's struggle for fully adult capability and identity in areas

that do in fact mark the teenager off from the child: in firstly *political* and in secondly *sexual* agency and awareness. Often those two real properties of maturation – growing political awareness/agency, a consciousness that is usually born within and then shaped by injustice – is intertwined with sexual coming of age. (p 11)

Nodelman (2008) rarely differentiates between children's and young adult literature. But here he posits that young adult texts begin with the ways that adults and children are opposites, which he argues is characteristic of literature for children, but young adult novels have the potential to deconstruct those polarities - "The idea that mature adult knowledge and experience really offers no more certainty or security than childhood innocence does...". (Nodelman 2008, p 58)

One of the difficulties in defining this genre is that fashions and trends in publishing move quickly in response to a fast-moving world. John Stephens (Bradford, Mallan, McCallum 2008) also talks about the political and social influence of children's and young adult literature, describing it as, 'a field of cultural production highly responsive to cultural and to global politics, and crucially implicated in shaping the values of children and young people.'(p 2)

Caroline Hunt noted that this transitory nature of the category influenced YA criticism.

Because young adult literature is marketed as, essentially, a disposable record of a fleeting moment, the theory that accompanies it is more likely to focus on social issues than on literary theory. Critics, understandably, find it more feasible to study the

phenomena than to analyze the books themselves, which are often read simply as documents of an ever-changing adolescent social scene. (Hunt 1996, p 6)

In keeping with this tendency to focus on fashions, Jonathon Hunt's article 'Redefining the Young Adult Novel' considered the trend for cross-over novels:

The teenage years represent a turbulent phase of growth and change, and the problem novel has historically addressed and explored many of its aspects, but too often in a formulaic and unsatisfactory manner. Eschewing the model of the YA novel as a developmental tool for a discrete phase of life, the emerging literary fiction treats those teenage years as part of life's continuum, and thus the novels in this tradition tend to be more artistic and less didactic than their forebears. They also allow for a fuller, more complex treatment not only of young people as they grow into maturity but also of their burgeoning awareness of the world around them. (Hunt 2007, p 146)

But how is young adult fiction, or even cross-over fiction, separated from literature for adults?

Wall (1991) argued that a book for young people can be defined by who the writer addresses. A book is for young people if the young people are directly addressed, as opposed to the writer addressing the adult reader over the child reader's head. But where a child finishes and an adult begins is problematic.

In regard to children's literature, that is literature for children younger than 12 or 13, Wall has put forward evidence that it can be classified by subtleties in the narrator – narratee relationship and methods of treating material which acknowledge the restricted experiences of the implied child reader. To attempt the same exercise in regard to readers between the ages of twelve plus and

eighteen however is problematic in that the divisions between adult audiences and those of adolescents can never be as sharply defined as those between adult audiences and those composed of children younger than twelve years. To create defensible categories of adult readers and adolescent readers is to presume that the extra years inexorably bring greater wisdom and maturity. Moreover, the concept of 'teenage books as a bridge between children's and adult literature'... militates against marked distinctions between books for each audience. Rather the goal has to be the production of a range of titles of varying complexity and sophistication which at the older end of the market blend indistinguishably into adult material. (Nimon and Foster 1997, p.6)

Nodelman (who does not differentiate between literature for children and young adults in this discussion – p 6) suggests:

Their tendency to imply a more complex shadow text that transcends the presumably childlike view they purport to represent becomes a significant distinguishing characteristic of texts for children - a difference of kind, for even when adult literature hides great depths, it tends to speak much more and more complexly of all it knows, to leave, therefore, proportionately less in the shadow and therefore to be much less likely to hinge on the significance of the difference between the simplicity of what is said and the complexity of what isn't – on questions of childlike and adult knowledge. (2008, p 143)

Jonathon Hunt believes that it is not separate. "Young adult literature has matured into something virtually indistinguishable from the best adult literary fiction" (2007, p 147).

The above examples refer to trends in publishing, or marketing - to what is being offered to readers as 'young adult literature', rather than to the book selections made by young adult readers. In *Crossover Fiction* (2009), Beckett argues that "readership transgression", readers "challenging reading constructs" (choosing to read books published for a different age range) is centuries old. (Beckett 2009, p 7)

Donelson and Nilsen (2001) also refer to the reader, rather than the publisher in their definition of the category. "By young adult literature, we mean anything that readers between the approximate ages of twelve and eighteen choose to read either for leisure reading or to fill school assignments." (p 3) They will include books originally published as general fiction in their lists of best books.

By this definition, conceivably anything that is read by young adults can be Young Adult literature, including fantasy, horror, or erotica.

Page (2008) points out that the power in relation to creation and distribution of young adult fiction is held by adults.

...The adult construct of the child has a marked effect on what is written and how; what is disclosed and what is concealed. Adults 'own' the knowledge and therefore have the power to make decisions about what information will be distributed to children and young adults. This has always been the case with children's literature (and, come to that, education in the broadest sense). (p 6)

Page notes in her earlier thesis (2005) that while most young adult fiction is purchased by parents, librarians and other adults for young adults, the readers themselves do have influence over the industry.

Young adult keen readers perform a number of roles, including buying, borrowing and sometimes loaning books, and promoting particular titles and authors through word of mouth and reviews. Not only are they enthusiastic readers themselves, but they are also positive influencers on their peers and family members. (Page 2005, p 445)

Not only are young adult readers choosing to read books from a range of different genres and categories, marketers are also repackaging children's books for adults, and adults' books for children. Readers, either by choice or unknowingly, are selecting books that may not originally have been published 'for' them.

Young adult literature does not exist in isolation. It is one of a range of media that influences the cultural development of teens.

The boom in teen mass-marketed fiction makes it increasingly difficult for the discipline of children's literature to sustain notions of the novel as a transcendent space. Academic research in children's literature, an area that includes young adult fiction, is centrally concerned with the enculturation of the implied child audience (see Stephens 1992) and the narrative strategies through which readers are positioned to accept the values of the text. (Bullen, Toffolletti, Parsons 2011, p 499)

There are always exceptions to each new definition of what is and what is not young adult fiction, and therefore young adult fiction is being continually redefined. The ongoing

discussion is fascinating, vexed, and often controversial. But ultimately, individual publishers decide what is published as contemporary young adult fiction. The debate commences with books that have already been designated ‘young adult’ by the publishers who have printed them.

In his 2003 article, Dr Anthony Eaton argues that, with shifts in the traditional markers of adulthood (p 8), young adult fiction should be considered threshold literature rather than transitional literature. He compiles this list of books:

In the Australian context; books like (and this is in no way intended as an exhaustive list, but a brief overview) Hartnett’s *Sleeping Dogs* (1996), *Stripes of the Sidestep Wolf* (1999), *Thursday’s Child* (2000), *The Ghost’s Child* (2008) and *Butterfly* (2010), Metzenthén’s *Johnny Hart’s Heroes* (1996) and *Boys of Blood and Bone* (2003), Zusak’s *The Messenger* (2002) and *The Book Thief* (2005), McDonald’s *Love Like Water* (2007), my own novels *Fireshadow* (2004) and *Into White Silence* (2008), Marchetta’s *The Piper’s Son* (2010), Crowley’s *Graffiti Moon* (2010) and Gardner’s *The Dead I Know* (2011) have all adopted, either consciously or unconsciously, a liminal conception of ‘young adulthood’ in their approach to narrative and character, and also in the way these works have been marketed and positioned by publishers, librarians, parents and key organisations through awards structures, critical response, and market positioning.

These books have been published as “young adult” by their publishers, prior to Eaton’s article, and/or submitted to the various awarding bodies in the “young adult” categories by their publishers.

While an individual book might be considered in a dozen ways post-publication, it is the publisher who considers an undefined, unpublished manuscript and publishes it within a category, or sometimes more than one category, as is the case with Zusak's 2005 novel *The Book Thief*.

As John Rowe Townsend stated in 1971:

Arguments whether such-and-such a book is “really for children” are always cropping up, and are usually pointless in any but organizational terms. The only practical definition of a children's book today – as absurd as it sounds – is a book which appears on the children's list of a publisher.

This is not to say that those who critically examine books do not have a role to play in how the industry and the literature itself evolve. Publishers commission books that sell. Books that sell (in Australia at least) are ones that are bought by schools.

The increase in YA fiction in the 1980-90s may have been due to reader demand, but more likely stemmed from the needs of secondary school teacher-librarians attempting to provide materials relevant to a literature based curriculum. (Sheahan Bright 2005, p 336)

This is still the case. The Federal Government's continuing administration of Educational Lending Rights recognises that significant proportions of books are purchased and used in schools.

Who defines young adult fiction, who reads it, who challenges that definition is cyclical, complex and ever-changing.

It is not within the scope of this exegesis to attempt to define what young adult fiction is, has been or should be. The discussion above acknowledges that it is an ongoing and evolving debate.

As far as this exegesis is concerned, the books examined for close study are young adult fiction because they have been published as young adult fiction, and have an intended readership aged between twelve and twenty. The protagonists in the novels chosen are also aged between twelve and twenty throughout the novels. The novels chosen also tend to explore the conflict or friction between the teen and their parents, and examine themes of identity and belonging.

Narratology

Narratology has elements in common with the study of literature, but examines ‘narratives’ more broadly, including, for example, the narrative of spaces, history, music - how language, stories and the omission of certain groups of people (races, cultures, genders) from this broader idea of narratives have been used to define, limit, or exclude – how narratives influence culture, and vice versa. Narratology is related to disciplines falling under the umbrella of ‘cultural studies’, linguistics, philosophy, sociology and semiotics, as well as literature.

In her 2008 paper, "Surveying Narratology" Sabine Gross has charted the study of narratology over the last forty years. (Gross 2008). Gross observed that much work in the field is still focussed on categorising texts, defining itself or developing terminology, a large amount of which overlaps. There is also some confusion about what the research and theory aims to achieve. Gross notes:

It is not always clear whether the study of narrative illuminates the power of a story or text or seeks to domesticate it by subduing uniqueness via classification. (p 535).

Narratology is, however, hermeneutic in nature. It is generally about the interpretation of texts – how texts are received:

...Researchers in these fields tend not to produce narratives, but to receive them, and their work, in essence, involves commenting analytically on that reception, looking at

the determinants, operations and semantics of narrative as a genus or at those of individual narratives. (Herman, Jahn, Ryan 2005, p 379).

This is quite a different process than examining narrative strategies in a range of works and then selectively using those devices to produce a new creative work. I will therefore need to adapt the usual methods employed in the study of narratology for this study. This will be explored in greater depth in section 2 - research design.

Narratology – structural, postclassical, poststructural

Structural narratology is about applying systematic and formal rules for analysing narratives. Structuralists considered narratology a science of narrative, and applied principles rigidly. Structuralism considered plot to be the principle way of organising the analysis. Structuralists believe that the definition of what constitutes a ‘narrative’ is broader than just texts or novels, including other methods humans use to tell stories, for example, advertising, news media, songs, photographs, etc. (Herman, Jahn, Ryan 2005, p 571) but still aims to apply instruments to find elements in common, and generalising rules.

Some of the main principles from structural narratology that could be usefully applied in this research are:

- unreliable narration (Booth 1961)
- breaking plots into events and then determining when and how a sequence of events becomes a ‘story’ or ‘fabula’, (Bal 1997, Fludernik 2009)
- distinguishing between story and discourse (what is told as opposed to how it is told) (Chatman 1978)
- differentiating between the focaliser and the narrator (the ‘actor’ experiencing the story and the narrator telling the story) (Bal 1997)
- anachrony, or a departure from chronological storytelling (Genette 1980)

- hierarchical structuring of texts into ‘levels’, for instance, ‘mythemes’ (systems of meaning in myth), ‘kernels and satellites’ (elements that are essential for the story to be understood and those that are not), primary and secondary embedded narratives (stories within stories). (Chatman 1986)

These principles will be discussed in more depth below.

One of the key tenets of postclassical narratology is a move from an examination of the text to the context - an acknowledgment of context, not only of the text itself, but also of the reader. Rather than finding features that all texts have in common and naming them, postclassical narratology is concerned with each reader’s individual response to text. Postclassical narratologists argue that, further to the structuralist position that humans *tell* stories in almost every media imaginable; humans are innately able to *recognise* narratives in an assortment of forms also. Some theorists argued that narrative is part of the way that we store and organise our memories and experiences – that narrative is part of the way we are wired. (Polkinghorne 1988, in Fludernik 2009, p 1).

Postclassical narratology examines how ways of telling, and also ways of reading were influenced by society, culture, ethics and politics at the time (Herman, Jahn Ryan 2005, p 450).

Like postclassical narratologists, poststructuralists argue that there are not consistent structures common to all narratives. Poststructuralism took the focus on the reader a step further – indeed, Barthes, who began as a structuralist, argued the theory of ‘The Death of the

Author? – that it is the reading of the text rather than writing that creates meaning. (Barthes, 1977).

The field then explored this area of reader-response, delving into physiological responses to text, and text as a metaphor for the body. Theorists who have made significant contributions to poststructuralist narratology include (amongst others) Barthes, as mentioned above, Foucault and Lacan. (In Burke 1998, and in Herman, Jahn, Ryan, 2005).

Rimmon-Kenan says of poststructural narratology:

Both the underlying assumptions of narratology and the exclusions they entailed came under attack in the poststructuralist period. The attacks were also partly directed against narratology and partly against its structuralist basis, the distinction often being elusive. (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, p 138)

It is now a more diversified discipline and retains strong links to other disciplines.

Narratology still works, Rimmon-Kenan argues:

Cultures consciously or unconsciously generate narrative structures, patterns, processes as one mode of perceiving, constructing, making sense of things and experiences. Narratology in turn gives names and a relational network to them. (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, p 145).

For the purpose of this exegesis, I am adopting a structuralist position in relation to the application of narrative theory to my work. Given the ongoing presence and application of structuralist notions - such as the use of unreliable narrators - in the field of YA writing, it is valid to apply structuralism as an analytical prism through which to view my own creative work.

Key Narrative Devices

Having outlined the different approaches to narratology, I will now identify the major theories that would seem to apply most to this study.

Following that is an overview of some doctoral theses on the subject of narratology and young adult fiction that were published over the period of time that I engaged in this study, and are therefore broadly contemporary to it.

Unreliable Narration and Implied Author

According to Chatman, unreliable narration links three key concepts ‘distance’, ‘narration’ and the ‘implied author’.

What makes a narrator unreliable is that his values diverge strikingly from that of the implied author’s; that is the rest of the narrative – “the norm of the work” – conflicts with the narrator’s presentation, and we become suspicious of his sincerity or competence to tell the “true version”. The unreliable narrator is at virtual odds with the implied author; otherwise his unreliability could not emerge. (Chatman 1978, p 149)

Phelan and Martin take this definition further. They argue that reliability exists along three axes – ethics, events, knowledge/perception.

A homodiegetic narrator is “unreliable” when he or she offers an account of some event, person, thought, thing, or other object in the narrative world that deviates from ...the account the authorial audience infers the implied author would offer, excepting the point that the implied author knows that the narrator is a fictional construct.

Unreliable reporting occurs along the axis of facts/events; unreliable evaluating occurs along the axis of ethics/evaluation; and unreliable reading occurs along the axis of knowledge/perception.

(Phelan and Martin in Herman 1999, p 94).

These axes offer a range of different types of unreliability, even multiple kinds of unreliability that can be employed together or separately at different times in the text.

It is still, however, a difficult definition to apply, given that it is often impossible to determine what the ‘implied author’s’ version is, or what it would be.

While Booth (Booth 1961) coined the term ‘implied author’, Chatman elaborated on the concept. Chatman says that as readers we understand that the ‘teller’ in the story is different from the author. Even if the author is writing about him/herself, then they are the “author”, or “author narrator” out of several possible kinds of narrators, who has characteristics in common with, but is not the same as the individual who is writing the words down. The same author (writer) can create very different ‘implied authors’ in different texts. The implied author has no voice, rather it is constructed by the reader from the shape of the whole text. (Chatman 1978, p 148).

Heyd includes the actual author in her discussion about unreliable narration. Heyd contends that previous definitions and categories of unreliability have been difficult to apply,

particularly those that focus on the reader and ignore the role of the author altogether. (Heyd 2006, p 219)

She said that, ‘readers of literary narrative are conscious of a shaping force with a certain communicative intention’ and that this is the underlying concept that gives us irony, metafiction and unreliability (p 221). She suggests that at the heart of fiction, a reader understands that there is an author in the real world penning a story and a narrator in a fictional world telling the story – that ‘this duality, and its awareness in the reader, is the fundamental mechanism that creates fictionality’ (p 221). Within this frame (real author and fictional narrator) she argues that it is very easy to define an unreliable narrator.

Heyd talks about a narrative as communication. Communication has rules that are reasonably stable through cultures and time (p 240). For example, most communication involves ‘turn-taking’, but in a novel, the narrator ‘has the floor’ for an extended time and thus has an obligation not to waste the reader’s time with pointless stories (p 224). This is Heyd’s ‘tellability’ principle.

Further, ‘the “on-display” mode of narration forbids a storyteller to make false claims, leave out salient facts, be vague or evasive, or relate only irrelevant information.’ (pp 224-225).

An unreliable narrator is one that deviates from these rules.

The procedure for detecting and pinpointing UN [unreliable narration] is therefore conceivably simple: One needs to identify utterances that are either manifestly false, or which explicitly correct, clarify or contradict utterances made earlier in the discourse, or else which belatedly convey information that would have been salient at an earlier stage in the narration.’ (Heyd 2006, p 226).

Heyd outlines three categories of unreliability:

‘Quiet deception’ is ‘highly intentional unreliability’ (p 227). The narrator deliberately and flagrantly lies to the reader.

‘Self deception’ or ‘face-saving’ is where a narrator evades, embellishes or lies because he/she wants to avoid embarrassment, or wishes to present him/herself in the best light, out of politeness (p 230).

‘Unintentional unreliability’ is a narrator who is naïve, uneducated or mentally ill. The narrator is not being intentionally uncooperative (p 231).

This method of detecting unreliability is the most applicable to this study because it is testable. Does the character utter something in one section of the text that is contradicted in another, or not? This is less open to debate than, what is “the norm of the work”? For this reason Heyd’s definition will be used in the analysis to follow.

Dramatic irony and distance

Dramatic irony occurs when the author and audience have information that the character/s do not know. Rather than the narrative being about ‘what happens’ it becomes a question of ‘will the character find out in time?’ The story is not about ‘what’ but ‘how’ (Booth 1961, p 175-176).

As Booth puts it:

There is, of course a radical difference of effect, depending on whether the reader is made to feel from the beginning that he sees the truth toward which the character is

stumbling, or is forced to cast off his own moorings and travel on uncharted seas toward an unknown harbour (1961, p 286).

‘What’ versus ‘how’ will have an influence on the emotional distance the reader experiences. When the reader is learning information at the same time as the character they are on the journey together. The ‘what’ binds the reader’s sympathy to the character, regardless of how abhorrent the character might be (Booth 1961, p 281). When the reader knows what is ahead, their companion is the implied author. The implied author tells the ‘truth’. Together the reader and the implied author watch the character deceive and be deceived.

Cadden (Cadden 2000) links irony to ethics. Cadden, as discussed in the introduction, argues that novelists of YA literature, in creating naïve characters, know that they are presenting a view to the reader that is ‘incomplete and insufficient’, in other words they deliberately construct narrators that are unreliable.

‘Novels constructed by adults to simulate an authentic adolescent’s voice are inherently ironic because the so-called adolescent voice is never – and can never be – truly authentic.’ (p 146)

Cadden believes the author is ethically obliged to ‘show adolescent readers equal and multiple narrative viewpoints that equip them to identify the irony in the text’. (p 148)

As previously discussed, ethics in terms of an author’s responsibilities to the reader and to characters, and whether they are mutually exclusive is one of the key questions driving this research, and so Cadden’s proposition in terms of ethics will be discussed further below.

Embedded text (levels in narrative)

Embedded narratives fall into a number of categories, such as ‘frame narratives’, where an entire secondary story (Bal uses the term ‘fabula’ rather than story (Bal 1997)) is told within the main, or primary story.

Bal argues that dialogue is embedded text. “Dialogue is a form in which the actors themselves and not the primary narrator, utter language” (Bal 1997, p 60). She supposes this to be the case even when the actor speaking is a younger version of the narrator. They are different people, since one has more knowledge and experience than the other.

Dialogue is particularly useful for overcoming unreliability in young adult protagonists. In its most basic form, one character can tell the protagonist (and therefore the reader) something they did not know – for example, an event that occurred when the protagonist was not present. Dialogue can provide information the protagonist may know, but not understand. For example, another character makes an observation, which, in retrospect, is backed up by prior actions or behaviours, and this gives the protagonist (and the reader) an opportunity to reflect that the world, and their response to it, may not have been as they previously thought. This is one of the techniques I have most heavily relied on to overcome unreliability in protagonists in the past.

Secondary fabula explains

Sometimes the embedded story explains the primary story. Usually this involves a character describing previous events that have brought us to this point.

When an actor relates a previous event, this has an effect on the order in which the reader receives information. It means the order of events presented is different to the chronological sequence. Bal (1997) refers to these deviations, or anachronies as ‘retroversion’ (looking back, or what Genette refers to as ‘analepsis’) and ‘anticipation’ (flash-forward, or Genette’s ‘prolepsis’) (Genette 1980). Temporal ordering will be discussed separately.

Secondary fabula resembles

At other times the secondary story resembles the primary story, in which case the reader makes comparisons between the two and draws conclusions. The connection between the two stories is not drawn together for the reader. They are required to extract the meaning for themselves.

This would seem to be the common plot/subplot dichotomy. A familiar structure of young adult novels is to explore some external crisis or relationship and then mirror this with an internal one. Symbols, such as animals, the weather, sporting success, or some external world event are frequently used for this technique. While the choice of subject varies, usually the success or resolution in one plot echoes the outcome of the other.

Focalisation

Bal’s definition of focalisation is “the relationship between the ‘vision’, the agent that sees, and that which is seen” (Bal 1997, p 146). She differentiates between internal and external focalisation. Internal ‘character bound’ focalisation occurs where a character within the story is the one who ‘sees’. An external focaliser is an anonymous narrator who is not participating

in the story, 'seeing' from the outside. She suggests that focalisation can switch from external to internal, and from one character to another (Bal 1997, p 147).

Chatman rejects this. He believes that calling an external narrator the 'focaliser' when no internal character has been allocated the task "violates the distinction between story and discourse" (Chatman 1986, p 194). He argues that an external narrator can never literally 'see', because he/she does not exist in the story world. Chatman offers the distinctions 'slant' and 'filter'.

Slant and Filter

Chatman's term 'slant' refers to the narrator's attitude to things that occur within the world of the story, which he/she is viewing from the outside or 'recalling'. 'Filter' is applied to a character within the story through which we literally 'see', but filtered by their biases. These terms arose from his dissatisfaction with the use of 'focalisation' as a coverall applying to a character's senses as well as cognition, emotion, or other mental functions. (Chatman 1986).

Use of slant and filter would seem to be highly applicable to young adult characters, and instances where there are unreliable characters in general.

Multiple focalisation

Shen (2006) and Cadden (2000) both identify multiple focalisation as one of the key strengths in Robert Cormier's YA novels. Cadden commends this technique as an ethical choice, supporting young readers:

[Cormier's novels] provide the reader the contrast of equal and many times (but not always) opposing voices, and therefore give young adult readers the tools to identify the paradox of contrasting "authentic" young adult descriptions of the same situations. (Cadden 2000, p 152)

Shen admires multiple focalisation as technically superior, and not indulging young readers:

Through variable and multiple focalizations, Cormier presents characters' different points of view on certain subjects. Consequently, his novels become dialogical in the Bakhtinian sense by breaking the monological predominance of an authoritative narrator. In the text, everything is shown through the characters' diverse perspectives. There is no omniscient authoritative narrator who tells the reader what has really happened or provides moral comment on the characters. Thus, Cormier's fiction engages the reader in the text to interpret the fictional world on their own. (Shen 2006, pp 161-162)

Shen's solution then, for overcoming the unreliability of one young adult protagonist is to provide the reader with more than one.

Similarly, Elizabeth Schuhmann (quoted in the introduction), in her 1999 article also looks to Cormier and the use of multiple focalisation (along with omniscient narration) in his novels for the solution to overcoming the limitations of unreliable narrators.

However, Schuhmann goes on to argue for a more complex and more mature form of expression in YA fiction. She says:

Because the language must be appropriate to the adolescent narrator, it can at times be denied the expanded opportunity for richness that often accompanies the expression of individuals with greater maturity and experience. (p 315)

This seems to be at the heart of the issue. If the character had greater maturity and more experience then it would not be a book about a teenager. The whole point of YA fiction as a category is that it is specifically for and about young adults, and therefore addresses inexperienced and immature readers. Readers seeking greater density and depth in novels are very well served by general fiction.

Anachrony and ordering of events

Temporal ordering is complex. It will be more logically explainable later in the exegesis, when concrete examples can be provided, but some of the main notions follow.

‘Frequency’ refers to how often an event occurs and how often it is narrated; i.e. an event can occur several times and be narrated once, occur once and be referred to several times, or occur several times and be referred to several times.

‘Narrative speed’ is the relationship between how long an event takes in story time and how long it takes to tell.

‘Analepsis’ and ‘prolepsis’, as already mentioned, are flashbacks and flashforwards respectively.

‘Ellipses’ occur when information or a period of time is skipped over.

Temporal ordering would seem to provide great scope for overcoming unreliability. Temporal ordering methods can be the vehicle for manipulating unreliability, by ordering events more conveniently than the chronological order. Ellipses, prolepsis and analepsis could be used to link two events that the reader may not otherwise connect, or to reveal, or conceal information.

Metafiction, metanarrative and metalepsis

Fludernik defines metafiction as follows:

A narrative strategy or a comment on the part of the narrator is metafictional if it explicitly or implicitly draws attention to the fictionality (fictiousness or arbitrariness) of the story and the narrative discourse. (Fludernik 2009, p 156).

She explains that metanarrative comments can actually contribute to reliability. Metanarrative occurs where the narrator talks about the telling of the story. For example, my use of; ‘as discussed in the previous section,’ ‘or what follows is...’ and similar phrases throughout this exegesis directs the reader to other places in the text, gives the reader an opportunity to pause here, flip to a different section to refresh, and then resume the ‘story’ of this research. This points to the construction and order of the text.

Fludernik suggests that metanarrative makes the reader feels as though the narrator confides in them directly (Fludernik 2009, p 61).

Metanarrative is not the only means of generating metafiction. More intriguing is the concept of metalepsis - transgressions between levels of narrative. A simple example is using the word, 'meanwhile', as though events in the story are actually occurring simultaneously, and as if characters are carrying out some activity behind the scenes while the narrator tells the reader about something else. More extreme examples are characters escaping from the story, or addressing the narrator directly (Genette 1980, p 234).

Metafiction and metalepsis not only provide opportunities to address reliability, but also prospects to discuss the process of narration itself.

Dissertations – narratology and young adult fiction

These three dissertations are examples of narratological principles being applied to contemporary young adult novels:

- Fu-Yuan Shen's *Narrative Strategies in Robert Cormier's Young Adult Novels*, (Ohio State University Graduate School, 2006)
- Amy Faulds Sandefur's *Narrative Immediacy and First-Person Voice in Contemporary American Novels* (Louisiana State University Dept. of English, 2003), and
- *How to Make a Girl: Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature* by Ann Younger. (Louisiana State University Dept. of English, 2003)

The first two dissertations take structural narratological principles and apply them to a body of work, and a category of literature (bildungsroman) respectively. Sandefur examines narrative devices in four novels. She has used the term 'immediacy' to describe little or no temporal space between the focaliser and the narrator. Shen studies a broad spectrum of devices in thirteen novels by the same writer.

Younger considers fifty contemporary novels (many from series by the same author) in terms of their depiction of body image, power in relationships, and sexuality, including homosexuality. This last study is an example of a more postclassical approach, where texts

are examined in reference to context, culture, and reader-response rather than deconstructed structurally.

Narrative Immediacy and First-Person Voice in Contemporary American Novels seems to begin from the same place as my study:

Most often, writers communicate distinctions between the two entities [the older 'I' narrator, and younger 'I' focaliser] by having the narrator provide interpretations of actions that he or she clearly would have as an adult with the benefit of hindsight and maturity rather than as a youthful protagonist in the midst of a life-alternating experience. (p 4)

The majority of writers utilize retrospective narration in first-person novels because reflection generally allows for greater interpretative power by the narrator, therefore seemingly reducing the limitations of first-person voice. (Sandefur 2003, p 6)

Rather than finding ways to overcome this problem, Sandefur argues that it is a strength. She suggests that by having no gap between the narrator and the focaliser, the focaliser retains the agency. 'Novelists construct protagonists who tell their stories without the interpretative influence of a distanced narrator' (p 8).

Sandefur's study differs to mine in that it examines autobiography as well as fiction, and 'life writing', which she suggests is something between the two. Her study focuses on protagonists from minority groups, who are oppressed, or marginalised. ('Bildung' is a recent re-examination of the self-identity narrative referring specifically to feminist, race-based or postcolonial texts (Herman, Jahn, Ryan 2005, p 42)).

In her conclusion, Sandefur gives examples of texts with a large time gap (even a lifetime) between the narrator and the focaliser that still contain ‘narrative immediacy’. She points to techniques such as present tense and vivid descriptions, which give the sense of events being ‘relived’ rather than recalled (p 150), and also emotional experiences being related to the reader through physiological responses, rather than an older narrator explaining how the character felt, (a technique I used in *Walking Naked*, when one character responds to the death of another (Brugman 2002)). She gives examples of first-person narrators recollecting events when they were not present – not even born, and confidently quoting the thoughts of other characters.

Sandefur’s conclusion is that ‘narrative immediacy’ is a feature of *all* first-person novels, which, while true, is not helpful, since all of the techniques she points to as indicative are equally applicable to third-person narration.

Narrative immediacy, as she defines it, is not confined to a young protagonist, or an unreliable protagonist. It is simply a protagonist who relates events that occurred recently. Most detective novels, for example, describe actions that happened in the immediate past.

I would contend that the ‘narrative immediacy’ that Sandefur talks about is a common feature in *all* narrative, and not even limited to literature. An image on a billboard could be described as having ‘narrative immediacy’. (This is not in any way to disparage billboards. A great deal of time, thought and testing is applied to billboard design).

Shen’s dissertation provides a more practical model, in that it does not so much analyse content and themes, but concretely lists and compares narrative strategies and then shows how those selected strategies ‘correspond to thematic illustration’ (Shen 2006, p 22). Shen isolates

Rimmon-Kenan's analytic system (story, text and narration) in order to deconstruct the entire body of Cormier's work.

Two of the principle features (but not the only ones) that Shen found to be common in Cormier's work were, multiple focalisation and anachrony (Shen refers to this as 'narratorial delay').

Multiple focalisation results in the dialogical discourse that Cadden (2000) felt was ethically desirable in books for younger readers. As a narrative device Shen argues that it provides a 'compelling capacity to illustrate the theme by showing a vivid case rather than preaching a moral lesson' (p 211).

Anachrony, Shen contends, contributes to suspense. The fragmentation of the narrative mimics the manner in which the characters often determine (sometimes construct) their identities in the novels. 'Cormier accomplishes a subtle correspondence between form and meaning' (p 215).

Shen's research design is not centred on Shen's own experience as a reader. A different person could deconstruct the same novels into these same categories and draw similar conclusions. Those conclusions are useful to a writer of young adult fiction who is attempting to achieve narrative complexity, by isolating the devices and then demonstrating the effects they achieve in the texts.

One challenge I would make to Shen's work is that it argues that Cormier's work stands out amongst YA fiction with its narrative complexity – that, essentially, all other children's and YA fiction is simplistic and unsophisticated (and that this is a bad thing). Shen qualifies this position in the conclusion by suggesting that Cormier is a 'pioneer' and then lists some work

considered to be derivative. This would indicate that Shen has not read the category broadly. Take for example, Australia's own Ivan Southall, who was producing novels with equal narrative complexity concurrently with Cormier. (See, for example, Southall 1966, Southall 1971, Southall, 1983).

Ann Younger (Younger 2003) points out that while some YA might be considered simplistic and unsophisticated, many of the more complex texts merely alienate the inexperienced readers. Readers of this age are often new to narrative structures, and part of the enjoyment, security and empowerment for them is being able to predict how the narrative will unfold.

Hunt also explores this idea throughout his work, proposing that it is expected that writers and readers share a common culture, but that children do not necessarily share the same culture as adults (the adults that write the books and those that read the books to them). Children do not create meaning in the same way. This is why he argues that *Wind in the Willows* is an adult's children's book, while the works of Enid Blyton are children's children's books – that children will 'misread' and this has implications for how narrative theory will be applied to books for young people. (Hunt 1985, Hunt 1995, Hunt 1999).

Younger (2003) explains why she believes series, particularly those series' that have very similar plotlines in each book, are so popular in this age group.

Some series depict characters over longer periods of time, and thus can portray their growth and change more realistically than many stand-alone texts can. Series fictions are popular because they provide continuity and predictability for young readers whose lives are often in adolescent turmoil. (p 144)

Younger's work is primarily concerned with depictions of girls, women and sexuality in novels. She is concerned that the 'cultural pressure from the media directs females to be thin, beautiful and sexually desirable, but not sexually active' (p 176), and so does not consider specific narrative devices, but rather engages with these broad themes.

Younger's dissertation does prompt me to consider that much of children's literature criticism continues to overlook the books that children and young adults actually read, unless they are a 'publishing phenomenon' – J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series being the most obvious example.

Aside from being of interest due to their content, these three dissertations have been instructive in terms of research design.

Ethics and Unreliable Narrators

In the previous sections I have briefly outlined the major theories of narratology and the various narrative devices that I am specifically looking for in the texts in order to explore how they influence reliability.

However, there are two papers that have been particularly influential for the discussion that follows. One is Heyd's definition of unreliable narrative, and her three categories of unreliability, which was discussed in the earlier section. The other is Cadden's examination of ethics in YA. A brief summary of his relevant arguments is offered below.

A third text came to the fore as the study progressed, Wayne Booth's *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (1998). How Booth's arguments complement those of Heyd and Cadden will be discussed at the end of this section.

Mike Cadden - "The Irony of Narration in the Young Adult Novel" 2000

Cadden argued that novelists of YA literature, in creating naïve characters, know that they are presenting a view to the reader that is 'incomplete and insufficient', in other words they deliberately construct narrators that are unreliable.

Novels constructed by adults to simulate an authentic adolescent's voice are inherently ironic because the so-called adolescent voice is never – and can never be – truly authentic. (p 146)

This matters because there is an unequal power relationship between the adult author and the young adult (and thus inexperienced) reader that does not exist when the reader is an adult. The writer therefore has an obligation to help the reader comprehend the irony.

Cadden maintained that, ethically, the writer should provide alternative interpretations to that of the immature protagonist – to make the text ‘double-voiced’. He presented two forms of this double-voice, ‘active’ and ‘passive’ (here Cadden paraphrases Bakhtin from *The Problem of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 1984). A passive double-voice has two (or more) possible interpretations, and the writer makes clear which is the ‘correct’ interpretation. This is also called ‘parody’. When the double-voice is active, the reader is able to recognise that there are alternative interpretations, but none is given greater weight. The reader must actively choose between them.

Cadden believed the author is ethically obliged to ‘show adolescent readers equal and multiple narrative viewpoints that equip them to identify the irony in the text’. (p 148)

Cadden and Heyd’s papers in particular were significant in terms of this research, mostly because they laid the responsibility for the comprehensibility of the work with the author, rather than with the reader.

Some of the approaches to narratology removed the author from the process of interpreting meaning from work, which, as a craftsperson, I found confusing. This is not to say that the work of those such as Barthes was not groundbreaking and important – just that it does not inform this particular study.

This study instead supposes that, like a conversation, there are two parties. There is the writer who intends for their words to be understood, and has thus crafted a work with a great deal of thought and planning, and a reader who is in turn hoping to fathom that intent.

Heyd's article placed the author back at the beginning of the communication model. It made reliability and unreliability to do with intention, rather than interpretation, and therefore much more practical to apply to the writing of YA fiction.

Importantly, Heyd's article talked about novels as communication, with two parties, each with obligations to the other. Of note, is her tellability, or 'so what?' factor, highlighting that a writer should respect the contribution of time and effort that the reader makes to the endeavour.

Cadden's article went a step further than courtesy, by not only suggesting an author is responsible for producing meaning, but ethically obliged to ensure that the younger reader comprehends that the narrator is unreliable.

Initially this was an inspiring concept, but as the below examination of texts will demonstrate, meeting this ethical obligation does not always fit well with the conventions of storytelling. An active double-voice does not necessarily improve comprehensibility, ensure that the writer is fair, or meet Heyd's tellability principle.

Wayne Booth – The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction 1988

The predicaments that Booth discusses are at the very core of this study. The observations he makes in the book are similar to those I have so often faced as a writer and a reader. Having

read Booth subsequent to the other two writers, this work brought together and advanced for me many of the ideas that Cadden and Heyd raised in their papers.

Wayne Booth's 1988 book *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* covers too vast a territory to adequately summarise here, and his loquacious means of expression make highlighting his ideas via pithy quotes quite difficult. Further, the book addresses critics – and in particular, ethical criticism, rather than the authors themselves, but I will attempt to recap the major points that would seem to be most applicable to this study.

Please note also that Booth returns often to Twain's 1884 novel *Huckleberry Finn*. Although he enjoyed the work as a whole, he was torn by recurrent racism in the text and the limited world presented by unreliable Huck. Much of the debate in the book, and therefore in the quotes below, revolved around this specific quandary.

Booth began by talking about censorship and the reasoning behind it - how texts are likely to influence our character (as readers) as we read them.

But the censors are likely to know, because of the way they themselves read, that literary parts can carry their own meaning and power quite independently of any correction an author may have built into the whole. (p 161)

Most overtly ethical critics have dwelt on whether a given narrative will work for good or ill in the life of other readers, *after* the last page has been turned ...

But what happens if we begin instead with the qualities of experience sought or achieved by authors and readers *during* the time of the telling or listening? Instead of asking whether this book, poem, play, movie, or TV drama will turn me toward virtue or vice tomorrow, we now will ask what kind of company it offers me today. (p 169)

Booth introduces the idea of friendship as a metaphor for the relationship readers have with books.

The point in turning to the metaphor of friendship is not, of course, to revive this sort of extremely general talk about book-friends, as if all books were equally friendly, and friendly in the same way ... What we need is a vocabulary of discrimination among kinds of friendship, and for that we are forced to return to an ancient tradition that made true friendship a primary goal of life, and the study of how to achieve it the center of all ethical inquiry... The quality of our lives was said to be in large part identical with the quality of the company we keep. Our happiness is found in a pursuit of friendship... (p 172).

Much of the text then sets about examining those types of friendships offered by books, and by authors. Booth concludes that:

The fullest friendships, the “friendships of virtue” that the tradition hails as best, are likely to be the works that the world has called classics... I meet in their authors friends who demonstrate their friendship not only in the range and depth and intensity of pleasure they offer, not only in the promise they fulfil of proving useful to me, but finally in the irresistible invitation they extend to live during these moments a richer and fuller life than I could manage on my own. (p 223)

One of the tenets of narratology, as discussed in the introduction to narratology above, is that narratives are fundamental to how we communicate to others, and also how we receive and

process ideas internally. Booth claims we are all engaged in ethical criticism of the narratives we encounter continuously.

We cannot avoid choosing among them [narratives as friends], consciously or unconsciously; even those of us who do not read or watch TV... are *offered* innumerable stories each day, unless we have no human converse whatever, and just by living we choose some and reject others.

...We thus practice, willy-nilly, an ethical criticism regardless of our theories: we choose our friends and their gifts. (p 177)

Booth talks about stories as communication between parties to steer conduct and demonstrate the rules of a culture or society.

Each culture provides every member with an unlimited number of “natural” choices that seem to require no thought. Such intuitive choices tend to get articulated into gossip, which consists of a kind of free-wheeling narrative appraisal of people not present. Though we may not think of gossip as “ethical culture” – it is still fashionable to condemn it, in theory, as inherently immoral – the best gossip is wonderfully educational, an essential exchange that speaks to us learners messages like: “You should try not to be like that”; or “You should hope to be so brave!”; or “save us all from becoming such creatures!” (p 484)

Booth also expanded on how a writer as a communicator has a particular responsibility where the power relationship between the two parties is unequal in the writer’s favour (which is

always). He talks about the ethics – not only of technique, but of the themes and norms being addressed in the novel.

Here Booth talks about ethical deficiencies of the novel *Huckleberry Finn* (which he identifies as racial stereotypes, and the catering to chauvinism) being attributed to the character, Huck, rather than Twain, his creator. The first person narration allows the creator to get away with discourse throughout the novel that offends.

Dealing with any first-person narrative, we can explain away any fault, no matter how horrendous, if we assume in advance an *author* of unlimited wisdom, tact, and artistic skill. But such an assumption, by explaining everything, takes care of none of our more complex problems. If we do not pre-judge the case, the appeal to irony excuses only those faults the book *invites* us to *see through*, thus joining the author in his ironic transformations. Our main problems, not just with the ending, but with the most deeply embedded fixed norms of the book as a whole, remain unsolved. (p 470)

This brings me back to the very beginning of this study and the dilemma that sparked this academic pursuit. My character, Jenna-Belle, in *Girl Next Door* is a chauvinist, of sorts. I expected readers to absolve me of her flaws and to see the irony arising from the recognition that the character's views are not ones that I hold. I believed any failure to comprehend the irony to be an inadequate reading of the text. Not my fault.

Booth's text argues that the limitations of the unreliable narrator are not just a problem of technique, but more broadly an ethical problem for the writer and the reader.

Booth's text encouraged me to look for the qualities of friendship being offered to the audience of the novels I read, and the influence novels have, not only at their conclusion, but throughout the experience of reading it.

The Company We Keep provoked me to look at the quality of friendship that I am offering. And in all my novels to date, not just *Girl Next Door*, I have not been the friend I aspire to be.

3. Section two – Research Design

In the previous section I reviewed the major periods of narratology – identified the theories that are most pertinent to my area of study. During this time I also considered three dissertations (Sandefur 2003, Shen 2006, Younger 2003) that combine both narratology and young adult fiction, discussed earlier.

In this section I will discuss the means of achieving the aim.

To recap, the aim of this study is to identify narrative devices, and determine how they can be used to address the limitations of unreliable narrators in young adult fiction.

There are two components to the research – the exegesis and a creative piece.

In this section I will:

- identify which of the approaches to narratology previously discussed is most appropriate for this study and explain why,
- list the texts selected to demonstrate those narrative strategies in use and why they have been selected, also texts that were considered but not selected,
- discuss the narrative strategies that will be incorporated into the creative piece.

Why I have chosen the structural approach

Structural narratology is not interpretative, but instead seeks to describe narratives. Neither does it attempt to evaluate narratives, or even methods, as superior or inferior to others, but instead to find commonalities and differences. (This is the ‘linguistic tradition’ referred to in the previous discussion).

Since my goal is to identify a suite of techniques that may be applicable in a range of situations, rather than one single solution, this approach seems to be the best fit.

Postclassical approaches are more inclined towards narrative criticism and are reader-focussed. Context is important, but as the novels I intend to select for close study are contemporary and from the same category as my own, contextual considerations are not as important as they might otherwise be.

Poststructural narratology moves into a much more theoretical and hypothetical sphere, sometimes even to a position where the ‘author’ has no place within the theory. Many of the theories are at odds with structural narratology. As a writer - both the author and the ‘author’ - I am unable to relate these narrative approaches to the creative process. As stated previously, the relevance of this work is not dismissed altogether, it is just not pertinent to this particular study.

My primary purpose is to identify a number of narrative tools that may be useful in overcoming a particular technical challenge and then apply them to a new creative work of fiction. The systematic categorising of narrative techniques has more in common with the

earlier structural and some postclassical forays into the field than many of the poststructural contributions.

Selection of texts for close study

Most of the studies in narratology read for this research discuss a narrative device or theory and then give an example of that technique in use in a text.

If one was analysing a specific narrative theory, then it is fitting to isolate these snippets from a range of texts as illustrative. In this type of study design one could (as Younger has (Younger 2003)) choose fifty texts that demonstrate that particular device.

The problem with this method for my study is that the choice of technique in one part of the novel will limit or necessitate other techniques in the rest of the work. I am not only interested in individual narrative strategies, but the results of their usage in concert.

Shen's study (Shen 2006), like mine, examines multiple narrative strategies, and how they work together in a text. Shen has selected, essentially, two whole bodies of work - Shlomith Rimon-Kenan's discussion of narrative structure, to evaluate Robert Cormier's entire works of fiction – thirteen novels, which are stylistically and thematically similar.

My study is different in that I believe a more comprehensive, and more generalisable answer lies beyond the works of only one novelist, and one theorist.

For this reason I have chosen to examine *whole* novels, by *several* writers, for *multiple* narrative strategies, used in *combination*. This study is concerned with how individual narrative strategies are used in context.

The texts selected have some elements in common. Since the study aims to inspire and inform a new work, the elements that the examined novels have in common are elements that the new work will possess.

The books selected for close study are:

- within the category of children's or young adult fiction
- published in Australia, by mainstream publishing houses
- featuring complex adults, differing versions of adulthood and contrasting forms of parenting
- targeting the same audience as my own novels
- written by contemporary authors.

This means I discounted:

- junior fiction books (specifically aimed at preteens)
- books not written by Australians, or not published in Australia
- books that did not have relationships in families as a major theme (for example, science fiction, romance, sports, or humour)

- books published earlier than 2000 (which approximately covers the time span of my own published works).

The books chosen also all feature mentally ill parents. This means that the parents in the novels are not entirely reliable characters either. As a result the novelists of the selected texts cannot simply have the adult character in the novel provide reliable commentary to compensate for the young character. Selecting texts that have parent characters that are emotionally impaired at some point means that a broader range of narrative techniques must therefore be applied to overcome the limitations of the unreliable young adult protagonist.

Books with ‘normal’ parents rely more heavily on the parents as a vehicle for explaining to the reader what is really happening. It is the main method I have used in the past in my own writing. Since I already know how to use ‘normal’ parents as a narrative device for overcoming unreliability in a young adult protagonist, books that feature this strategy are not as helpful.

The novels I have chosen for close examination are:

Helicopter Man by Elizabeth Fensham (2005)

Saving Francesca by Melina Marchetta (2003)

The Museum of Mary Child by Cassandra Golds (2009)

The Red Shoe By Ursula Dubosarsky (2006)

Liar by Justine Larbalestier (2009)

Other texts considered for selection included:

Catherine Bateson - *Painted Love Letters* (2002)

'Painted Love Letters' concerns a teen daughter, Chrissie, coming to terms with her father's terminal illness and death. This was the first novel considered for close study. However, the parents in this novel are frequently used as a tool to overcome the unreliability of the main character, Chrissie. An example is when Chrissie fears that she has become infected with the plague, the dialogue between Chrissie and her teacher, and Chrissie and her father make it clear to the reader that Chrissie's concerns are unfounded. While this is a handy device for a writer to employ, it was clear that using dialogue with a reliable adult could become a failsafe method of overcoming the unreliability of a young character. At this point I decided to narrow the selection to include child or teen protagonists with a mentally ill parent so that this 'failsafe' cannot be employed. The parent's testimony becomes unreliable too, which means that the writer has to apply other strategies to overcome unreliability.

Jacqueline Wilson - *The Illustrated Mum* (2005)

This is the story of two daughters living with a mother who suffers from bi-polar disorder. It deals with complex family relations as the girls seek out their fathers and their mother is institutionalised for her mental illness. However, the selection was ultimately narrowed to

Australian novels, excluding this title, which was first published in the UK, and then in the US.

Bill Condon - *No Worries* (2005)

This is the story of Brian who lives with a mother suffering from bi-polar disorder and father who drinks and gambles. It follows his developing relationship with love interest, Emma. While an excellent book, *No Worries* employed similar narrative strategies to those that were well covered by the other texts that had already been selected – in particular *Helicopter Man*.

Barry Jonsberg - *It's Not All About You, Calma* (2005)

This novel is a study in unreliable narration, following Calma Harrison making assumptions about the motives behind the behaviour of those around her – her mother and father, and her best friend Vanessa. It includes a whole range of narrative strategies. The parents in this novel are not mentally ill, and as in the previous example, the parents are ultimately the device used to overcome the protagonist's unreliability.

4. Section three - Examination of Selected Texts

The novels discussed in this section are:

Elizabeth Fensham – *Helicopter Man*.

Melina Marchetta – *Saving Francesca*

Cassandra Golds – *The Museum of Mary Child*

Ursula Dubosarsky – *The Red Shoe*

Justine Larbalestier – *Liar*

Elizabeth Fensham – ‘Helicopter Man’

Helicopter Man is the story of twelve-year-old Pete, who has been on the run with his father following his mother’s death six years prior. Over the course of the novel we learn that the pursuers are not real. Pete’s father suffers from a mental illness. Pete’s father is hospitalised and Pete is settled into a foster home. The climax concerns Pete coming to understand the circumstance of his mother’s death, and becoming reconciled to the nature of his father’s mental illness. The book concludes with Pete’s father being released from hospital and reunited with his son.

Narrative Strategies Applied

The book opens with a postcard written by Pete’s friend Vic, and closes with Pete’s reply. Pete writes a letter to his dead mother early in the novel, and addresses several of his entries to his friend Vic (both examples of assigning a narratee). There is an email from Pete’s foster carer to her mother in the middle of the novel, a poem composed by Pete’s father, which Pete transcribes, and a letter from his mother that was given to a neighbour. These letters provide an alternative view to Pete’s and satisfy Cadden’s requirement for a passive double-voice (Cadden 2000, p147). In particular the email at the middle of the novel from Pete’s new foster mother seems to serve no other purpose than to support (later) Pete’s impressions of the Cowpers (the foster parents).

The remainder is written as a series of diary entries covering four months, from May to August 2000. It is therefore epistolary in style. The events unfold simultaneously with Pete writing them down. He does not know at the beginning of the novel how it will end.

The primary fabula – the pursuit in the present - is a frame narrative, in that it provides a suspenseful ‘here’. The secondary explanatory fabula offers, in fragments, how the characters got here. These two timelines converge at the climax.

The tertiary fabula (subplot) involves the relationships and circumstances of a family of mice that Pete adopts along the way. This is an example of a tertiary fabula resembling the primary fabula.

The ordering of events, or anachrony is complex as the narrative incorporates the three different time frames - the immediate past, the distant past and the present, corresponding with the three fabulas.

Fensham is not consistent with tense, using it to create urgency and intimacy in a scene regardless of which timeline she is referring to. The shifts in tense contribute to the informal, conversational tone and make Pete’s narration more ‘authentic’.

Unreliable narration – withholding information

In *Helicopter Man* the matters about which Pete is unreliable are the pursuit that Pete and his father seem to be involved in, and the circumstances of his mother’s death. He carries out a ‘quiet deception’ in Heyd’s terms (Heyd 2006). He withholds information that would have been salient at the time.

Pete underreports (Phelan and Martin in Herman 1999, p 95). He does not share with the reader the extent of his knowledge. He is ambiguous about the circumstances of his mother's death throughout the novel. Take for example, page 85:

Dad's kept us safe from those people who took Mum.

Then page 87:

Why hasn't Dad ever properly explained to me about Mum? Who abducted and killed her? Or did she walk out on us like the Human Services man said? ... Anyway, Dad now says he doesn't even believe she did die. That's why I'm not allowed to talk about it with him or even remind him that we did go to the funeral.

It is revealed much later in the novel (p 126) that both Pete and his father did know the circumstances of her death and that they both did attend her funeral. Pete's father's mental illness did not manifest until shortly after that event.

Pete also underreads. His lack of knowledge 'yields an insufficient interpretation of an event, character or situation'. (Phelan and Martin in Herman 1999, p 96). Examples include Pete's responses to 'Human Services' telling him (repeatedly) that his father is mentally ill. Pete claims not to understand.

Even the most inexperienced reader would become suspicious of Pete's reliability as he is so consistently non-specific about the threat posed by the helicopters. The vagueness itself becomes a flag for the reader that the pursuit is a symptom of Pete's father's poor mental health.

Pete talks about their situation being 'safe' or 'dangerous' and about 'they', which we assume to be the pursuers from whom they are hiding, but never any mention of who 'they' might be.

We read that Pete's father claims to be 'one of the chosen' (p 57), but not what he has been chosen for.

Pete frequently wishes his father would elaborate on the hazard they face (p 28, 30, 44, 55, 67, 68, 73, 85, 87, 91, 96, 97, and finally 100 where Pete decides that his father is not telling the truth).

This withholding of information and lack of pursuers in the pursuit might frustrate a young reader, while details of day-to-day, subsistence living are given. The reader begins to look for clues as to why this obvious oversight has been incorporated into the narrative.

Rather than evidence of pursuers, the reader is instead provided with a list of symptoms of mental illness that Pete's father is exhibiting— sleeping more than normal, anxiety, paranoia, delusions of grandeur, receiving secret messages. The descriptions of these symptoms and the vivid depiction of life on the street become the 'norm of the work' – the method the author uses to point out the most significant clues to the 'real' story.

The ambiguity surrounding the circumstances of Pete's mother's death/disappearance, and who is responsible is the mystery that carries the plot. Without it the reader would not feel an urgency to continue reading, and therefore it is an essential component of the story. It is necessary for Fensham to include it, however each instance of Pete's evasion is a delicate balance between the character being unreliable in various ways, and the author being unfair.

Fensham 'makes visible' (Cadden 2000, p 146) for the reader Pete's unreliability in a sustained way, by noticeably avoiding any evidence that his view of this 'pursuit' might be the right one. She does not allow Pete to speculate at any time. Even when he and his father

are forcibly detained Pete does not wonder if (much less assume that) the captors might be the ‘them’ who the two have long been avoiding.

After Pete’s father has been placed in a mental institution, Pete still fails to understand him to be mentally ill. It is not until page 105 (of 159) that he admits to suspecting it.

All of a sudden I realise for sure that the enemy is not out there, but somewhere inside Dad’s mind (p 105).

If the young reader has not guessed it already, the author rewards the reader, and Pete too. She begins to make connections in Pete’s past. In particular, she elaborates on the mother’s mysterious disappearance, both through Pete’s recollections, through dialogue with Daph, a family friend, and other adults.

In the present, Fensham ties together some of the metaphors she has been using. For example, directly linking the male mouse being removed from his family and Pete’s father being in hospital.

Mice family doing well. Babies are starting to look like proper mice. Strange how they have to get along without a dad, too. Merrie in solitary. Dad in hospital. Do men find it harder to handle things? (p 118).

The mouse babies are starting to look like proper mice, and Pete is starting to look like a proper boy – succeeding in school, making friends, participating in sport, beginning to engage openly with the adults in his new life. At the end of the novel the reader understands that this is the story – Pete’s initial displacement succeeded by security and a growing sense of identity – rather than the pursuit scenario that we were offered at the outset.

Filter and the narratee

The information that we receive throughout *Helicopter Man* is ‘filtered’ through Pete’s understanding of the world. It is summarised into those events that Pete volunteers to record each day. We do not get his unselfconscious thoughts, dialogue, other than that which Pete chooses to transcribe, or those actions that he does not realise are significant. This is information we could expect if either Pete himself, or some other narrator was narrating the events from the future – one who knows how the story will end, and therefore recognises what information is pertinent. (This is, of course, a construct. Fensham knows what is significant and ensures we have the information we need).

In two discrete sections Pete addresses his diary entries to other characters – his mother and his friend Vic. When Pete assigns a narratee the entries are then filtered further into the parts of the narrative that Pete believes are appropriate and of interest to these narratees. This has consequences for the order in which information is revealed.

Diary entries are personal documents designed to be reread by their author at some future point in time, and as such, tend to be written in an intimate kind of shorthand. The writer, for example, does not need to spell out the various relationships that they have with other people mentioned in the diary. Both now and in the future, the character who is writing will know the names of the neighbours, cousins, aunts, the school bully, the best friend, the secret crush, etc., and it is therefore up to the implied author to provide the clues necessary for the (actual) reader to understand who these people are. The same can be said about locations and events.

This can result in some rather clumsy wording as Fensham attempts to give the reader information that the diary writer would know but the actual readership does not.

Dad says I look like Mum – blackish hair and lots of it, same shaped face and eyes except they are cloud-blue like Dad’s (not deep brown like Mum’s). (p 26)

Even if for some reason the protagonist should forget what his parents look like (Pete’s mother died when he was young and photographs of her were stolen), he is unlikely to forget his own hair or eye colour. This description is for the reader’s benefit.

Fensham bypasses this problem a short way in to the novel by assigning a specific reader to the diary - a narratee. The first of these is a letter addressed to Pete’s mother (p 28). In this letter Pete refers to events that would have occurred when he was six years old. At this point the reader does not know how old Pete would have been, which is convenient as he quotes conversations and recounts a series of jobs that his father has held. Again, this information is for the benefit of the reader, since that level of detailed recollection is beyond the capacity of a six year old. By the time we understand how old Pete was during this event, what we remember is the tone rather than the particulars.

The second narratee is Vic, a friend from a previous neighbourhood. The diary becomes a series of quasi-letters to Pete’s friend. Pete recalls shared adventures and routines, which have the effect of establishing the strength and importance of this relationship.

With this assigned reader the tone shifts away from a mix of brief descriptions of the day, updates on Dad’s physical state, lists, and posts about the mice. These fragments have, up to this point, established the frame narrative – the ‘here’ that the secondary fabula is heading towards. They also reminded us of Pete’s youthfulness, and the carefree lifestyle Pete is missing, as well as providing a contrast between his homelessness and the foster homes that we will see later in the novel.

Assigning a narratee frees Fensham to begin sustained recollections of events leading Pete and his father to this point, providing the reader with more extensive clues than would be feasible if the implied audience was only an older Pete.

At the same time, the correspondence is limited to that information that Pete and Vic have in common – namely, their shared time together at McKenzie’s Beach and Pete’s explanation of why they left without saying goodbye. In this way the embedded secondary fabula (the distant past), explains the primary fabula (‘here’). However, it is only a partial explanation. It does not cover events before their arrival at McKenzie’s Beach – the abduction, disappearance or death of Pete’s mother that has been alluded to in the early entries.

Assigning a narratee allows Fensham to logically dole out small amounts of information that Pete already knows. In this way she can legitimately maintain the suspense.

Anachrony – order of events

There are three ‘times’ in *Helicopter Man*.

1. Immediate past. Each diary entry is a summary of the current day. It is characterised by ellipsis (gaps) as Pete does not account for every moment. Fensham selects only one or two events to recount. Pete also infrequently refers to events that will occur in the future, but due to the epistolary form, this is not technically speaking ‘prolepsis’ since Pete does not know for certain that events will unfold the way he imagines. True prolepsis occurs when the narrator who is narrating from the future refers to events that have already occurred for the narrator, but not yet in ‘story time’, i.e. ‘little did I

know then...'. It is instead 'preparation' (Genette 1980, p 75), where Fensham allows Pete to refer to events that she may expand upon later in the text.

For example, on page 26, Pete plans to make a mouse trap. In later entries he makes the trap, and catches mice. These all form part of an ongoing chronicle about the mice.

2. Distant past. Pete recollects events from several years ago. This could be described as 'explanatory analepsis', in that it provides the reader with clues. By assigning a narratee to the entries, Fensham can have Pete reveal events in a convenient order for the narrative.
3. The present. In most entries, Pete will refer to the time he has taken to write down those events in the immediate or distant past. This provides the novel with a 'now'. It also gives Fensham an opportunity to directly compare Dad right now with Dad in a previous situation (when he was well).

Some entries are temporally complex, including all of these times in an unsystematic order and using inconsistent tense.

Take for example, May 9th. Pete begins with a one line summary of the day before.

'Didn't make it to the fish and chip shop yesterday. Helicopters.' (p 12)

He then skips to the immediate past - a summary of the whole day 'today' (May 9th).

'Today another helicopter.' (p 13).

This is followed by an 'iterative' statement. (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, p 58), which refers to a mention once of an activity that recurs.

'When they are close, Dad freaks.'

Then a description from the present.

‘Rations low. Just stale bread.’

There is an ellipsis.

‘Got back half an hour ago.’

Another summary of the present – Pete’s father is angry about where Pete has been. Pete has been shot. This is a true prolepsis, in that it gives the reader a glimpse of an event that is going to be revealed and increases the suspense.

Pete then summarises the afternoon. He makes a number of iterative statements describing deviations to the route that he and his father take to the shop, and comments that are temporally ambiguous. ‘Dad says they [the trees he is walking past] used to be logged for ships masts.’ (p 14) We do not know when Dad said this, or whether it is something he has said more than once.

Pete comments again from the present.

‘Hard to believe all this was roughly two hours ago.’

Then a prolepsis from two hours ago;

‘I was going to do a “break in and borrow”...’.

Then another iterative statement.

‘Five o’clock is as late as he [the shopkeeper] ever stays open.’

This is followed by a long description of the break in, escape, and a new crisis as Pete is beset by a dog. Much of this is narrated in present tense. Half way through the dog incident Pete recalls reading (some time in the distant past) what to do about being attacked by a dog. He

escapes the dog and heads into the scrub, ‘for about ten minutes’ (p 17). Pete hears a noise that frightens him, and he recalls another fact his father has told him about trees. The noise is a wallaby. Pete then narrates from the present.

‘Torch is fading.’ (p 17)

This entry is temporally complex, but imagine if Fensham had removed the iteration so that each incident was reported as many times as it occurred. Imagine if she had taken each of the isolated events and arranged them chronologically.

It would begin with Pete reading about what to do when one is attacked by a dog. Then Pete’s father would make comments about trees. Pete would recount walking to the shop and observing the shopkeeper closing the shop before five o’clock several times. It would be interspersed with each separate incident of Pete’s father ‘freaking’, before we reached ‘yesterday’, ‘today’, and then the break-in, the shooting, the dog attack, and finally Pete writing the events down.

It would not make sense – or it would make sense, but not until you reached the very end and rearranged the separate elements in your head in a similar order to that which Fensham currently has them in the novel.

While this entry is temporally complex, this form of storytelling is consistent with an oral rendition of events. Incidents in the future need to be foreshadowed in order for the reader to understand where the anecdote is heading and to maintain interest. Ellipses and iteration reduce the reporting of irrelevant material. Reminiscence provides emotional flavour and intensity to the scene. Fensham also uses present tense sporadically to increase urgency, as one would if recalling the events out loud.

An anachronous ordering of events is essential. In terms of characterisation, following an oral pattern of narrative makes the passage seem more authentic. The reader is more accepting of Pete's unreliability when he is rendered in this form, as he appears to be a real teenager recounting events in a spontaneous manner.

Embedded text

There are two types of embedded texts in this novel worthy of discussion, the secondary fabula explaining how Pete and his father have reached the 'here' in the novel, and a tertiary fabula resembling the primary one.

Secondary fabula explains

The primary fabula – Pete's 'now', when he is writing the diary - is a frame narrative. The secondary fabula explains the journey that Pete and his father have made to this point. This secondary fabula is told in a long series of anecdotes and, as noted, not in chronological order, but arranged thematically.

In combination they make one long secondary fabula, but each anecdote is its own secondary fabula. When Pete is sick he does not discuss the course of his own illness in full, but instead pauses to recount his father's episode of appendicitis. Pete explains that his father would not complete the paperwork in the hospital, and fears that his father's distrust of hospitals will result in Pete being discharged too early. This anecdote is then interrupted by another, in which Pete tells of the drug addict neighbour who took care of him while Pete's father was in hospital.

The story of the druggie neighbour seems slightly out of place here, but provides the reader with a point of comparison for the foster parents that are appointed to him later in the novel – a much more suitable environment where his health, social, educational and emotional needs are met. The foster placement is very different from the guardian Pete’s father selected during this previous health crisis.

The whole novel is made up of anecdotal snippets, micro-secondary fabulas, which, in combination, make up the whole, even though significance of each of the incidents may not be apparent at the time.

The pattern of the anecdotes – the deliberate manner of revealing information is one way the ‘implied author’ is manifested in *Helicopter Man*.

Secondary narrative resembles

The second ‘secondary fabula’ (in this case, a tertiary fabula or subplot) in *Helicopter Man* is an account of Pete’s pet mice. Pete captures two mice in the ‘Heritage Hotel’ – the barn where they are squatting. This is an example of a tertiary fabula resembling the primary one. The connections are not drawn directly for the reader, although the parallels are hard to avoid. When Pete is trapped, the mice are kept in an icecream container, which they find distressing. When Pete’s father goes to hospital and Pete becomes aware of his father’s mental condition, the male mouse attempts to eat its young and is isolated. The mouse family prospers as Pete settles into his foster home. The foster home is lavish and the relationship Pete has with his foster parents and grandparents is healthy. The foster grandfather builds the mice a ‘mouse

castle'. As Pete's father heals in hospital, Pete begins to tame the male mouse – teaching it to eat from his hand rather than bite.

Here is an example in two adjoining entries:

[August 12th] Can't remember when Dad last went on about this Asio crap. Cross my fingers and all that, looks like his mind's clearing.

[August 13th] Merrie [the father mouse] has been released into the castle. Prue [Pete's foster mother] says he's on a good behaviour bond, which is what you get if the judge thinks you'll try hard not to muck up. Merrie's made no more attacks on his children. Anyway, they're big enough to look after themselves. (p 153)

The ongoing parallels between the mice and Pete's circumstance are obvious, perhaps a little blunt for an experienced reader, but this novel is not designed for experienced readers, it is for younger readers who may be just beginning to make the shift between immersive and analytical reading. Making the connection between the primary and tertiary fabula in this novel would be an opportunity for them to be successful, active readers, and learn to look for secondary and tertiary fabulas in other texts. This is an example of Fensham 'being the reader's friend' in the way that Booth refers to in *The Company We Keep* discussed earlier. Fensham is considering the context of the reader and meeting the needs that may arise from their inexperience with narrative.

Other techniques

Fensham uses a technique that is not mentioned in my reading of narratology thus far. When Pete indulges his father's fantasies or withholds pertinent information from the reader, his

situation either stagnates or becomes worse. When he questions his father's parenting, or versions of the truth, and the facts surrounding his situation in a more 'grown up' way, he is rewarded by gifts, by the plot advancing, or new information coming to light.

It is a narrative technique similar to conditioning of living creatures by positive and negative reinforcement. Seal training.

Here are some examples:

On pages 11 and 12, Pete's father says that they can leave the shed in which they are trespassing to buy some food only if the helicopters stay away. Pete obeys. Pete fills in the time with some anecdotes, including a remark that his father has good manners. They do not leave. Pete stays hungry.

On page 70 and 71, Pete and his father are staying in relative comfort with family friends. Pete tells the reader that he would like to go to school. He does not press it with his father when the opportunity arises. Pete's father's hysteria escalates. Pete does not turn to the family friends with whom they are staying and reveal the extent of his father's extreme behaviour. Pete and his father return to the shed. They take a step backwards in terms of the comfort in which they live.

On pages 74 and 75 the owners of the shed (the Collins) discover them. Pete's father instructs Pete not to 'give away information to the enemy'. Mrs Collins seems sympathetic. Again Pete does not take the opportunity to tell someone about the trouble they are in. They find themselves on the streets.

On page 77 the police pursue the pair. Pete fully commits to his father's delusions.

Everything Dad has warned me about is true. But my mind is made up. They're not going to get us.

Two paragraphs later both Pete and his father nearly drown.

Pete's situation remains stagnate for the next eight pages. He is in temporary foster care where he feels isolated and misunderstood, and his father is sent to an institution. On page 87 Pete begins to question his father again, 'Why hasn't Dad ever properly explained to me about Mum?' and then he is moved to the Cowpers' – the stable, secure, loving foster home where he resides for the remainder of the novel.

Here are some other examples of positive reinforcement being applied:

Dad was still in the same clothes as yesterday. When I asked him why he whispered, *They're trying to get me in the shower so they can gas me.* Positive that's not true. (p 96)

Two paragraphs later Pete receives as a gift a special 'mousery' for his pet mice.

He [Dad] reckons they've put poison in his food. It's only safe to have bread and water. Told him if he starves to death he won't get to see me again. I also said that if the other patients aren't dropping dead round him, then he's probably not getting poisoned. (p 100)

In the next paragraph Pete's solicitor gives him the phone number of Daph and Bill, who, later in the novel (p 123), are able to give Pete information about both his father and mother that Pete has been seeking for some time.

From pages 123 to 127 Pete seeks out information about schizophrenia – the illness his father has, and is open with an adult about his feelings for a sustained conversation. This is a turning point for him and he is well rewarded. On page 128 Godfrey (the foster father) makes chocolate crackles with him, and then the foster grandfather arrives with an elaborate mouse castle.

Almost a metre square. It's made of wood, but painted to look like stone. Four turrets that the mice can really run up and down. A large medieval hall, a courtyard with space to put mice exercise equipment. Best of all, a real drawbridge and a portcullis that works. (p 128)

Sweeties and gifts. Fensham is seal training.

Lessons from Helicopter Man

Helicopter Man is the story of 12-year-old Pete and a journey he takes with his mentally ill father. The mystery that propels the plot is the circumstances of Pete's mother's death/disappearance. The real story concerns Pete's search for identity, growing independence and sense of belonging, and therefore it is bildungsroman disguised as a mystery story.

The 'disappearance' is the main matter about which Pete is unreliable, and the secret that the reader expects to be resolved by the novel's conclusion. Pete's unreliability allows the mystery to be sustained. His unreliability is essential for maintaining suspense. However, Fensham still requires the reader to understand some things that Pete does not.

Fensham is able to prolong Pete's incorrect understanding and tainted version of events by using anachrony – that is, not listing events in chronological order, but outlining events in a more convenient order, and also manipulating the order in which facts are revealed by assigning a number of narratees.

It can be difficult for the writer to manufacture reasons why a character may (or may not) recount pertinent details, but these two techniques used together allow this to occur in a manner that is both credible and deliberate, and still maintains the tension.

In addition, the anachronies contribute to the authenticity of the young adult voice. It mimics an oral style of storytelling – spontaneous and casual. The reader is hearing the story the way a teenager would tell it in person, including prolepsis, preparation, ellipses, and iteration. This oral style gives Fensham more freedom with Pete's unreliability than a more formal and rehearsed manner of storytelling would allow.

Of note is a disparity between the unreliability of Pete as a character, and the fidelity offered by the author as manifested by the plot. While Pete is sometimes convinced by his father's delusions, the author, as manifested by the progression of the plot is not convinced. Pete's dialogue supports his father's position at times, but the plot pursues a slow downward spiral. When Pete appears to understand the truth, the author – through the plot - then rewards him with better circumstances, or in some cases, actual gifts, such as chocolate and the mouse castle.

This is perhaps a more practical and literal application of Chatman's 'norm of the work' (Chatman 1978, p 149) discussed earlier, whereby the author uses the structure of the work itself to differentiate their views from the characters within the text, however Chatman's description was not so tangible as this 'seal training' reward structure that Fensham employs.

Melina Marchetta – ‘Saving Francesca’

Saving Francesca is the story of sixteen-year-old Francesca whose mother is suffering from acute depression due to delayed grief over her father’s death and a miscarriage she experienced at around the same time. Francesca was aware of the former, but not the latter. Her learning of the miscarriage and her father’s negative attitude to the potential third child is the climax of the novel.

Francesca is also attending a school that was previously attended by boys exclusively. She is in the first coeducational cohort. Over the course of the novel Francesca has to deal with becoming increasingly estranged from her previous group of friends, who are attending a different school, the strains within her family from her mother’s mental illness, developing new friendships with the other students at her new school, and a growing romantic attachment to an unattainable boy.

It is in the process of negotiating her way through these relationships that Francesca understands her role and establishes her values. It is a search for identity, which sets this book squarely in the bildungsroman genre.

Narrative Strategies Applied

Saving Francesca is told in first person. Francesca tends to demonstrate the ‘face-saving’ form of unreliability. She addresses the reader directly – assigning a ‘you’. Frequency is one

of the major strategies applied for overcoming reliability. The primary, secondary and tertiary fabulas take the form of three rescues – each reflecting the ‘saving’ that the title refers to.

Marchetta also has made some plot choices that subvert the conventions of the genre and those will be discussed below.

Acknowledging a ‘you’ and forms of unreliability

In *Saving Francesca* the main character will occasionally make reference to the fact that the events are being told to a narratee, although no specific narratee is ever assigned. The ‘you’ is the reader, rather than a character that exists in the story.

This begins on page 2, ‘I have to tell you that I hate the life that, according to my mother, I’m not actually having.’ The *I have to tell you* section addresses the reader directly. It acknowledges a *you*.

Another example is on page 67, ‘The score is too pitiful to divulge.’

Both of these sentences indicate that Francesca is aware that she is divulging information to someone (the reader), and also that she feels shame about revealing this information to that reader. In the first case she is embarrassed by her ‘teenage angst’ and in the second, ashamed of the score in a game of basketball she plays. Francesca is concerned about what the reader thinks of her, and chooses to limit the information that she offers. This is Heyd’s ‘face-saving’ form of unreliability (Heyd 2006, p 230). This face-saving occurs across the whole novel and is the main source of Francesca’s unreliability.

By acknowledging the 'you', Marchetta 'makes visible' (Cadden 2000) Francesca's unreliability. We know Francesca is not telling us everything because she tells us as much.

Francesca is coy about her own appearance – as is required by society of young women. She is described by other characters as resembling Sophia Loren (p 208), who is in turn described as '...like the most beautiful woman in the world.' (p 209). If Francesca's beauty was genuinely comparable to Loren, and Francesca was being forthright with us, then she would acknowledge the likeness.

Another example of this face-saving politeness, or reservedness from early in the novel is from the final lines of the first chapter.

But today the Mia we all know disappears and she becomes someone with nothing to say.

Someone a bit like me. (p 5)

This is a disingenuous remark from a character embarking on a whole novel that contains a further two hundred and forty two pages of what she has to say. It is a conventional, expected and polite form of humility, rather than an authentic one.

In this way Marchetta warns us from the outset that we are not hearing inner Francesca (who knows she is beautiful and thinks we want to hear what she has to say), but a polite, slightly distant version. Comments such as these alert the reader to Francesca's unreliability and inform us that we will be required to form our own opinions.

The only other form of unreliability in the novel is that Francesca withholds certain information, or provides some of the essential information, but not all of it ('preparation', as

described above) – not because she is face-saving but because she is not in possession of all the pertinent information herself.

Specifically, we receive a number of clues about her mother's miscarriage and Francesca's expectation about her parent's response to a pregnancy.

I wonder if she could be pregnant, but it's too strange a thought. (p 6)

Whatever this thing is with my mum, I don't think it's cancer or anything, and it certainly isn't pregnancy, because my dad would probably be ecstatic about that. (p 7)

Once, at the beginning of last year, she told me that she wanted to stay home and not work and she was so happy about it ... For so long she was sad and then one day I remember that she was happy. But then it changed again. (p 149)

It was two months after her father had died and I remember how beautiful she looked that day ... it was like some fantastic aura was surrounding both of us. (p 180)

[Referring to the commonly held belief that women who are pregnant have a 'glow'.]

This form of unreliability is not primarily due to Francesca's youth or naivety. It is a convention of story telling to provide clues to the ultimate plot revelation earlier in the text. 'Preparation' makes the climax of the story more credible. This withholding of information serves as a device for dropping these clues within the plot. The withholding form of unreliability used here is a plot tool.

Unreliability in relation to static minor characters

The book is a strong example of the author having to overcome the narrator's unreliability. We learn over the course of the novel that Francesca's initial impressions of every other character (family, teachers, friends, the love interest) are different from her impressions at the end – and those characters do not change. All of the other characters in the novel are static. Francesca's parents in particular were characters whose counsel she previously relied upon (grudgingly) – in a world we imagine existed before the novel began.

It is important to note that the life of the characters before Mia's illness does not exist, even within the novel. As readers we construct it from the anecdotes (analepsis) that Francesca provides of a time before the events in the novel. Marchetta uses forms of frequency to create this world, so that it is easy for us to imagine that we have experienced it. This use of frequency will be discussed in the following section.

Francesca's mother is essentially absent for most of the novel. Francesca's father proves to have different attitudes to those Francesca believed him to hold. Further, the power dynamic between her parents is not the way Francesca assumed it to be (it transpires that her father is the stronger of the two). The assumptions that Francesca makes are inaccurate. Her parents do not change over the course of the novel – only Francesca's understanding of them.

Tense and frequency

The novel is told in first person and, generally, in present tense. It is mostly in chronological order. Past tense is used for anecdotes that emphasise a point. This use of analepsis allows the

reader to draw comparisons between how Francesca viewed matters before and how she sees them now.

Marchetta uses iteration - referring once to events that occurred often.

... I didn't have to go through one of her daily pep talks which usually begin with a song that she puts on at 6.45 every morning. (p 1)

Most of our free time was spent making up dance moves to Kylie songs in our bedrooms... (p 3)

I've never been left out of their conversations, not even when they talked about sex ... (p 42)

The effect of this use of iteration and tense change is to compare a life that was comfortable and routine to the new unfamiliar behaviours her mother is exhibiting, and to demonstrate how her new friendships are much less predictable and easy than the previous ones.

Marchetta also uses repetition - recounting a number of times events that occurred once, and with each retelling provides slightly different information. An example is her approaches to telling of Mia's miscarriage.

The anecdote spanning pages 180 to 183 covers two car trips during which Francesca first tells her mother that she intends to audition for a part in the school musical. In exchange Mia tells Francesca that she has decided to stay home and not accept a job she has been offered. We later come to understand that this decision is due to her pregnancy. Over the course of the next car trip Francesca tells her mother that she did not get the part, which is a lie. She was peer pressured out of auditioning. Mia tells her daughter that she has decided to take the job

after all – which is an omission. Mia returns to work because she no longer has a reason for staying home now that she has lost the baby.

When these events are first related we know the truth of Francesca's actions and motives, but not of her mother's.

On pages 185 and 186 Francesca raises this matter with her father.

‘Why did Mummy take the job at the university?’ I ask him.

‘Because it was offered to her.’

‘But for a while there she wasn't going to take it. At the beginning of last year. She was going to stay home. Why didn't she?’

‘I don't remember, Frankie. Go to bed. You're tired.’

Francesca's father lies to her. We discover later that he does remember. When Francesca discovers the truth from Mia's boss (p 219) she confronts her father. He fobs her off. Then on page 225 he confesses to his daughter that he did not want a third child. On page 231 Mia briefly raises her pregnancy (simply that it occurred).

The miscarriage event is also an example of dialogue as embedded text overcoming unreliability. The dialogue Francesca engages in with other characters about the miscarriage gives the reader information that Francesca does not have.

The miscarriage is one event, but Marchetta approaches it from four different angles - from Francesca, her mother, her father and from also Mia's boss. It is a very important event in the lives of these characters and as an element of plot. It shows the vulnerability of Mia, the dynamics of her relationship with her husband, and the way in which this family negotiates

conflict. More broadly, it demonstrates that a single event can change the course of one's life, and in turn, the lives of all of those with whom one's life is intertwined.

How events and choices made in one life influences others is a strong theme throughout the novel. Francesca is entirely at the mercy of William Trombal's whims, for example. Her actions and feelings are irrelevant. Will must choose, in the first instance, between Francesca and another girl, and then later between Francesca and a desire to travel abroad. (He chooses the latter).

The other form of frequency that Marchetta uses is describing similar events every time they occur. Francesca travels to and from school by bus fifteen times in the novel (p 35, 65, 66, 68, 75, 102, 118, 123, 126, 130, 147, 172, 187, 201, 213 – excluding taxi rides or train rides). On each of these trips Francesca engages in extensive dialogue with her friends – either her new St Sebastian's friends, or her old St Stella friends, or both. These trips replace the car trips that she would have taken with her mother, who drove Francesca to school prior to her illness. It is on these trips that we see the growing attachment to the new friends and the disconnection from her older friends.

On the trip home on the bus [with Jimmy Hailler – a St Sebastian's boy], I'm vomiting out words, unable to hold them back no matter how hard I try; talking film and music and gossip and DVD commentaries and clothing and teachers and students and pets and brothers and loves and hates and lyrics and God and the universe and our dads. (p 65)

When the bus stops at Broadway, about ten Pius girls get on. Two of them are Michaela and Natalia, my Stella friends. As usual, they're animated, enjoying their

lives with those around them. Why do I feel as if something's missing in my life without them and they don't feel the same about me? That doesn't make them bad does it? (p 75)

Marchetta also uses this technique with house meetings, where Francesca has an opportunity to observe William Trombal – house leader. She uses this repetition of the same event every time it occurs with the boys in detention, beginning with an active dislike to a growing affection, and with some of her classes, where the girls' views are at first ridiculed and eventually acknowledged (although never truly embraced). In each of these cases Francesca is in the same setting for the same time period. What changes is Francesca's engagement with, and consequently, her attitude to her classmates.

These three forms of frequency used by Marchetta are effective vehicles for achieving these goals in the narrative – namely – establishing a world before, showing Francesca's lack of knowledge and thus her unreliability, and witnessing the development of Francesca's relationships with these other characters.

Secondary and Tertiary Fabulas – rescues, word choice and ways to be a woman

There are three fabulas in the story corresponding to 'rescues' that the 'Saving' in the title refers to. The first two rescues are connected to the primary fabula - the story of Francesca's mother's depression and the family's response to it. Francesca is rescued from drowning as a five year old. Francesca is rescued from Woy Woy after her seventeenth birthday.

The rescue from drowning is first raised on page 18.

There's always a story to be told to show how weak I am and how great she [Francesca's mother] is. 'Remember the time you almost drowned' she'd ask me. I don't want to remember. Because it's probably a reminder of how I need saving.

It transpires that it was not Francesca's mother who rescued Francesca on this occasion but her father.

...I remember my dad's hands. Out there in the surf. I knew they were his, even with all that water pounding in my ears and down my throat and even though every wave was like a giant punch against me, I knew his hands. (p 224)

The circumstance for this recollection is the climax of the book, and the third rescue. (The second rescue is discussed below). Francesca has disappointed her friends and they are angry with her. She has learned of her father's negative attitude to the pregnancy and accused her father of being responsible for her mother's illness. Her accusation has infuriated her mother.

In her rage and confusion, Francesca has left the city and boarded a train to the Central Coast. Here the plot choices of the novel are problematic in relation to the traditional structure of bildungsroman.

In terms of the relative risks that a lone and emotionally agitated teenage girl may face, the city of Sydney and in particular, the area surrounding Central station are much more hazardous places than the sleepy fishing village of Woy Woy in mid afternoon.

Further, places and destinations also often metaphorically mirror the main character's inner turmoil – the desert for example, could be used to show a sense of desolation or despair, a thundering surf can show a person literally on the edge, and conversely a lush bucolic scene

can indicate calm contentedness and fertility. The harmlessness of Woy Woy does not serve as a helpful metaphor for the tumult Francesca is feeling.

The central theme of most bildungsroman novels is the main character learning (or being forced into) self-reliance. Here at the crisis point of the novel, Francesca does not exhibit any of the autonomy or ingenuity, or strength of character that the author has so valued in other parts of the text (see below). She does not even leave the train station.

It would be easy for Francesca to catch one of the hourly trains that would return her to Central station – a journey of around 50 minutes. Instead she phones her father and he first sends the police before driving to collect her ... from Woy Woy, a place where she never faced any danger.

The anecdote of the original potential drowning only serves to demonstrate that Francesca is as needful of ‘saving’ by her father as a seventeen-year-old as she was when she was five.

Meanwhile, Will Trombal – the only other character in the novel who faces a dilemma – whether to stay at home in his comfort zone or to take risks and explore the world - chooses to travel overseas alone and ‘shake his foundations’ (p 238).

The quality of friendship offered by this book – particularly to its young female readers is problematic. In *Helicopter Man*, discussed above, we see the trajectory of plot itself used to reward the protagonist for independent thought and steps towards maturity, but in this novel, which explores feminist issues, and attaches much importance to female independence, traditional gender (not to mention cultural) stereotypes are firmly adhered to within the plot.

The second rescue involves Francesca being 'saved' from Siobhan Sullivan by her friends at St Stella's. This is the secondary fabula, which recounts her gradual detachment from her old school friends and her growing rapport with her new friends (male and female).

Rescue from Siobhan Sullivan is referred to many times (p 3, 29, 44, 76, 81, 103, 113, 114, 136, 169, 214). The first time it appears is on page 3:

My friends always told me they wanted to rescue me from Siobhan and I relished being saved because it meant that people stopped tapping me on the shoulder to point out what I was doing wrong.

This is a perfect example of using passive double-voice (Cadden 2000, p 147). The author's voice shadows the voice of the first person character in order to give the reader information that the main character is initially supposedly unable to see. It exposes the dramatic irony and is an opportunity for the reader to travel with the implied author, and observe the focaliser through her eyes.

Nodelman describes this 'shadow' text in *The Hidden Adult*:

Their tendency to imply a more complex shadow text that transcends the presumably childlike view they purport to represent becomes a significant distinguishing characteristic of texts for children - a difference of kind, for even when adult literature hides great depths, it tends to speak much more and more complexly of all it knows, to leave, therefore, proportionately less in the shadow and therefore to be much less likely to hinge on the significance of the difference between the simplicity of what is said and the complexity of what isn't – on questions of childlike and adult knowledge. (2008, p 143)

The group of girls that do the ‘saving’ are the same girls that were telling Francesca (and continue to tell her) that everything she does is wrong. Even from the beginning Francesca seems nostalgic for the types of activities that the St Stella girls prevent her from doing.

...Siobhan and I were the most hysterical of friends because we were the only ones who wanted to gallop around the playground like horses while the rest of the Stella girls sat around in semi-circles being young ladies. (p 3)

‘Hysterical’ is a subtle word choice that serves two purposes – a position held on the relationship that Francesca had with Siobhan at this time (ie one that she required saving from), and from Marchetta herself. This word choice allows Marchetta to indicate that Siobhan was a kindred spirit. ‘We were the only ones...’ as opposed to ‘Siobhan made me...’. It was not hard for Francesca to be Siobhan’s friend. On the other hand Francesca has put in a lot of effort to be acceptable to the other girls, and frequently fails to meet their standards.

Francesca’s attitude to the Stella friends is ambiguous from the outset. Essentially, Francesca seems to be saying, ‘Thank God my friends stopped me from having so much fun.’ The first half of the book is full of these imprecise word choices and sardonic commentary from Francesca that gives the perceptive reader the inside scoop. It is an application of passive double-voice because it tells the reader which interpretation is the correct one.

Francesca understands that those same friends were in fact preventing the type of inhibition, vulnerability and freedom of expression that Siobhan Sullivan exhibits throughout the novel – traits that Francesca learns to value. (p 201-202). She grows to understand that she wasn’t ‘saved’ - she abandoned Siobhan.

The reader gets the strong impression that the author values those traits that Siobhan and indeed the two other girls – Justine and Tara, embody from the beginning. Consistently through the text the commentary establishes acceptable and unacceptable ways to be a woman.

Francesca pines for the way her mother used to be, while at the same time complaining about it. Mia was strong, vibrant, successful, popular, and inspiring. She knows herself. These types of female characters appear to be approved of by the author.

Relatives sometimes call Angelina mini-Mia because they have the same fiery personality, although my mum's her aunt by marriage only. Despite the ten year difference, they get on fantastically. They're brutally honest and don't take shit from anyone. (p 42)

Compared with:

The girls standing closest to us we call the Hair Bear Bunch because of their fascination with their hair – it's all they ever talk about. (p 192)

Worse still, Vera the gym junkie is flirting outrageously with my father and he's laughing with her. She's attractive and uncomplicated and she does the helpless thing well. (p 164)

The word choices are negative regarding female characters who do not fit into the Mia mold. The St Stella girls are another example. They are insincere, selfish and use peer pressure in every instance that we come across them. The duality of the commentary accommodating both Francesca's and Marchetta's view makes it hard for the reader to understand why

Francesca was friends with them. Here is an example laid down for the reader very early in the novel.

They call me Francis, by the way. ‘Just to keep you simple,’ they’d tell me. (p 28)

Marchetta consistently uses these snide comments from Francesca to convey to the reader the truth of the St Stella girls. Like Fensham, Marchetta does not allow the reader to be hoodwinked. We can see that Francesca is deceived as to their true nature. Marchetta shadows her unreliable character’s commentary with the reality.

For example, it is telling that when Francesca first meets William Trombal, the love interest, she begins to introduce herself by her ‘simple’ name, but changes her mind.

William Trombal then asks, ‘Do you want some advice, Francis, Francesca?’ (p 17) He uses both her names, mirroring the way he initially assumes that she is uncomplicated but comes to understand and appreciate her intelligence. This progression in their relationship is foreshadowed from the outset by Marchetta’s word choice.

The tertiary fabula has to do with Francesca’s romantic relationship with William Trombal. Marchetta affixes this relationship to a rescue as well in the text but the connection is much more perfunctory, and appears to be more about ensuring the reader is following the theme.

‘...I swear to God that I’ll be on the first plane back if you ever need saving from anything...’

I shake my head again.

‘You go and shake your foundations, Will. I think it’s about time I saved myself.’ (pp 237, 238)

However, Francesca does not save herself. Her mother is on the road to recovery. She puts up the same motivational signs, inspiring songs and resumes the pep talks that were so startlingly absent for Francesca on page one. What has changed is Francesca’s attitude to being saved. She is at the end more compliant to parental influence than the character the reader first met.

Lessons from Saving Francesca

Saving Francesca follows the journey of a sixteen (and then seventeen) year old high school student as she comes to learn the true nature of her associations with her peers, with her family, and also with the boy in whom she is interested. Francesca intentionally withholds information from us out of politeness – Heyd’s ‘face-saving’ form of unreliability. Marchetta makes us aware of this by acknowledging a ‘you’. Francesca is more profoundly unreliable in her initial perceptions of all of her relationships. She makes assumptions about other characters’ natures and their motivations, many of which prove to be false. Marchetta alerts us to this with two strategies, one is judicious use of frequency, and the other is with dual or ambiguous word choices, conveying both Francesca’s flawed view and Marchetta’s correct one, which allow the reader to comprehend both meanings.

From the title, readers have an expectation that Francesca will be ‘saved’ by the conclusion of the novel. And given that the genre is bildungsroman, our expectation is that Francesca will save herself – that she will develop a sense of self-reliance and independence. This does not transpire. While feminist issues are explored in the text, the plot ultimately follows a more traditional path, painting Francesca’s prospects both at home and at school as small, limited and dependent on the endorsement of men. Her mother Mia, who tries to have a career, a family, as well as a stable marriage learns to accept her reliance on her husband and limit her aspirations (to getting out of bed in the morning).

Marchetta might be deliberately presenting this outcome for the reader to reject. The denouement presents multiple interpretations for the reader to choose from, satisfying Cadden's ethical requirements.

Cassandra Golds – ‘The Museum of Mary Child’

Heloise lives with her austere and detached godmother and their servant, Mrs Moth, in a small village ‘in a time and a place that never was’ (p 13). When her godmother consistently rejects Heloise’s affection, Heloise wishes for, and then finds a doll, a Madonna figurine, who speaks to her. Dolls are forbidden, and much of the early part of the novel depicts Heloise’s secretive playing with the doll she calls Maria.

The godmother runs a museum (of the title), which exhibits the hundreds of disfigured doll-creations of mad Mary Child who used to live there. The godmother explains that Mary Child, now dead, was Heloise’s mother.

Heloise runs away to the city where Old Mother, who cares for a choir of orphan girls, takes her in. Here Heloise has the opportunity to experience love, affection and trust.

After a time Heloise is discovered by the vicar from her old village, who tells her that her godmother is gravely ill. Heloise returns and her godmother reveals that she (the godmother) is Mary Child and that Heloise is a doll that she created. The godmother then transfers her ‘lifeforce’ if you will, to Heloise, and turns into a doll herself, which is then burnt in a fire that destroys the museum.

The Museum of Mary Child draws on the tropes of the classic fairy tale. It contains a prince locked in a dungeon. The prince is instrumental in Heloise’s recognition of her identity. She visits him in the prison and with each visit he tells her more about Mary Child, with whom he

had a friendship. The prince is essential to this story, since he is the only character who knows Mary Child, and therefore the only one who can give Heloise the information she is looking for. Heloise forms a relationship with the prince at the end of the book. The nature of the relationship is not explored, which is appropriate, as Heloise is prepubescent for the majority of the text.

Unreliable Narration and Point of View

Heloise is a naïf. She is more so than Pete in *Helicopter Man*. Pete is merely young. Heloise is literally incompletely formed. She has no history and no experiences at all to draw from. She knows nothing except what her godmother tells her and what comes by instinct. Later she learns by mimicking the other girls.

The novel is written in third person limited to Heloise (mostly). Third person is necessary for Golds to use language and express the complexity of emotions that are beyond Heloise's capacity.

Thou shalt eschew the word 'love' and the phenomenon to which it refers. (p 18)

Heloise has never experienced love in any form, and would not be able to identify the 'phenomenon' in order to 'eschew' it. Indeed, on page 25, she asks 'What does that word mean – "love"?'

The language of the narrator is much more nuanced than Heloise's, but also of most children Heloise's age.

But now she knew that The Museum of Mary Child was dedicated to something bad, something regrettable, something unfortunate, although she did not know what it was. (p 33)

In their various ways, they seemed subdued, chastened, even uneasy... (p 33)

How many preteens would differentiate between ‘bad’, ‘regrettable’ and ‘unfortunate’, or ‘subdued’, ‘chastened’, and ‘uneasy’, with the clarity required to recognise the need to use all three adjectives, rather than settling for just one?

Language like this alerts us to the presence of the implied author – in whom we place our trust, as Heloise’s own interpretation of events is inadequate.

The narrator sometimes identifies herself.

But little, as I said, had changed. (p 32)

The third person narrator not only describes for us the way that Heloise feels, but when she is mistaken, or draws our attention to matters that none of the characters recognise. In this way the narrator guides us, benevolently, through the story. More so than in the texts studied above, Golds is our friend (Booth 1988). Her narration assists the reader to comprehend the story. She recognises that her main character is not providing the complete picture and adds the occasional aside to allow the reader to see things beyond Heloise’s gaze.

Heloise was supervised, it was true. But her guardians were not observant women, or not keenly observant, anyway. (p 46)

Heloise's memory was strange. She had often thought so. There was so much she did not remember. Sometimes it almost seemed that her life had started on the day she had lifted the floorboard and found Maria. (p 181)

In essence, this is the day that separates Heloise from Mary Child. It is the day that Heloise makes different choices from those Mary Child has selected for her, and therefore it is her emotional 'birth'. Heloise has no way of knowing the significance of the choice she has made, and none of the other characters know for certain that she has the doll, Maria. If the author wants us to know this is an extraordinary event – and it is preparation for what is ahead - then the narrator has to tell us herself.

There are places that Golds slips into third person omniscient – where the narrator makes observations about characters that Heloise is not in a position to know. She will occasionally report on events that occur when Heloise is not present.

At the very moment Heloise had fallen asleep, some twenty feet below her a door had shut. (p 94)

Another example is pages 120 and 121 where Old Mother and one of the older choir girls, Esther, discuss Heloise on a visit to the market. They know she is hiding some object and fear that it is stolen. They discuss whether or not it is appropriate to confront Heloise with their suspicions. The respect and concern exhibited by this exchange helps the reader make a comparison between the parenting styles of Old Mother and Godmother.

Golds also comments, not just on what other people say and do, but what they think.

Old mother, although excited by Heloise's powerful voice, had thought it would be an exacting task to teach her to blend. (p 125)

This switch to third person omniscient is necessary, and is a perfect example of a narrative strategy designed to overcome the narrator's naivety. Golds must tell us directly what another character is thinking, because Heloise is unable to read people. A more sophisticated character might be able to make guesses about what another character is thinking based on their body language, what they say, or how they say it (or in Micah's case from *Liar*, discussed below – how they smell). Heloise has demonstrated that she does not have this capacity. Golds must find another way – in this case, showing us another character's thoughts. Of the books examined so far, this is the only one in which point of view has been employed this way.

Metafiction

Like Larbalestier (in the discussion below), Golds draws attention to the artificialness of the construct. She opens the primary fabula with, 'Long ago and far away, in a time and a place that never was...' The manner in which it is told – the fairytale structure – emphasises the construct.

Occasionally her metafictional remarks are tongue-in-cheek. Take this description of Heloise by the choirgirls:

'I'm sure many girls would give their eyeteeth to be considered haunting! Why, you look like a Gothic heroine...'

'All Gothic heroines have black hair and green eyes and waxen complexions,' put in Lizzie helpfully.

'And it is all the rage to be Gothic,' said Polly. (p 131)

And again here:

‘Perhaps you remind him of his long-lost grand-daughter, Heloise, like in a novel.’ (p 145)

Later, Heloise and Sebastian (the prince) ponder their role in the story.

‘You say everything is a prison, Heloise. I believe you. But what if the prison we are trapped in is a story? Our own story?’ (p 202)

‘If what you say is true,’ she said at last. ‘If we are all of us trapped in a story, then we – you and I – *are in the same one.*’ (p 203)

‘You must not distress yourself. This story we are in, sometimes it is a sad story, almost too sad to bear. But it has a happy ending.’ (p 205)

Here Golds promises us, because it is a story, that she will abide by the rules. The reference to the fact that it is a story commits Golds to its conventions, and she delivers.

The story unfolds in the way that is expected – a fairytale structure that younger readers would be familiar with. The main premise on which the plot balances is resolved in a way that is unexpected, but fits within all the clues laced through the body of the text.

An example of these clues, which appear to be mere detail at the time, but end up being significant, are two stories from the Bible that Heloise refers to early in the novel.

And so it came to pass that Moses’ mother, who had given him away to save his life, raised him after all, by pretending to be his nurse. (p 31)

Mary Child, in essence, gives Heloise away – rejects her, in order to save her – and teaches her by pretending to be something other than what she is. Heloise also plays the ‘Making

Adam game' (p 31). She pretends to form a man out of dust and breathes life into it, just as she herself is made from clay by Mary Child (p 305).

Golds references to Heloise's journey being a story, her assurances that she will abide by the conventions of this type of storytelling, and ultimately delivering on that promise help to overcome Heloise's unreliability. The reader can anticipate various story elements, and does not have to rely on Heloise's interpretation of events.

Willing suspension of disbelief - making the implausible plausible

The magic in *The Museum of Mary Child* – talking birds, dolls that speak, make the imaginative leaps that Golds requires of us easier to do. For example, all of the journeys that Heloise makes go straight from A to B (just as the story is mostly chronological. Temporal devices are not significantly harnessed in this text). Heloise does not get lost, or distracted, or meet any person who is not essential to the recounting of the primary fabula.

The tunnel under the church - the same church Heloise is led straight to, without deviation, by the talking birds – goes directly to the prison. (p 194) More unlikely still, it leads directly to the grill outside the prince's cell. (p 196) But she is lead there by talking birds, so that is acceptable.

Golds couples something unlikely with something even more unlikely, and so we reach an equilibrium of unlikeliness, which is acceptable. Instead of a literal road, the road to the city Heloise takes under the guidance of the talking birds becomes a metaphor and a clue.

And it seemed that following this desire was nothing more complicated than walking this road, no matter how hard it was, no matter how long it went on, no matter how many pairs of shoes, or feet, or how many lives she wore out walking it. (p 89)

Mary Child has already had at least three ‘lives’ – the mad Mary Child who made the dolls, the patient Mary Child in the hospital who formed a relationship with the prince, the ‘healed’ Mary Child who comes home to become the godmother. There is another life - Heloise – the part of Mary Child that she has been denying. Travelling the road represents the transition from one life to another.

Magic enables Golds to slip over a few plot problems. How is it that the prince was able to go through a whole public trial without anyone recognising him as royalty? Since the prince was missing, people should have been looking for him. Rather than going to jail, why did he not just tell the magistrate, or later, the jailers, who he was? Could his royal family have overturned that judgement?

Upon learning that the madhouse is nearby, why does Heloise immediately jump to the conclusion that Mary Child is still alive and living there? Her godmother told Heloise that Mary Child was dead. There is no evidence or clue that Mary Child is alive, or within. It is just a ‘feeling’.

Now she knew.

And the moment she saw it she was convinced.

‘Mary Child lives here,’ she thought. *‘How could she not?’* (p 185)

But we can accept these minor plot flaws because there are talking birds, talking dolls and roads that lead directly from one life to another. The reader willingly suspends disbelief (a phrase coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817 in “*Biographia Literaria*”).

The greatest leap that we are required to make is that Heloise herself is a doll. We always suspected that the godmother was Heloise’s actual mother. The clues were laid early.

And yet, as stern as her godmother was, sometimes Heloise caught the young woman looking at her with a strange expression. It was somehow hungry and ... what?

Proud? (p 24)

‘Blood will out!’ (p 71)

Golds takes pains to prepare us for this finish. This description follows a passage about Heloise’s first memories:

Near the end of the backyard there was a natural clay deposit. Normally it was smooth and not to be walked over, lest one slipped. But Heloise remembered a time when there had been a cavity in it, as if a great deal of clay had been scraped out. She did not know when this had happened or why. It seemed too long ago. (p 17)

She was so pale and waxen, so strangely unruffled. It was almost as if – unlike everyone around her – she was not –

Alive. (p 130)

‘... He taught her [Mary Child] to model in clay. ... She learned so quickly and modelled so convincingly. If she made a mouse you would swear its nose twitched.’ (p 257)

Here at the novel's conclusion, Golds reconnects with, and explains the former passages:

It [the doll] was infinitely more clever, infinitely more accomplished, infinitely more precious. It was modelled from clay, and I breathed into it a part of my own soul, as if my soul were a tree, and I had taken a cutting from it, and planted it in new soil. I made it the age I was when things had begun to go wrong. And I kept it from all the influences I believed to be dangerous. (p 305).

The doll motif is so consistently laced through the whole text. By using repetition and linking one unlikely thing with another, Golds makes the implausible possible, and even satisfying.

As one final note on Mary Child as magic creator - it is interesting that the prince is so afraid of Mary Child's capacity to make life, since females make new life all the time, and have that potential for much of their lives. Procreation is the main purpose of most species on the planet. Making new life is so common as to be unremarkable.

Motifs and repetitions

DeLoache defines a symbol as 'any entity that someone intends to stand for something other than itself.' (DeLoache 1995, p 109). She argues that symbols are central to human cognition and communication. Children have to learn how to understand symbols (p 110).

Like Fensham's use of the mice subplot in *Helicopter Man*, the linking of the symbols and their referents in this novel might be a little obtuse for an experienced reader, but Golds helps young readers to identify symbols in texts by applying them broadly, consistently and making the connections very clear. Hopefully this will encourage young readers to look for symbols in other texts.

Like Fensham, this use of symbols or embedded fabulas helps young readers to be successful analytical readers, making both these novels excellent stepping-stones to more demanding texts. Golds and Fensham are not just entertaining, but useful friends.

Two symbols, or motifs are repeated throughout this novel as a means of communicating the themes and ideas being explored. Golds uses both dolls and prisons or cages as metaphors.

Dolls

Dolls are littered throughout the novel. The vicar's children who live next door have dolls. The museum contains dolls. Heloise finds the doll, Maria. The orphan choir sews dolls clothes, and take them to a doll shop, where Mary Child is given another doll. The Madonna at the church is a form of doll – a doll in a cage, no less. Dolls are even used as a simile – ‘they are packed inside it as stuffing is packed into a rag doll.’ (p 5). Golds could scarcely fit more dolls into the text.

Elizabeth Robinson said of dolls, way back in 1946:

Through the medium of dolls the child may express his attitudes toward his world and the people in it, his fears and anxieties, his affection and aggression, his needs and motives. In the relatively "objective" play situation he may reveal and work through the problems, effecting catharsis and insight. (p 99)

Golds uses the dolls in the novel in exactly this way. The dolls are literally a representation of something else. Dolls are shells to project love onto. Dolls are a means to mimic the parent-child relationship, and to experiment with that bond. It is only when Heloise experiences attachment to the doll Maria that she understands that with love comes the fear of loss or

abandonment. It is a complex emotion that generally only arises with parenthood or romantic love, neither of which Heloise is old enough to know. But having gone through that progression of emotions with Heloise and the doll, Maria, it is with relief that we accept the idea of Mary Child testing a theory of love on a clone of herself, rather than what we feared, that she was a parent psychologically abusing her child.

Dolls also represent the child, or the self. Heloise as a doll is ultimately more satisfying than Heloise as a daughter, because, again, like the journeys between the madhouse and home, it represents a transformation of Mary Child from one person into an entirely new person, but still the same person. The character we have been examining all along is Mary Child in two separate parts. The godmother is incomplete because she is damaged. Heloise is raw and unformed. The capacity to love oneself and others, and to live with, and even embrace the fear of loss and abandonment as integral to love is what brings the two parts together and makes Mary Child whole. By inference – it is what makes all of us whole.

The journey of the Maria doll strengthens this analogy that Golds draws about dolls and love. The transfer of Maria represents offering love without expecting it in return – love at one's own expense.

The prince has made the Madonna and child figurine for his mother. When he abandons his mother (in search of the loss and the fear that he has never experienced), she gives the Madonna back to him, and keeps the child part of the figurine. When the prince falls in love with Mary Child, he gives her the Madonna. Mary Child in turn, hides the Madonna in Heloise's room. Heloise finds the doll and names it Maria. When she decides to return to her

godmother, Heloise gives Maria back to the prince, and he returns it, once again to his mother when he re-enters the ‘prison of gold’.

The Madonna and child figurine is complete again, and this symbolises the reuniting of the other relationships. The prince and his mother are reunited. Mary Child and Heloise become one. The prince and Mary Child start afresh. Every character who has possessed the Madonna has learned that to love is to make personal sacrifices.

This is an example of the ideal friendship offered by a book that Booth talks about – it is an opportunity not only to enjoy the journey of the characters therein, but to reflect on our own, and be all the more complete in our own selves for reading it.

Prisons and cages

Golds uses prisons and cages in a similar way to the use of dolls. The Madonna in the church is in a cage. The members of ‘The Society of Caged Birds’ are guides to the hero and heroine at different times in the novel. The museum is a prison for the dolls. It is an emotional prison for the godmother. The prince travels from his ‘prison of gold’ to a normal prison and back again. Mary Child is imprisoned in the madhouse. Heloise is imprisoned in the caretaker’s cottage. Everything is in prison.

‘You are in prison. I am in prison. She is in prison. Her dolls are in prison. Maria was in prison before I found her and got her out. The stone doll is in prison in the church. It is true. It is true. Everything that is important or beautiful is in prison.’ (p 200)

Cages are dual in nature. In her 2010 dissertation, Younsel Eum observes:

The original intention of a cage is to create a boundary to enclose a target. Even though cages are the most popular symbol for boundary, limitation and isolation the most curious aspect of cages is the action of enclosing with a positive intent and for protection. For instance, an elementary school in a city has a fence, in other words a cage – like a boundary, allowing children to play safely inside of it. An incubator is protection for immature infant, but it isolates a baby from its mother. A shark cage is definitely protection for a diver, but the diver is limited to the inside of the cage. Even people utilize cages to protect their property. All of these examples are essentially cages but their use is not intended for a negative purpose. (p 9)

Of note in *The Museum of Mary Child* is the suggestion throughout that imprisonment is self-imposed. ‘The Society of Caged Birds’ can enter and leave their cages at will. The prince left his ‘prison of gold’ only to enter a conventional prison. At the end of the novel, when he understands that to love is to sacrifice, he leaves that prison too. He simply opens the door and goes home.

The godmother is released from her emotional prison – it is indeed, destroyed - when the godmother lets go of her emotional hold on Heloise.

Prison in this novel represents denial. Prison in the book is used to represent the misunderstanding of love as control over another and imposing one’s own desires and expectations onto that object of love instead of the personal sacrifice discussed above.

Dolls and prisons complement each other. They support each other in presenting the themes of love and sacrifice. They help to overcome Heloise’s unreliability by frequently emphasising the arguments that Golds is putting forward.

Lessons from 'The Museum of Mary Child'

This is the first book examined so far that employs point of view as a means of overcoming the limitations of an unreliable (in this case naïve) protagonist. Heloise is unable to read people. It is fundamental to her character. The alternative would be to describe in great detail all of the clues offered by body language, tone, expression and timing, that a more sophisticated character would discern in a glance, allowing the reader to draw on those clues and make assessments, and that process would bog down the text to such an extent that it would become unreadable. To bypass this, the third person narrator takes on that more sophisticated character's role. The narrator tells us things directly that Heloise does not know or understand. The narrator becomes a separate character from the main character, external to the fabula and looking in. It is an application of Chatman's 'slant' to overcome the limitations of the unreliable narrator.

The key to this choice of point of view would seem to be weight. How much weight in terms of actual words is required to provide the information that the reader needs to read the other characters in the text? As observed by Schuhmann (1982), first person is almost the default choice of point of view for writers of young adult fiction, because it allows the reader to identify and engage with the character in a way that the distance of third person does not allow. However, this text would become heavy with all the words required to explain to the reader the things that Heloise is missing. It makes more sense for the narrator to do it directly.

The Museum of Mary Child is metafictional because Golds refers to Heloise's journey being a story. Her assurance to the reader that she will abide by the conventions of this type of

storytelling, and ultimately delivering on that promise helps to overcome Heloise's unreliability because the reader can anticipate various story elements, and does not have to rely on Heloise's interpretation of events. Sticking to the conventions of storytelling is a shortcut to overcoming unreliability.

Golds includes magic. Suspension of disbelief only works when the readership is willing to by-pass a plot element in order to achieve something else, and as long as it is in keeping with the genre. And this is perhaps one of the key differences between *The Museum of Mary Child* and *Liar*. Golds' cluster of unlikely magic things, talking birds, imprisoned princes, magic dolls are all in keeping with the style of telling. In comparison, Larbalestier latches together the parts of teen romance, a detective story, and the supernatural to suit her needs and disregards the rest, and in doing so, satisfies the conventions of none of them. Magic should not be used primarily as a means of dodging plot flaws, but as a vehicle for focussing the reader's attention on the broader, and more substantial themes.

Golds uses two symbols extensively. Dolls and cages are metaphors that a child reader will identify with, and Golds uses them to explore ideas and themes that are much more complicated – love and sacrifice, the fear of abandonment, control and denial. Transformations are at the heart of this story. The symbols also help the reader understand the idea of new knowledge and wisdom being a path to a whole new life.

Ursula Dubosarsky – ‘The Red Shoe’

The Red Shoe follows a family living in Palm Beach, Sydney during the Petrov Affair in 1954. They live next door to the safe house that is used during Vladimir Petrov’s defection from the Soviet Union.

Told in third person, the main focaliser is the youngest sister, Matilda, but the novel is occasionally focalised through the elder sisters, Elizabeth and Frances.

The father of the family is a war veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress. This is complicated by an affair that his wife (the girls’ mother) is having with his brother (their uncle) Paul, who stays in the house while the father is away at sea.

The father attempts suicide at a time before this story begins (Boxing Day 1953), but this does not transpire in story time until after the affair becomes obvious to the oldest daughter, Elizabeth (and in turn to the readers) which is over Easter in 1954.

The Red Shoe is beautifully written, subtle in technique and has been duly recognised by the various awarding bodies.

An example is the Petrov Affair. There is not enough information within the novel itself for the child reader (who presumably was not alive in the 1950s) to understand what actually occurred, or gain a sense of the political upheaval that followed. There is not enough detail offered about the relationship between Mr and Mrs Petrov for the child reader to draw parallels with Matilda’s parents, or reflect on the obligations of marriage at the time. It is only

when considered in combination with all of the other clues in the text that these comparisons can be made, requiring diverse comprehension skills. This is beyond most of the ‘juvenile’ readers to whom the novel is pitched.

Similarly, the father’s motives for suicide are not fully explored, especially as it is revealed that the affair his wife is having is consummated four months after the suicide attempt. His daughter, Elizabeth, goes some way towards helping us understand:

Down in the dark hallway he had crawled on his hands and knees, banging the floor with his fist, that night he came home at last when the war had ended. Elizabeth had seen him then too, banging the floor and weeping like a child, and she had stared in the darkness. (p 164)

But essentially, the reader is left, as Matilda is, with a sense of puzzlement and foreboding.

The bulk of the details – events, both on a global and personal scale are inferred rather than explicit. Much of what is occurring is beyond the intellectual and emotional radar of the three girls, and thus of the reader. While being outstanding in many other ways, this novel is not an entirely successful example of overcoming unreliability. Dubosarsky’s range of narrative strategies are only partially effective at addressing the limitations of the young protagonist.

However, *The Red Shoe* is not a ‘whodunnit’. The plot is not driven by the reader’s desire to solve a mystery. The primary event, the suicide attempt by the father, is covered at length. It is more peripheral matters that may be missed due to unreliability.

One possibility is that Dubosarsky intended to provide only a sketch of these peripheral events, reflecting a six-year-old’s disinterest in social and international politics, although she

also had the opportunity to use the older sister Elizabeth to decode all of this information on the reader's behalf. She has chosen not to do that.

Narrative Strategies Applied

Temporal techniques similar to those used by Marchetta and Fensham in the novels studied previously are evident in Dubosarky's revelation of the affair and the suicide attempt – in particular, repetition is employed to dissect a pivotal event.

The Red Shoe contains forms of embedded text. The middle sister reads Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale *The Red Shoes* to the youngest sister at the beginning of the novel. The girl in the tale, Karen, is denounced by her society and punished eternally for dancing in red shoes. Matilda's mother mirrors the Karen character. Dubosarsky makes the connection for the reader by adjoining sentences.

Why shouldn't little Karen have her beautiful red shoes?

Their mother had some red shoes with golden buckles and shiny black heels. (p 11)

Matilda's mother possesses the red shoes. It is her sensuality, her desire and her desirability that is at the centre of the family's silent implosion. Like Golds' use of dolls and cages, the symbol of the red shoes recurs and draws attention to the mother's sexuality, since the three girls are unlikely to see her in that light.

Dubosarsky has also included actual newspaper articles from the days in which the novel is set. The articles provide a series of indisputable facts to complement the girls' more emotional responses to these events. Their style and format also help to provide context,

particularly for younger readers who would have had limited experience with the concept of changing societal conventions.

This is the first novel included in the study that has multiple focalisers. While it is primarily told from the point of view of Matilda, we also receive extracts from Frances and Elizabeth. Much of Elizabeth's testimony supports the information we receive from Matilda. Frances though, explores other aspects of the text – specifically, her discovery that her school friend has died.

Dubosarsky uses another method not explored in the other novels studied above in order to overcome these young characters' unreliability. She has introduced a character, Floreal, Matilda's imaginary 'friend', who frequently interjects to state what the reader suspects. Initially he articulates Matilda's true motives and doubts, but later he comments about the adult relationships, criticising her father and drawing attention to the affair between Matilda's mother and her Uncle Paul. Floreal is neither an actor within the story, nor an extradiegetic narrator. He is ostensibly a form of Matilda's consciousness, but he performs a very useful function in overcoming her unreliability and offering the reader information which the reader would not otherwise have access to.

Ways Matilda is unreliable

Matilda, like Pete from *Helicopter Man* and Heloise from *The Museum of Mary Child*, is a naïf. She is six years old and is 'sneaky', we are told by the third person narrator (p 16). Matilda tells blatant untruths, but as there is no narratee in this text, there is nobody that she

needs to save-face for. Matilda falls under Heyd's third category of unreliable narration. Her unreliability primarily arises because, as a six-year-old, fantasy and reality converge.

Down at the bend in their street there was a block of bush, so thick with tall gum trees and a great grey rock broken in pieces scattered about at the front. There were cowboys and Red Indians hiding in there, with guns and bows and arrows and they would shoot her if they could. (p 28)

[About the men next door] Could they be spies? Who were they spying on? Maybe I could be a spy, thought Matilda suddenly. I could watch them, without them knowing I'm here. (p 100)

The men next door are, in fact, secret service agents guarding Vladimir Petrov, the spy who has defected, but it does not really matter, because Matilda is six and she would carry out the same activities either way. She acts as though there actually are cowboys and Indians in the vacant block, hiding behind her sister when they pass so that Frances will be shot first (pp 49-50). She acts as though the men next door are spies, and she watches them through pretend binoculars (p 100).

Dubosarsky has created a very convincing six-year-old, genuinely entertaining the idea of cowboys and Indians waiting in the vacant block, just to shoot her, spies in the house next door, and flat, imaginary people living inside the radio.

Unlike Micah, the protagonist in *Liar*, Matilda's contradictory and obvious untruths are not designed to confound a reader, or obscure the reality, but are an endearing aspect of her character. Part of the tragedy and power of *The Red Shoe* is how this carefree artlessness in

Matilda is obstructed and weighed down by the actions of the adults in her life, as represented by the cynical and guarded Floreal.

Frances and Elizabeth are less youthful, Frances is ten and Elizabeth is fifteen, but their contributions are limited and incomplete. In addition, they are both suffering from grief and depression, and that makes them unreliable as well.

Temporal techniques

The critical plot event in *The Red Shoe* is the father's suicide attempt, witnessed by Matilda. Dubosarsky uses repetition in her telling of it.

The picnic at the Basin on Boxing Day is referred to on pages 31, 56, 71, 92, 93, 94, 122. Matilda tells the day's events leading up to, but not including the suicide attempt on pages 130 to 135. Then from pages 141 to 147, Matilda recalls the events surrounding the suicide attempt and the aftermath, but omits the suicide attempt itself. Elizabeth gives her version on pages 162 to 164, with the suicide attempt, and her knowledge that her father had planned it, but without being aware Uncle Paul did not try to save his brother. Matilda sees that her uncle does not intervene in the suicide attempt. This fact is not relayed until page 169, when she recalls it, and also tells her mother what she has seen.

The use of repetition tells the reader that whatever happened at the Basin is the significant event in the novel, and also one that plays in the minds of the three girls constantly.

Repetition appears to be a useful tool for overcoming unreliability in young adult protagonists, particularly for dissecting a major event. It has been used in all the novels studied.

Embedded Text – The Fairytale and Symbols

The choice of Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale is interesting from a feminist perspective, since the story condemns female sensuality and desire.

Andersen has created a myth that describes female sexuality as dangerous not only to the community but also for the woman as well. Karen's initiation into sexuality is presented as a drive to 'exhaust' any and all partners. By definition she is a 'horror'. Therefore we might call this fairytale a myth of the 'gendering' of the female form a patriarchal point of view. (Young 1994, p 115)

In *Women who Run with the Wolves*, a feminist examination of folktales, Clarissa Pinkola Estes says that red shoes are an ancient symbol representing, and celebrating the onset of menstruation and sexual power (p 235).

Matilda's mother owns red shoes, a symbol of her desire, sexuality, and her female potency. We know that Dubosarsky considers the shoes an important symbol, because she called the novel 'The Red Shoe', and opens it with the Hans Christian Andersen story. Matilda's mother is wearing the shoes on the day her husband attempts suicide. On the day that they go to the cinema, Floreal says, 'She wishes she could wear her red shoes', (p 105). This indicates to the reader the mother's intentions to commit adultery on that day.

Matilda wears the shoes when she witnesses the suicide attempt.

Pinkola Estes says of this fairy tale:

Socially, shoes send a signal, a way of recognizing one type of person from another...

Shoes can tell us something about what we are like, sometimes even who we are aspiring to be, the persona we are trying out. (p 222)

Matilda is literally walking in her mother's shoes when she witnesses this event.

Matilda stood up in her mother's shoes. How tall she was! She took a tottering step forward. She had to be careful to keep her balance so she held out her arms, like a tightrope walker. (p 133)

The abandonment of Matilda by her father and betrayal by her uncle is also, more significantly in terms of the family dynamic, an abandonment of the wife, and a betrayal of the sister-in-law. Matilda's mother does walk a tightrope – as a mother, a wife, maintaining her own identity and between the love of two men. The consequence of her losing that balance is grave for everyone.

It is Matilda's mother's infidelity that is the family's undoing – it contributes to her husband's ongoing mental illness, Elizabeth's breakdown, Frances' withdrawal and even Matilda's invention of Floreal to cope with the trauma she has experienced. Uncle Paul does not commit fratricide exactly, but he does not go to his brother's aid because he covets his brother's wife.

Mrs Petrov also wears red shoes when she is dragged away by the KGB (p 148). The shoes in this case represent that Mrs Petrov is a sinner. She is a spy. Her husband has defected without her. He has abandoned her. What is to become of this woman?

'In Russia some people have been shot by a firing squad for high treason,' said Elizabeth. 'It says they betrayed the Motherland.' (p 75)

The price for women who sin is high. These women living in 1954 are dependent on the mercy of men in a way that the young readers today are probably not able to imagine. The difference in generations is indicated at the end of the book, when Matilda is contemplating what would happen to the three girls should they become orphans.

‘I would look after you,’ said Elizabeth.

I *love* Elizabeth, thought Matilda with a rush. I *love* her.

‘Would you?’ said Frances. She turned and looked at Elizabeth seriously. Would she?

‘Well, I’d have to, wouldn’t I?’ said Elizabeth. (p 176)

Caring for the children is an obligation that is obvious to Elizabeth, and yet the difference between Elizabeth and her mother is that Elizabeth is confident that she can do that alone.

The embedded fairytale, with its gruesome moral, helps to convey the magnitude of the consequences for women who sin in this social context, and the injustice of it, compared to the relative independence women enjoy today.

Embedded text - The Petrov Affair and Newspaper Articles

The Petrov Affair, the defection of Vladimir Petrov and later his wife, their period staying in a safe house in Palm Beach (next door to Matilda and her family), and the political ramifications of the defection, is a secondary fabula. The defection itself will not be covered in as much detail in this analysis as it would if the novel were being examined more broadly in scope.

However, it is a useful means of demonstrating Matilda's, and indeed Elizabeth's insularity. Elizabeth reads the newspaper from front to back every day.

She had always liked reading the newspaper, but since her nervous breakdown she had begun to read every single word, really every word. All the conflicts, crimes, unknown names, excitements and miseries, all those numbers and letters and reports of rain and snow. (p 37)

Elizabeth reads the entire paper every day – the Petrov Affair is extensively covered, as Dubosarsky shows us in the actual reports on pages 82, 83, 88, 95, 102, 136, 148, 149, 179, 180, and 181, and yet Elizabeth does not make the connection with the Russian man who has moved in next door, who is being guarded by men in black suits and driving black cars, and this matter of national significance. Matilda, on the other hand, (through Floreal) decides he is a spy the first time she sees him (p 47).

Elizabeth and Matilda's differing instincts about the people next door tell us much about their character.

Other Embedded Text.

Dubosarsky includes the lyrics from two songs of the time – *A Nightingale Sang in Berkley Square*, a love song, and the theme song from the movie *High Noon*, the story of two old foes (men) facing-off. Both of which reflect the mood of the scene they are in, and in particular, the disposition of the singer, Uncle Paul. Again, while adult readers may know the lyrics, most child readers would not be familiar with either song, and would have to take their cues from what appears in the text.

As a method of overcoming unreliability, the song lyrics add flavour, and for the readers who recognise the references, it adds context and thus contributes to the mix of strategies applied.

Multiple focalisation

Employing multiple focalisation could restrict the number of events that can be covered within the word limit for the average YA novel. This is the case with *The Red Shoe*, which essentially scrutinises one event and three different characters' reaction to it. A sample of one is certainly not enough to draw conclusions about the entire genre, but it is worth noting.

Each of the three girls performs different functions in terms of overcoming unreliability.

Matilda is unreliable, as was established in the earlier discussion, but it is her journey that we are following, in the wake of this trauma she has experienced.

Elizabeth does a good job confirming information that Matilda offers us, for example, Elizabeth also sees the men in dark suits and black cars driving to the house next door (p 41). It is not Matilda's imagination. Yet neither Elizabeth nor Frances acknowledge the cowboys and Indians, or the embodiment of Floreal the Argonaut – outside of the radio program from which he is derived, which helps the reader understand which parts of Matilda's story are real and what is fantasy.

Elizabeth makes observations about the nature of the relationship her mother has with Uncle Paul.

She threw herself in his arms, thought Elizabeth, watching them. (p 90)

Elizabeth confirms Matilda's version of the suicide attempt. We know the event at the Basin (which is not elaborated on until the later part of the book) was not just a crucial experience of Matilda's, but for all of the family. It plays on Elizabeth's mind too, and affects their mother.

‘Remember when we went to the Basin?’ said Elizabeth abruptly. ‘And you showed us that game with the matches?’

Their mother's shoulders stiffened. (p 122)

Elizabeth also tells us things about the mother that would escape Matilda. Unlike Matilda, Elizabeth has an interest in what her mother did before she was married (p 38). Elizabeth makes direct comparisons between what her mother has done and what she will do. Elizabeth intends to get a job (p 39).

Elizabeth has her own character arc. Believing she could have prevented the suicide attempt, Elizabeth carries her own guilt about the day at the Basin (p 163). She considers suicide herself. (p 165)

Frances has a smaller character arc. She is very withdrawn from the family. We do not read her account of what happened at the Basin – simply that it occurred (p 157) and that she did not like being part of this family since ‘round the time Elizabeth had her nervous breakdown’ (p 150). She does not have the same role that Elizabeth has of confirming and supporting some of Matilda's stories.

The best view of Frances the reader experiences is her school life. This is especially useful since Elizabeth does not attend and Matilda has only just begun school. Frances tells us the story of a boy in her class, Mark, who has polio. She observes that the teachers did not disturb him when he fell asleep in class (p 53). Frances goes to his house and is told that Mark has

died (p 156). This revelation occurs between Matilda's description of the day at the Basin and Elizabeth contemplating suicide. The emotional tension for all three girls has been wound very tightly over this section of the novel.

Frances does not offer the same kind of counterbalance that Elizabeth does to Matilda's version of events. She does show us a different way of responding to trauma than either Matilda's growing cynicism or Elizabeth's watchful apathy. Frances also shows us some of the other stresses in the lives of these girls – where a friend (or indeed a father) can be present one day, and dead the next. While this is still true today, the types of support available to children who are suffering from grief is much more broad than it is for these three children. Matilda, Frances and Elizabeth only have each other.

All three of the focalisers in *The Red Shoe* are unreliable because they are children and they are under a great deal of stress. The advantage of multiple focalisation here though, is that each one can confirm both events and moods offered by the other focalisers. So much in this novel is inferred rather than explicit. Whilst their responses are different, the emotional tone (trauma, stress, grief) of the three girls is consistent.

Floreal – an adult consciousness

Matilda's small, flat, imaginary friend from the radio is ever present. He appears on pages 17, 18, 19, 21, 31, 32, 33, 34, 46, 47, 61, 85, 91, 100, 104, 105, 115, 126, 140, and 167. The first reference is just fourteen paragraphs into the body of the novel. He opens with an observation of Matilda's short-comings.

‘You're not brave enough to be a spy,’ her friend Floreal told her. (p 17)

A few sentences later the narrator tells us:

Floreal is blunt and truthful, and remembered all sorts of things that other people forget. (p 17)

Floreal embodies Matilda's doubt, cynicism, and reservation. He first appeared to Matilda the day after Boxing Day – the day after Matilda witnesses her father attempt suicide and his brother (Matilda's uncle) not making any attempt to save him, although the reader does not have the opportunity to connect these facts until the end of the novel.

His language is brief, staccato and generally monosyllabic. Throughout the novel he offsets all of Matilda's aspirations. Take for example, this exchange on page 61. Matilda is determined to win the most unusual pet prize at the parade at her school:

'What are you doing?' said Floreal.

Matilda started and the pencil broke – she had pressed too hard.

'Ay!' said Matilda. 'Now look what you've made me do!'

'What is it?' asked Floreal.

'It's for the Pet Parade.' Matilda held it up for him to see. 'It's a snail hotel.'

'A what?'

'A snail hotel,' repeated Matilda impatiently. She pointed to where she had begun to write the word on the cardboard. 'See?'

Matilda was only just learning to write, and she couldn't do much yet, just some of the capitals. But she could do an H and an O and a T.

'The E is back to front,' commented Floreal.

‘No it’s not,’ retorted Matilda. When she frowned, her whole face seemed to cave in and her eyes became even darker. ‘You’re just jealous.’

‘Snails don’t have hotels, anyway,’ said Floreal.

Here Floreal introduces an element of doubt and apathy to the previously joyful and energetic hotel-building endeavour. He does not even need to belittle her efforts to make the joy of her victory in the pet parade short-lived. Matilda is different now that she has experienced the abandonment of her father and the betrayal by her uncle. Floreal represents that change.

Floreal’s role in the novel becomes more meaningful as we come to understand the relationship that Matilda’s mother is having with Matilda’s uncle.

‘He shouldn’t be here,’ said Floreal. ‘He shouldn’t be here when your father’s away.’

(p 100)

Floreal makes this observation on Good Friday, before the trip into town on Easter Saturday when the two adults leave the children at the movie theatre and, we assume, the relationship is consummated.

They are an hour late to collect the children from the theatre, Uncle Paul ‘smells like a man’ (p 119). Her mother has been crying. Uncle Paul walks with his arm around mother’s waist. Matilda is six years old. She is not in a position to draw conclusions about the nature of their relationship. We rely on the evidence she is able to discern, the remarks of the older sisters, who are less observant, but more knowing, (‘She threw herself in his arms,’ Elizabeth notes on page 90) and Floreal’s shrewdness.

Floreal always tells the truth. Take for example his comment about the men next door – ‘They’re spies,’ Floreal says on page 47. At this stage of the novel, the reader may not

distinguish between the claims of Matilda, such as her assertion that there are cowboys and Indians in the vacant block up the street, and Floreal's accurate observations. Floreal's claim is proved on page 111, when Matilda sees Petrov on the newsreel at the cinema. The inference from then on is that Floreal's testimony is reliable.

Floreal is not the implied author – he is a character within his own right. He exists within the fabula, whereas the omniscient narrator does not. At the same time he is not an active participant in events. He does not exist. He is not able to influence events, yet he provides us with a candid, if incomplete alternative version of events.

Floreal allows Dubosarsky to apply both slant and filter to different incarnations of the same character. The incompleteness of Floreal's commentary is a necessary element. Floreal's role is a supporting one, providing hints that cannot be given in another manner that allows the reader to piece together plot, and no more.

Matilda discards him at the end of the novel.

Floreal had been so silent since she'd screamed at him to go back in the radio that she hoped, although she could not quite believe it, that he really had gone away. Maybe he's gone to a radio in another person's house, she decided. He can be friends with someone else now, with someone who actually likes him. (p 175)

Matilda has revealed what she saw. Uncle Paul has run away, Elizabeth has decided not to have her breakdown anymore, and her father is returned. Matilda does not need Floreal any more.

Lessons from 'The Red Shoe'

The Red Shoe leaves many of its themes and fabulas unexplained. If we go back to the example offered at the beginning of this study, Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006) depends on the reader having some knowledge of what occurred in Nazi concentration camps. *The Red Shoe* is similar in that it makes a whole series of allusions, to the Petrov Affair, to World War II, to polio, to music and movies, and social conventions of the time, particularly regarding the role of women and marriage, many of which will probably escape a child reader.

This is not to say that all intertextual references should be spelled out so that all readers of every age and ability level can understand them, just an observation that the more subtle and obscure the references, the fewer readers are likely to follow them. The novel will then need more of something else – a compelling plot, stylish prose, endearing characters - to keep readers turning pages. What Dubosarsky loses in overcoming the limitations of unreliable narration, she gains in character development and tone.

This then, would seem to be a conclusion worthy of further discussion in the next section. In cases where the narrative strategies are less successful at overcoming unreliable narration, or where a character's unreliability and naivety is an element of plot and therefore not one that the author is addressing, the novel will require other qualities to keep readers engaged.

Dubosarsky uses repetition to recount the suicide attempt by the father. Marchetta uses repetition in her recounting of the miscarriage in *Saving Francesca*, and also gives different versions of it to several characters, indicating that it has impacted on the lives of many. Fensham uses repetition in telling of the abduction (or not) of Pete's mother. Repetition,

particularly by a number of characters, seems to be a useful method of telling a significant event and giving it weight in the plot. It increases suspense and allows the one event and its aftermath to be examined from a range of different angles. Repetition helps to overcome unreliability because it gives the reader multiple opportunities to reflect upon an event. The amount of space that the author gives to the event (as in the number of words dedicated to its telling) indicates to the reader its significance, and in cases where an event is told from a range of perspectives, the implications of the event can be more fully comprehended by the reader.

Dubosarsky uses a number of different forms of embedded text. The book opens with an excerpt from the Hans Christian Andersen's *The Red Shoes* – a fable warning against female desire. It is an example of an embedded fabula resembling the primary fabula. Both Matilda's mother and Mrs Petrov have red shoes. They are both sinners, reliant on the mercy of men. The fairytale as embedded text serves two purposes then – to serve as a symbol for sin, and in particular, women, sexuality and sin, and also for the story to suggest to the reader the gravity of the situation for these women at this time. The author here is more reliant on the embedded text to convey meaning, than in the books studied previously, since the themes that this embedded text refers to (Matilda's mother's sexual potency) are far beyond Matilda's understanding, and the young audience is unlikely to appreciate the social context.

There is also a range of newspaper articles from the days in which the novel is set, covering varied events, but significantly, the Petrov Affair – the defection of a Russian spy. She includes two song lyrics, *A Nightingale Sang in Berkley Square* and the theme song from *High Noon*, both of which add flavour and context to readers who are familiar with the originals.

So far the discussion in this study has been around the choice between an implied author who colludes with the character at the reader's expense, and one who sides with the reader, or neither, which leaves the author dependent on other means for overcoming unreliability. Dubosarsky has come up with another choice. Floreal is neither a heterodiegetic narrator, nor an actor within the fabula. He always tells the truth, and allows Dubosarsky to apply both an external slant and internal filter to the same character.

Dubosarsky is required to employ a broader range of narrative strategies than the previous writers discussed, because the themes being explored are so far beyond the understanding of the primary protagonist, and many of them will probably be lost on a young readership as well.

However, by choosing Matilda as the main focaliser, the tragedy of innocence lost is much more powerfully expressed than it would have been had Dubosarsky chosen one of the older sisters. In this case, Matilda's unreliability – her inability to differentiate between reality and fantasy, is a key ingredient, not only in her character, but also for the whole premise of the novel. The reader may not have all the answers at the end of the novel, but at the same time, the reader is not cheated by Matilda's unreliability, because it is not the point.

Justine Larbalestier - 'Liar'

Liar is the story of sixteen-year-old Micah, a high school student living in New York. The boy with whom she says she was having a clandestine relationship has been found dead and Micah is a suspect. *Liar* is a murder mystery.

We learn that the boyfriend, Zach, appears to have been attacked by dogs. Micah claims to be a werewolf and accuses another werewolf, the 'white boy', Peter, with the murder. Both are sent (by Micah's parents) to live on a farm upstate belonging to Micah's ancestors, whom she asserts are also werewolves.

Micah returns to the city where she attacks the school teacher and the teacher's family with whom she has sought refuge. The final pages make up an epilogue of sorts where Micah has her own apartment, begins at a new school on a lucrative scholarship, makes friends and maintains healthy relationships with many of the characters from within the body of the novel – including the teacher whom she physically assaulted.

Throughout the novel Micah confesses to being a liar. She refers to it constantly and the plot loops and spirals on itself as we are shown similar events, or the same events but with contradictory information.

Liar is an interesting counterpoint to the other novels included for study. The novel is an example of active single-voice. Larbalestier allows for a number of alternative interpretations, but all emanating from the same character. There is no other perspective to orient the reader.

Larbalestier does not at any point attempt to overcome the limitations of her unreliable narrator. Quite the opposite. Many of the techniques that appear in the other novels examined as devices for enlightening the reader are here designed to confound. The active single-voice structure tells us that Micah is unreliable.

The effect of this most extreme form of unreliability is to draw attention to the artifice of the novel itself. In a traditional narrative structure readers have an expectation that the mysteries within will be resolved, that at the conclusion we will find out the ‘truth’ – a version of events that is credible within the bounds set by the genre, and given the clues within the text, that we will find satisfying - Heyd’s tellability principle (p 224). In this case, a murder mystery, we expect to find out ‘whodunnit’.

As readers we have a certain expectation of works in this genre – that there is an answer – a truth. It is an illusion. In fiction a writer constructs one ending, out of a plethora of possibilities.

In this genre a writer usually endeavours to satisfy the reader’s desire for order. With varying degrees of success, a writer generally also aims to have the novel provide some sort of broader meaning that the reader can take away from the journey. *Liar* subverts this convention.

Ways in which Micah is unreliable

Micah fits into all three of Heyd's (2006) forms of unreliability. Like Marchetta and Fensham in the novels examined above, Larbalestier assigns a narratee. In *Liar* it is the seventh line of the novel. 'I will tell you my story and I will tell it straight' (p 3). There is a 'you' – a readership that she understands will judge her actions. Like *Saving Francesca*, the narratee is us rather than a character in the story.

Micah's entire narration is directed to the reader and mediated by the knowledge of their presence. Micah often conceals information or plainly lies in order to save face (Heyd 2006). For example, she initially claims not to have had sex with Zach. She wants us to think she is chaste.

We didn't.

It was kissing and holding and hugging. *Lots* of kissing. But we never took our clothes off. Never got past that very first base. He didn't touch mine; my fingers got nowhere near his.

See?

I am a good girl after all.

I didn't kill him either. (p 116)

Micah is also candid about her unreliability – 'My father is a liar and so am I' (p 3). She deliberately aims to deceive the reader (Heyd's 'quiet deception' 2006). When she finally confesses to having a sexual relationship with Zach. The language she uses is extreme and designed to shock.

‘Me and Zach slept together. Made love. Had sex. Fucked.’ (p 242)

Finally, Micah is mentally unstable which makes the validity of her narration questionable. The very least of her instability demonstrated by admitting to her compulsively dishonest behaviour, and exhibited most by her professing to be a supernatural being.

Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Fabulas

The primary fabula in *Liar* is the murder mystery. Who killed Zach? It provides the ‘now’ and is told in present tense. All of the chapters concerning the primary fabula are headed ‘After’. This fabula follows Micah from just before she is told that Zach is missing, to the discovery of his body and the police investigation.

The secondary fabula follows Micah’s relationship with Zach prior to his death, in chapters entitled ‘Before’.

The third fabula involves Micah’s slow reveal about her family history and the family illness, ie, being werewolves. These are in chapters entitled ‘Family History’, or ‘History of Me’.

In addition there are ten chapters entitled ‘Lie Number One’, ‘Lie Number Two’, etc. The first of these confessions appears on page 196 – well into the novel. These are revisions of information from all three of the fabulas.

As readers we hope and expect that the secondary and tertiary fabulas will provide us with the clues we need to decipher the first (and guess ‘whodunit’ before the author tells us). They do, but they provide us with a number of alternative scenarios, each as strongly weighted as the other. An example is the question of Micah’s sexual relationship with Zach discussed earlier.

By tacking the denial of the murder to the claims of chastity, the blunt confession to the sexual relationship gives us cause to question her guilt on the murder. This is a pattern throughout the novel.

There is no denouement. There is no hint from the author as to which theory is the correct one. According to Cadden, this providing of a number of alternatives should assist the reader – ‘equip them to identify the irony’ (Cadden 2000, p 148). Allowing us to appreciate irony in this case does not equate with the author being fair. If we should look instead at Booth’s sense of ethics, we judge a book by the types of friendship or companionship a book provides as it is read. (Booth 1988) *Liar* is no friend to the reader. The author has abandoned us, and colluded with the protagonist in her unreliability.

Absence of the implied author

As readers we have an expectation in this novel that we will find out who killed Micah’s boyfriend, Zach. The murder mystery is the primary fabula and the element of plot that sustains the suspense. We are given a plausible alternative to Micah being the killer – plausible within the boundaries established by the story. It was the ‘white boy’ Peter, the other werewolf. Micah tells us that Peter confessed to it, but we only have Micah’s word that he confessed. Perhaps Micah is actually a werewolf, committed the murder, lied about it and got away with it? Maybe Micah is not a werewolf, and killed Zach, and got away with it? Maybe Zach was, in fact, attacked by dogs, and both Peter and Micah are innocent? There are also glimpses of another possibility. Micah is in some type of prison or insane asylum.

Bars surround me. Prison guards bind my arms, bring me pills several times a day. They ask me – beg me – to tell them the truth. (p 206)

You don't think I wrote this from a cozy little apartment – you think it was composed from a cold, padded cell. (p 330)

The difficulty is that we only ever receive information from Micah and she is deceptive in every way. The reader does not hear from any other characters. There is no implied author subtly or obtusely pointing us to the 'truth'. The author instead points constantly to the artificialness of the whole construct. In this way it is metafictional (metafiction will be discussed further below).

There is no Micah. There are no werewolves. There is no Zach. It is just a made up story, and therefore revealing who is the 'real' killer is meaningless. There is no real murder to solve.

The narration (focaliser) in the novel is unreliable, but so too is the author. The whole structure – the plot, the characters, the very rules and conventions of storytelling that we as readers expect the writer to adhere to, and that we want to participate in during the process of reading fiction, is made up. The structure of *Liar* highlights the pretence, rather than the journey.

Author colluding in the unreliability

At times the implied author is not just absent, but actively colludes in the protagonist's unreliability. An example concerns Micah's brother, Jordan. He first appears on page 37, even though we have read several scenes of the family without Jordan being mentioned.

Me, Mom, Dad, Jordan.

My brother. My younger brother. My ten-year-old brother, Jordan. (p 37).

She mentions him again in passing on page 57. Further along there is a passage dedicated to him.

Jordan and me?

We hate each other. He thinks I should be locked in a cage; I think he should never have been born.

You think I exaggerate? That siblings often say they hate each other, but don't mean it?

You're wrong. We hate each other. (p 71)

On the next page (72) Larbalestier depicts a family meal with the four family members interacting. The parents actually address Jordan. This is important to note, because later Micah claims that Jordan does not exist. The author actively colludes in the deception of his existence by having other characters interact with him. Not only is Micah's narration unreliable, but also the embedded text in the form of dialogue from other characters is unreliable. This suggests that none of the dialogue from any of the characters can be relied upon. Peter's confession to the murder is not reliable.

Larbalestier could have orchestrated this meal scene so that only Micah acknowledges Jordan, and in such a manner that the parents do not find her dialogue anomalous. Presenting the scene that way would mean that only Micah fabricates this character and not the author, or the 'norm of the work'. This is a very common device for presenting a twist in a story, (for

example, in the 1999 movie *The Sixth Sense*, written by M. Night Shyamalan, the boy who ‘sees dead people’ is the only character who address the narrator) but Larbalestier chooses instead to conspire with Micah against the reader.

On page 89 Micah confesses to fratricidal thoughts, but believes she would get caught. ‘I had to hope for an accident.’ (p 90).

On pages 124 and 125 Micah describes Jordan’s birth.

Then on page 225 Micah confesses to making Jordan up.

I don’t have a brother. I made Jordan up.

What did you think? That after having me, the wolf girl, my parents would risk a second child? A second freak? Two cages in the already overcrowded apartment? Even if the kid wasn’t wolfish how would you keep it from blabbing about its monster for a sister?

Not likely, is it?

Good-bye, Jordan. Imaginary or not, he sucked. (p 225)

Even in the last line, ‘imaginary *or not*’ (my italics) Larbalestier hedges her bets. She has no fidelity to the reader, but she is not faithful to Micah’s version either.

On page 284 Micah tells us that Jordan was real and that he died. ‘He was ten. It was an accident’.

Larbalestier uses the same information in the different passages – identifying Jordan’s age, and discussing death by accident.

Marchetta's ambiguous word choices in *Saving Francesca*, discussed previously, have the effect of giving readers extra information that makes it easier to understand the situation the main character is in. Here the ambiguity has the reverse effect – it gives equal weight to opposing positions. The same technique can be applied with contradicting results depending on the intentions of the writer.

Another example of the author colluding in the unreliability is the way Larbalestier points to the artificialness of the process of transforming from a human into a werewolf.

How does hair come and go, bones shift and grow and shrink? How can I be a wolf *and* a human?

When I change back, am I the same human I was? Is it the same skin, the same cells? Or am I recreated each time? A new wolf, a new human. If so, why do my memories not change? Or do they and I just don't know it? (p 178)

It's called HGT. I know there's no documented case of HGT happening between big organisms. Humans and wolves are big. Each with at least twenty-three thousand different genes, way bigger than bacteria and viruses, who can have as few as eight ... Though I'm not talking the one gene, I'm talking many. There'd be the gene (or genes) that makes the change possible. A gene no one's ever heard of, let alone mapped. Then there's all the wolf genes that express when I'm wolf and human genes for when I'm human. (p 173)

Once we are told that Micah is a werewolf we, as readers, fulfil our end of the bargain and make the imaginative leap. We are prepared to suspend our disbelief, because it is part of reading fiction. We want to imagine, otherwise we would not have picked up the book. By

referring at length to this process of transformation the author actually makes it more difficult for us to achieve this. It is highlighting the impossibility of werewolves.

Metafiction

Metafiction – or commentary that points to the fictionality of a story (Fludernik 2009) is a device that can be used to overcome reliability. In this case it is not being used that way. Instead the comments that point to the fiction are more to remind the reader that it is just make-believe story, and therefore there is no obligation on the author to come up with a satisfactory denouement.

There is no doubt that readers are intrigued by the creative process, and often enjoy metafictional texts, but this would generally involve bringing the reader into a process that is usually kept hidden. What appeals is its inclusiveness and the sense that the writer is confiding in the reader.

Liar is a different beast. *Liar* confounds the reader and leaves them unsatisfied. The laying bare of the creative process is designed to condescend to, and embarrass the reader. It is a collusion between the author and the protagonist that excludes the reader. Larbalestier and her character each in their own way provoke us all the way through the text.

You're insulted I think you're so gullible that you'll believe such outrageous lies. You were never fooled. You can read between the lines, pull away the werewolf bullshit and see what's left. (p 330)

But Micah means to insult us (on page 243 she asks, ‘How dumb can you be?’). Larbalestier counts on us being gullible. Gullibility is what has brought us all the way through the novel to the very last page, and still there are no answers – or rather too many possible answers.

Finally, *Liar* breaks the turn-taking rules of communication that Heyd discusses, whereby if you take the whole turn, you ought to have something to say. *Liar* violates the ‘tellability’ principle, by accepting all of the reader’s time, and then not offering them a ‘punch line’. It is a riveting study in unreliable narration, but frustrating for the reader.

Lessons from 'Liar'

To preface the following, this discussion of *Liar* pertains only to the approach taken to overcome unreliable narration, and not to other aspects of the text.

In a traditional narrative structure, writers and readers form an unspoken contract – the writer agrees to take the reader on a journey, and the reader agrees to take the required imaginative leap, ‘let’s say ...’, or ‘what if ...’. There are rules for both sides, and on the writer’s side, while the character can be unreliable, the author usually agrees not to lie to the reader, and to help the reader understand the truth at the story’s conclusion. All manner of devices can be applied to withhold information, to digress, to hoodwink, but saying one thing at one point and then an opposing thing the next, without eventually revealing which one is correct, is a breach of the contract.

Liar is an example of the single voice Cadden argues against. However, if a writer is going to abandon the reader to form their own view of what is ‘true’, they might consider faithfully portraying the character’s position. Constantly focussing on the flaws in the main character’s claims – to the artificialness of the characters themselves draws attention to the pretence of the form. It is focussing on the strings rather than the puppet. The readership knows that a novel is fiction – that it is not real. They are busily ignoring the strings and watching the puppet to learn about life. As Heyd points out, ‘readers of literary narrative are conscious of a shaping force with a certain communicative intention. This duality, and its awareness in the reader, is the fundamental mechanism that creates fictionality.’ (Heyd 2006, p 221).

They are hoping to be inspired and enlightened, or at least entertained. Otherwise what is the point?

Larbalestier breaches the tellability principle. If the point is that there is no point, perhaps this could be made in a manner that does not breach the tellability principle?

The lesson that I will take from *Liar* is to approach metafiction in the creative piece with a generosity of spirit – to be deliberately inclusive and approachable – to allow the use of metafiction as a device to have something broader to say.

Liar has been an intriguing and valuable text in terms of examining the means by which authors can overcome the limitations posed by unreliable narrators.

Liar demonstrates that all of the narrative strategies so far identified can be used in a constructive way to enlighten the reader, but they can equally be used to keep the reader in the dark. What changes is the desire of the author for delivering clarity. The reliability of the protagonist in this case is not as significant as the reliability of the author.

5. Conclusions

This study began with the assumption that all narrators in young adult fiction are unreliable, either because they have not had enough experience of the world to perceive events with clarity, or because the distinction between fantasy and reality are blurred in the young.

In some novels this can be an advantage. In those cases the naivety of the protagonist is used as a canvas, where the character, along a journey with the reader, gains wisdom – usually through experiencing or bearing witness to some traumatic or otherwise momentous series of events.

In other novels the naivety of the main character is an obstacle making it difficult for the writer to explain what is actually happening, since the character does not have the capacity to process it, or to convey the complexity to the reader. The reader is left perplexed, and sometimes frustrated. In that event, the themes the writer is trying to express can be lost.

Other scholars have recognised this conundrum. Mike Cadden (2000) believes that it is an ethical obligation to address unreliability in young adult fiction, because there is a power imbalance between the adult writer and young adult reader, which does not exist in general fiction. Booth (1988) measures the value of the book to the reader in terms of how this is addressed. Amy Faulds Sandefur (2003) deems unreliability to be integral to a young adult character, making a protagonist more authentic. Elizabeth Schuhmann (1999) considers the limitations of the first person, unreliable narrator to be a flaw of young adult fiction, and

suggests it can be overcome by employing third person narration. Fu Yuan Shen (2006) proposes multiple focalisation to be a possible solution.

While the existing literature was informative and has made for exciting and inspiring reading, none of the studies examined provided a complete answer to this challenge that I continue to face as a writer of young adult fiction. How do I overcome the unreliability of my young adult protagonist, and allow the reader to comprehend facts, events, motivations that my character does not?

I hypothesised that there would not be one single answer – but that there must be a whole range of narrative devices that can be applied in combination in novels with unreliable narrators.

It was difficult at the beginning to find a useful definition of unreliability in order to look for it within those texts. One of the more promising definitions was Phelan and Martin's various axes of unreliability – the axis of events, axis of ethics and axis of knowledge and perception, which show the different ways that characters can be unreliable (Phelan and Martin in Herman 1999, p 92). The problem with applying these definitions was that they relied on how texts were read and interpreted by the reader, rather than concrete, quantifiable techniques that the author has applied to the text, identifiable regardless of the reader's context or subjective impressions of the text.

Eventually, the three categories of unreliability identified by Therese Heyd were searched for in the selected novels. To recap, those categories were 'quiet deception', which is 'highly intentional unreliability' (Heyd 2006, p 227). The narrator deliberately and flagrantly lies to the reader. 'Self deception' or 'face-saving' is where a narrator evades, embellishes or lies

because he/she wants to avoid embarrassment or wishes to present him/herself in the best light, out of politeness. (p 230) ‘Unintentional unreliability’ is a narrator who is naïve, uneducated or mentally ill. The narrator is not being intentionally uncooperative. (p 231)

Having found a useful definition of unreliability to apply to the narrators in the selected texts, it was also necessary to identify a range of narrative devices that might be employed in the texts selected to overcome it. The narrative devices that appeared in the texts chosen were:

- temporal techniques, including, anachrony, frequency, changes in tense
- point of view - first person, third person, and multiple focalisation
- symbols and motifs
- embedded text - frame narratives, and secondary fabulas.

The uses of these narrative devices in the texts will be discussed individually below.

One of the narrative concepts discussed in the introduction was dramatic irony, and distance. The idea was that there is a difference in allegiance when the reader travels with a narrator and knows the end toward which the character is stumbling, and when they are learning of events astride with the characters. I hypothesised that it would be a useful means of addressing unreliability, but this proved not to be a crucial element in any of the novels studied. While two of the novels used third person narrators, they were narrators limited to the view of the characters, and not overtly addressing the reader. This is not to say that this technique cannot be employed by writers of YA fiction to overcome unreliability, simply an observation that it was not one used by those writers selected for this study.

Two devices were identified in the texts that were not referred to in the literature. The first was Elizabeth Fensham's technique rewarding the main character in the plot when he was more reliable, which I described as 'seal training'. *Saving Francesca* was a counterpoint to this plot device, since Francesca becomes more reliable and more aware of the motives of others over the course of the novel, and yet she is not rewarded for this maturity. The character is as reliant on others (adults) at the end of the novel as she ever was.

Ursula Dubosarksy included both an omniscient narrator, and also an 'imaginary friend' character who existed within the narrative, but was not an 'actor' within the fabula. This character was essentially a reliable version of the young protagonist, allowing Dubosarksy to apply both slant and filter to the one character in the form of two personas.

Ways that characters were unreliable in the selected texts

Most of the protagonists in the selected novels exhibited all three of the different categories of unreliability identified by Heyd.

Quiet deception was a plot device employed in *Saving Francesca* and *Helicopter Man* to maintain the suspense, and to defer revealing the key plot question until such time as the messages or themes have been satisfactorily explored. Quiet deception as an end in itself was the crucial element of plot in *Liar*.

In cases where the character was telling the story to a narratee, the characters 'self deceived' and attempted to avoid revealing information to the narratee that would make them embarrassed. This occurred whether the narratee was another character within the text, or the

reader. None of the characters from *The Red Shoe* needed to ‘face save’, as there was no audience to be embarrassed about.

This is an example of two narrative devices working together in texts. The face-saving form of unreliability was only exhibited when a narratee was assigned.

This has two consequences.

1. If a writer wishes to avoid the face-saving form of unreliability, then they can choose not to assign a narratee in the text.
2. The writer can use assigning of a narratee to alert the reader to the protagonist’s likely unreliability. For example, in *Saving Francesca*, Francesca politely suggests to the reader that she is ordinary, and yet other characters tell us that her beauty is comparable to an international movie star. This notifies the reader that Francesca is likely to be wrong in her perception of other matters.

Micah from *Liar* was unintentionally unreliable (as well as being intentionally unreliable) because she was mentally unstable, whereas the other protagonists were unintentionally unreliable due to their youth, or because they did not possess all of the necessary information.

Heloise from *The Museum of Mary Child* and Matilda from *The Red Shoe* were not able to comprehend and convey to the reader the complexity of emotions occurring for the characters that surrounded them. In those cases the writer took that role out of their hands, and gave it to a third-person narrator, whereas the main characters in the other selected texts were able to understand emotional intricacies. Choice of first or third person will be discussed more in the section entitled ‘point of view’.

In *The Red Shoe* and in *Liar*, overcoming the limitations of the unreliable narrator did not seem to be as important to the writer as other considerations. In *The Red Shoe* Matilda's innocence and childishness are inherent to her character and the tone of the work. Micah's unreliability in *Liar* appeared to be the main purpose of the work.

In cases where the narrative strategies are less successful at overcoming unreliable narration, or where a character's unreliability and naivety are elements of plot and therefore not addressed by the author, the novel will require other qualities to keep readers engaged.

The Red Shoe explored a range of themes including the role of women in society and within a family, generational change, differing responses to grief and trauma, amongst others. In *Liar*, the characteristic that kept the reader engaged was the murder mystery, which was not resolved.

Temporal techniques

Temporal techniques were used in all of the novels studied. The most chronological of the novels, and the most formal in style, *The Museum of Mary Child*, still employed anachrony as a means of revealing information in a convenient order to maintain the momentum of the plot.

In *Helicopter Man*, anachrony, along with inconsistent tense, mimics an oral style of storytelling, making the main character sound more spontaneous and authentically adolescent. In this novel anachrony and assigning a narratee worked together as a means of revealing significant events in an order that made sense to the reader, but also maintained the suspense.

Anachrony and assigning a narratee work well together to maintain suspense, particularly in cases where the unreliable narrator is concealing some significant element of the plot from the reader.

It can be difficult to withhold from the reader a significant element of the plot, or indeed, *the* crucial piece of information that carries the story, in a convincing way. Heyd's tellability principle instructs us to find compelling and substantial reasons for not getting to the point.

All the novels used forms of frequency. Ellipses and iteration were both used to skip over irrelevant information and maintain the pace of the plot. Marchetta and Fensham both used iteration to build a picture of life as it was before the beginning of the story.

Repetition was used in all the novels to directly address unreliability of the protagonist. Dubosarsky offered several different accounts of the father's suicide attempt from different characters. We learned of the events surrounding Mia's miscarriage from four different angles in *Saving Francesca*, and Pete returned again and again to his mother's disappearance in *Helicopter Man*. Repetition in these cases were used by the authors to dissect an event and approach it from different directions. In each case the event and its ramifications was the 'mystery' that drove the plot. Repetition is also a signal to the reader of the weight of an event in terms of its relevance to developing character and the plot as a whole.

Generally speaking the information expands and develops over the course of the novel, giving the reader a clearer and ultimately a consistent picture, despite the opposing views. However, Micah in *Liar* retold the same events many times, and each time we received contradictory information. In that case it was designed to reinforce the unreliability.

Marchetta also described each occurrence of events that occurred often. She described the bus trips to and from school, the house meetings, and several of the lessons. This was an excellent means of showing Francesca's gradual change in attitude over the course of the novel.

Repetition can be used to alleviate or reinforce unreliability in young adult narrators. It can be used to signal the importance of the event and give the reader alternate perspectives of that event.

The implication here is:

1. If you are aiming to overcome the limitations of an unreliable narrator, repetition gives the reader the opportunity to consider all of the implications of the event being examined.
2. If you are aiming to reinforce the unreliability of a young adult protagonist, you can use repetition to compound the inconsistencies.

Point of view

As mentioned in the introduction, writers of YA favour first person, primarily because it provides a character that the readership can easily identify with and an age-appropriate readability level. (Schuhmann 1999). First person, then, is generally the default, and yet first person is the most problematic in terms of overcoming unreliability.

Sometimes first person is not adequate for conveying the complexities in the story, particularly when the protagonist is exceptionally unreliable – exhibiting Heyd's third category – unintentional unreliability.

From examining the five novels in this study, one of the determinants in choosing to use third person over first person would appear to be how many actual words are required to provide the information that the reader needs to ‘read’ the other characters in the text, and to understand what is happening.

In the case of a character like Micah, who has superhuman detection skills and is able to confirm another character’s subtle emotional shifts by scent, the implied author is not required to add many more extra words.

Francesca is a little less adept. Marchetta can get away with shadowing her commentary with ambiguous word choices, and extended dialogue with those other characters that give the reader the information that they need to assess the situation.

Pete is less competent again than Francesca. Fensham steps in with her seal training technique. She still chooses first person, but the implied author is much more evident in the manner that the story is told. Fensham is also greatly helped by the fact that Pete only has one character to be wrong about – his father. With all the other characters, what you get is what you see.

Matilda is not able to decipher the emotions and repercussions in the older characters. Dubosarsky complements this deficit with multiple focalisation and the imaginary friend, Floreal.

Heloise is at the opposite end of the scale to Micah. In first person, the text would become heavy and cumbersome, with all the words required to explain to the reader all the things that Heloise is missing. It makes more sense for the narrator to do it directly.

Somewhere between Pete’s and Matilda’s ability to read other characters is the tipping point.

Where the character has an inadequate capacity to ‘filter’ the information in the story, the writer may need to employ ‘slant’ from an external narrator in order to overcome the limitations of the child or young adult protagonist.

Dubosarsky offers an alternative of both slant and filter with an imaginary friend character. Of course, this strategy is not going to be applicable to every YA narrative.

Symbols, motifs and embedded text

In the novels studied, when the unreliability is of Heyd’s third kind, ‘unintentional unreliability’, other narrative strategies are more heavily relied upon to overcome it.

The books that had the most naïve protagonists relied the most heavily on symbols and motifs. In *Helicopter Man*, the tertiary fabula concerned a dysfunctional family of mice whose circumstances closely resembled those of Pete and his father. The father mouse went mad and attacked his son and was isolated. Meanwhile the other mouse moved into palatial accommodation and was much happier. *The Museum of Mary Child* featured dolls and cages, and even dolls in cages. *The Red Shoe* referred to the Hans Christian Andersen fairytale, and also used the red shoes belonging to Matilda’s mother and Mrs Petrov to symbolise their sins, and their subsequent vulnerability.

The symbols were so strongly used in these three novels that they clonked the reader over the head with them. As a result they served two purposes. They helped to overcome the unreliability of the young adult narrator by giving the writer another method of conveying the themes in the texts. By using this technique, they also helped to expose younger readers to this form of symbolism, which may not have been employed in the junior fiction that they

have been reading up to this point. It helps to introduce young readers to an analytical style of reading, which in turn would encourage them to look for levels of meaning in other texts.

Symbols and motifs can help to overcome unreliable narration by providing a secondary method of communicating themes, and at the same time encourages a more analytical style of negotiating texts by younger readers. This is an example of the book being the reader's friend, not only for this journey, but more broadly in the reader's life.

Similarly, embedded text in the forms of letters or postcards from other characters, embedded stories, like the newspaper articles and the Hans Christian Andersen fairytale in *The Red Shoe*, and extensive dialogue from other characters, as was used in *Saving Francesca*, all allow the writer to provide the reader with an alternative to the unreliable young protagonist's version of events. They are another means of reinforcing the themes that the writer is exploring.

Summary of the key findings

- The face-saving form of unreliability was only exhibited when a narratee was assigned.
- In cases where the narrative strategies are less successful at overcoming unreliable narration, or where a character's unreliability and naivety are elements of plot and therefore not addressed by the author, the novel will require other qualities to keep readers engaged.
- Anachrony and assigning a narratee work well together to maintain suspense, particularly in cases where the unreliable narrator is concealing some significant element of the plot from the reader.

- Heyd’s tellability principle instructs us to find compelling and substantial reasons for not getting to the point.
- Repetition can be used to alleviate or reinforce unreliability in young adult narrators. It can be used to signal the importance of the event and give the reader alternate perspectives of that event.
- Where the character has an inadequate capacity to ‘filter’ the information in the story, the writer may need to employ ‘slant’ from an external narrator in order to overcome the limitations of the child or young adult protagonist.
- When the unreliability is of Heyd’s third kind, ‘unintentional unreliability’, other narrative strategies are more heavily relied upon to overcome it.

Symbols and motifs can help to overcome unreliable narration by providing a secondary method of communicating themes, and at the same time encourages a more analytical style of negotiating texts by younger readers.

Situating the Creative Work within Young Adult Fiction

Writing a manuscript is a long process. Since one never knows at the outset whether a manuscript will ultimately be purchased by a publisher, most of the writing I have done I considered an exercise, like a piano player running through scales – an opportunity for trying my hand at something new or improving technique, rather than a performance for an audience. The distance between the initial draft and any kind of genuine reader response can

be three, or four, or even ten years. Only a very tiny percentage of readers will respond directly to my books. None of that correspondence is close to the kind of intense ethical criticism that Booth engages in in *The Company We Keep* (1988).

It is easy to put the reader out of my mind altogether. It is easy, and it has also been easier, because it has absolved me of any obligation that I might have had to them.

In concluding, I return again to those three scholars who so impressed me at the beginning of this study. Theresa Heyd's practical approach to unreliable narrators made me see writing as a conversation between two parties. Her tellability principle gave a name to the reason I have not enjoyed some books in the past, and counselled me to keep on point.

On first reading, I felt Cadden's remarks to be a personal admonishment of my back catalogue. Previously, I had dismissed some of the criticism of my work as 'poor reading', or inadequate comprehension skills on the part of the reader. On reflection – and I have reflected a lot since then – I will approach my writing in the future with more humility. My responsibility as a writer is to accept that role in developing young readers and to appreciate that my work exists in a broader context for the reader.

Alex as Well, the creative component and twin to the exegesis, demonstrates many of the narrative strategies explored in the exegesis. It follows a plight of a teenager of indeterminate gender who has been raised as a boy but chooses to become a girl. Alex has to fight her parents, an educational, social and legal system that is not designed to readily accept this type of transition, fitting Trites' description of characters negotiating "the levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions within which they must function" (Trites 2000, p 3).

Alex makes this decision to live as a girl after a physical attack at the hands of fellow students at her previous school, which she finds both frightening and humiliating. She seeks the assistance of a lawyer, Crockett, initially to have her gender legally reassigned, but ultimately to emancipate her from an increasingly hysterical and dominant mother.

In the story the main character is represented by two separate identities. There is a female Alex and a male Alex. Here I am using an 'imaginary friend' to provide an opposing perspective on events. Initially they are presented as two characters. The dichotomy is exposed in chapter three thus:

I should stop here, because it's not Alex and I really.

We're just the one person. Did you get that already? I guess so, because it was on the blurb, right? I put in some clues. Like no one we have spoken to has addressed us separately.

Alex and I are the one person, but I feel like two people, and this is the problem. It's always been like that, but since I stopped taking my pills five days ago it's so totally clear that I can't be the other Alex anymore. And that's why my dad left us.

Me.

The passage addresses a narratee. It explains why the implied author has used the technique of the two identities. It is metafictional, in that it refers to its own fictitiousness. It incorporates the exposure of the workings of the narrative into the narrative.

Later, Alex tells the reader:

You know being in the attic is like a metaphor of retreating into my head, because it's at the top. And all these little boxes are full of memories. Compartmentalised. If you had to do an essay on us, you could say that.

This acknowledges that the reader is likely to be a student, and that the book may be studied in class, as many of my previous books have been. It is cheeky, but it also shows the reader that the writer does deliberately include these kinds of metaphors in the process of writing, and to be on the lookout for other instances.

Another example of drawing back the curtain for the reader is certain places in the manuscript where I have illustrated points at which the narrative could have taken other directions.

The teacher's name is Susannah. She has long blonde hair that falls in ringlets. She has a nose ring. She doesn't wear tie-dye exactly, but she wears clothes in layers with beads hanging off them and she smells like sandalwood. Sounds all arty and casual, right? Sounds like she's got rings on her fingers and bells on her toes and goes tinkling around the classroom sprinkling encouragement like a big nurturing teacher fairy.

You can imagine that Susannah is going to be all supportive and I am going to blossom under her tutelage. I will make an art metal cage and find my inner spirit, and open the door to the cage and set my soul free. There will be butterflies, or white doves, or attractive people smiling and blowing bubbles, which will catch on the breeze and float away.

And another:

You can see what's going to happen, can't you? I'm going to fall in love with Amina (who are we kidding? I'm already in love with Amina), and it's going to be really,

really complicated and totally unrequited, and I'll probably end up with a broken heart – worse, because Amina won't just reject me, (Like, baby, baby, baby, nooo) she will be *repulsed* by me. She will tell everybody about my noodle, and then I'll have to top myself in a really brutal man-way.

I can see it too.

Maybe it will end up a different way. Maybe I have happened on the only other one of whatever it is that I am. We will be hooking up and I will discover that she too has a noodle.

And we will laugh and laugh!

Noooooot, Alex drawls.

These two passages talk about what might be expected from the narrative. They expose the conventions of the genre. They also show the reader that there are places in the plot where the author looks to the path ahead and makes certain choices that will lead to one denouement over another – and these are not fixed. It is a journey, and sometimes a writer needs to go back the way she has come.

Alex as Well has those characteristics I have identified as common to the texts selected for close study – books published as young adult fiction, with an intended readership aged between twelve and twenty. The main characters in the novels chosen are also aged between twelve and twenty throughout the novels. The novels chosen also tend to explore the conflict or friction between the teen and their parents, and examine themes of identity and belonging.

Alex as Well also exhibits the political and sexual agency that Nikolajeva describes as “a consciousness that is usually born within and then shaped by injustice – is intertwined with sexual coming of age” (p 11), and also what she labels as “a relationship between the subversive adolescent, and a critique of wider society.”

Over the course of my writing of this novel there were a number of TV shows – both ‘reality TV’ and dramas featuring characters who are transgender, intersex or transvestite, including “My Transsexual Summer”, “Ladyboys” .and “Hit and Miss”. There are books about intersex and transgender, for example, Jane McCredie’s recent book *Making Boys and Girls*, (2011) and Charles Anders’ *The Lazy Cross-Dresser* (2002) which both informed the manuscript.

Whilst the lives and struggles of transgender, cross-dressing or intersex people and the societal norms that they contend with have been explored in non-fiction books, movies and television shows, it has not readily transferred to young adult fiction. *Alex as Well* is one of the first young adult books ever published by a mainstream publishing company to have an intersex main character. *Fool for Love* is a self-published book written by Lisa Lees featuring an intersex protagonist (intersex being sexual anatomy that does not fit into typical definitions of either gender). Other adult novels with intersex protagonists include *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides, *Annabel* by Kathleen Winter, and *Ilario: The Lion’s Eye* by Mary Gentle. There are a number of young adult books that feature transgender (born as one gender and identifying as another) characters as the love interest - not the protagonist, such as Catherine Ryan Hyde’s *Jumpstart the World*, Brian Katcher’s *Almost Perfect*, or *Luna*, by Julie Ann Peters, where the main character’s older brother is transgender.

In her discussion of what a young adult might be, Nadia Wheatley (1994) refers to friction with other ages.

Those who express ‘concern about the friction or confusion that occurs at the boundaries between adolescence and middle age, or adolescence and childhood, are missing the point: the friction is the way the groups define themselves. (p 4)

I would characterise my own novels to date as young adult fiction because they explore themes of identity and belonging, and a growing awareness of sexuality. Most often they describe a renegotiation of the relationship between the child and parent to encompass a burgeoning sense of autonomy. This would seem to be the friction that Wheatley refers to in her definition.

In *Alex as Well* the reader follows that friction from both sides. The parent and the child both have an opportunity to present their case, and the reader can decide which combination of ‘truths’ from their testimony to accept.

The reader also encounters excerpts from www.motherhoodshared.com, a website where Alex’s mother, Heather, confesses her parenting struggles and receives advice (of varying quality) from a ‘Greek chorus’ of correspondents.

Alex as Well features a subversive adolescent, and a critique of wider society, in particular, the role of social media in modern parenting.

Alex as Well is young adult fiction because the main character is still a young adult at the conclusion of the novel. The time period covered within all of my novels only includes the main character’s childhood and/or adolescence. None of my novels to date have an adult main

character recounting events that occurred as a teenager; instead, events are told by the character as a teen, even if those events occurred in what that character perceives to be the distant past. This is as opposed to general fiction novels which might use lessons learned in adolescence as an explanation for the motivations of an adult character, or as a backdrop, or metaphor for that adult character's current predicament.

Alex as Well is a socially political text because it questions accepted gender stereotypes, and what it is to be a girl or a boy in this era. It discusses what is an increasingly narrow representation of female beauty. Alex is considered beautiful because she is very tall and narrow-waisted, with strong facial bones – which were also features that defined her as male. She is a subversive character, because she is neither sex and both in a society that sees gender only as a dichotomy.

The perspective that we receive from Heather, the mother, in *Alex as Well* fits into Nodelman's "idea that mature adult knowledge and experience really offers no more certainty or security than childhood innocence does..." (2008, p 58), and also Heuschele's suggestion that young adult novels will often feature incompetent adults (2008, p 28).

Alex as Well also treads the fine line between unlikely idealistic autonomy and bleak irresolvable states of alienation that would seem to satisfy Robyn McCallum's idea of acceptable empowerment in young adult fiction (McCallum, 1999).

Alex as Well has characteristics in common with other novels in the genre, in renegotiating the relationship between parent and child, exploring identity and belonging, but it leads YA into a new era, where gender and sexuality can be talked about. Intersex or transgender young people can become visible in this genre and their stories published by mainstream presses.

Alex is empowered in her choices, has employed her social power, has demonstrated growth which is not incidental to plot but bonded to it, and while not a crossover novel, fits into to Hunt's definition of a complexity, fitting into life's continuum and Alex's burgeoning awareness of the world around her (Hunt 2007, p 146).

Booth's reference considered and ardent examination of books as quality company, entertaining, informing and of use to readers, not only at the end of the book but as each page is read, inspired me to do better and to extend a hand of friendship to my readers in a way I have not done before – to consider who they might be, and the circumstances in which they might happen upon my book.

Acknowledging them is a good start.

So too in this study, I have gone back to the beginning to go forwards, starting with the basics of narrative structure, learning the names of the devices available to employ.

I believe my writing has changed, not just in technique, but in attitude. From now on, when I sit at the keyboard, I am not a lone piano player, running scales. Instead I will have in my head the image of a young reader holding my finished book in their hands, as yet unopened, full of anticipation, and ready to start a conversation.

6. References

Anders, Charles, *The Lazy Crossdresser*, Greenery Press, Emeryville, California, 2002

Bakhtin, M. M. *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984

Bakhtin, M. M. and Holquist, M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981

Bal, Mieke, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd edition, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo, 1997

Bateson, Catherine, *Painted Love Letters*, Queensland University Press, St Lucia, Queensland 2002

Barthes, Roland, 'The Death of the Author' *Image, Music, Text*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1977

Beckett, Sandra, *Crossover Fiction*, Routledge, New York, 2009

Booth, Wayne. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1961

The Company We Keep: an Ethics of Fiction, University of California, Berkley, 1988

Boyne, John, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, David Fickling Books, London, 2006

Brugman, Alyssa, *Girl Next Door*, Random House Australia, North Sydney, 2009

Walking Naked, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2002

Bullen, Elizabeth, Toffoletti, Kim, Parsons, Liz “Doing what your big sister does: sex, postfeminism and the YA chick lit series”, *Gender and Education*, Routledge Vol. 23, No. 4, July 2011, pp497–511

Burke, Sean, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, 2nd edition, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1998

Cadden, Mike, "The Irony of Narration in the Young Adult Novel" *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2000 (pp146-154)

Cart, Michael, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, Harper Collins, New York 2006

Chatman, Seymour, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1978

"Characters and Narrators: Filter, Center, Slant, and Interest-Focu" *Poetics Today*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1986 (pp189-204)

Condon, Bill, *No Worries*, Queensland University Press, St Lucia, Queensland 2005

DeLoache, Judy S, “Early Understanding and Use of Symbols: the Model Model”, *Current Directions in Psychological Science* Vol. 4, No. 4, 1995 (pp109-113)

Donelson, Aileen, & Nilsen, Kenneth, *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, 8th Edition, Pearson Education, Boston, New York, San Francisco, 2001

Dubosarsky, Ursula, *The Red Shoe*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2006

Eaton, Anthony, “From Transition to Threshold: Redefining Young Adulthood” *Write4Children* Volume 4, Issue 1, 2013

- Eugenides, Jeffrey, *Middlesex*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York 2002
- Eum, Younseal, *Duality of a Cage*, Master of Fine Arts Dissertation. Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, 2010
- Fensham, Elizabeth, *Helicopter Man*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2005
- Fludernik, Monika, *An Introduction to Narratology*, Abingdon, Routledge, New York, 2009
- Gennette, Gerard, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York. Published in French in 1972, published in English in 1980
- Gentle, Mary, *Ilario: The Lions' Eye* Gollancz London, 2006
- Golds, Cassandra, *The Museum of Mary Child*, Penguin Group, Camberwell, 2009
- Griffith, Susan, *The Red Shoe*, within *The Politics of the Essay: Feminist Perspectives*, edited by Joeres, Ruth-Ellen B. Indiana University Press, Indiana, 1993 (pp1-11)
- Gross, Sabine. "Surveying Narratology" *Monatshefte* Vol. 100, No. 4, 2008 (pp534-559)
- Herman, David, *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis, Theory and Interpretation of Narrative Series*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1999
- Herman, David, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, Routledge, London; New York, 2005
- Heuschele, Margaret, *The Construction of Youth in Australian Young Adult Literature 1980-2000*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Canberra, 2007
- Heyd, Theresa, "Understanding and handling unreliable narratives: A pragmatic model and method" *Semiotica* Vol. 162 No. 1 2006 (pp217-243)

Hunt, Caroline, "Young Adult Literature Evades the Theorists", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Volume 21 Number 1, Spring 1996 pp4-11

Hunt, Jonathon, "Redefining the Young Adult Novel", *Horn Magazine* March 2007 pp141-147

Hunt, Peter, "Narrative Theory and Children's Literature" *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1985 (pp191-194)

"How Not to Read a Children's Book" *Children's Literature in Education*, Vol. 26, No. 4 1995 (pp231-240)

"Necessary Misreadings: Directions in Narrative Theory for Children's Literature" *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, Georgia State University, Vol. 8, No. 2. 1985 (pp170-121)

"Introduction: The World of Children's Literature Studies" *Understanding Children's Literature*, Routledge, London, 1999 (pp1-12)

Jonsberg, Barry, *It's Not All About You*, Calma, Allen and Unwin, Melbourne, 2005

Katcher, Brian, *Almost Perfect*, Delacorte, New York, 2010

Koelling, Holly, *Best Books for Young Adults*, 3rd Edition USA: American Library Association, Chicago 2007

Larbalestier, Justine. *Liar*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2009

Lee, Harper, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, William Heinemann Ltd, London, 1960

Levi Strauss, Claude, "The Structural Study of Myth" *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 68, No. 270, Myth: A Symposium, Oct. - Dec., 1955 (pp428-444)

- Marchetta, Melina, *Saving Francesca*, Penguin Books, Camberwell, 2003
- Martin, Wallace, *Recent Theories of Narrative*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1986
- McCallum, Robyn, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity* Routledge New York and London, 1999
- McCredie, Jane, *Making Girls and Boys: Inside the science of sex*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2011
- Nieragden, Goran, "Focalization and Narration: Theoretical and Terminological Refinements" *Poetics Today*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2002 (pp685-697)
- Night Symalan, M., *The Sixth Sense*, Buena Vista International, 1999, feature film.
- Nikolajeva, Maria, "Beyond the Grammar of Story, or How Can Children's Literature Criticism Benefit from Narrative Theory?" *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Vol 28, No. 1 2003 (pp5-16)
- Nikolajeva, Maria & Hilton, Mary, *Contemporary Adolescent Literature and Culture: The emergent adult*, Ashgate Publishing Company, Surrey, 2012
- Nimon, M & Foster, J.; *The Adolescent Novel – Australian Perspectives*, Centre for Information Studies, Wagga Wagga, 1997
- Nodelman, Perry, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2008
- Page, Sue, *Australian Young Adult Keen Readers: Choices They Make, and Creators' Views Regarding the Young Adult Market*, Doctoral Thesis University of Canberra, 2005

“Fiction from fatality: creative exploration of the Holocaust in fiction for young people” *Text Journal* Vol 12 No 1 April 2008

Peters, Julie Ann, *Luna*, Little, Brown and Company, New York 2006

Pinkola Estes, Clarissa, *Women who Run with the Wolves: Contacting the Power of the Wild Woman*, Rider, London, 1992

Polkinghorne, Donald, “Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences”, *Suny Series in Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 2nd edition, New Accents, Routledge, London, New York, 2002

Robinson, Elizabeth, F., “Doll Play as a Function of the Doll Family Constellation”, *Child Development* Vol. 17, No. 3, 1946 (pp. 99-119)

Ryan Hyde, Catherine, *Jumpstart the World*, Knopf New York 2010

Sandefur, Amy, Faulds, *Narrative Immediacy and First-Person Voice in Contemporary American Novels*, Dissertation. Louisiana State University, Department of English, Louisiana, 2003

Schuhmann, Elizabeth, "Shift out of First: Third Person Narration Has Advantages." *Two Decades of the Alan Review, National Council of Teachers of English*, Illinois, 1999, (pp. 314-319)

Sheahan Bright, Robyn, *To Market, To Market: The Development of the Australian Children's Publishing Industry*, Doctoral Thesis, Griffith University, 2005

Shen, Fu-Yuan, *Narrative Strategies in Robert Cormier's Young Adult Novels*, Dissertation. Ohio State University, Graduate School, Ohio, 2006

Stephens, John, Bradford, Clare, Mallan, Kerry, McCallum, Robyn, *New World Orders in Contemporary Children's Literature: Utopian Transformations* Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2008

Southall, Ivan, *Ash Road*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, England, 1966

Josh QUP Classics, St Lucia, Queensland, 2006 (first published by Angus & Robertson Books, 1971)

The Long Night Watch Methuen Children's Books, London, 1983

Toma, Luise, <http://reviews.media-ulture.org.au/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=3251>
Accessed 21st April, 2009

Townsend, John, Rowe, "Standards of Criticism for Children's Literature", ALA Children's Services Division, *Top of the News*, June 1971

Trites, Roberta Seelinger, *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Young Adult Literature*, University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, 2000

Wall, Barbara, *The narrator's voice: The dilemma of children's fiction*, Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire 1991

Wheatley, Nadia, "From Teenager to Young Adult: The terms they are a'changing" *The Written World: Youth and literature*, DW Thorpe, Melbourne, 1994 (pp 1-18)

Wilson, Jacqueline, *The Illustrated Mum*, Delacorte Press, New York, 2005

Winter, Kathleen, *Annabel: A Novel*, Grove Press New York, 2011

Wylie, Andrea, Schwenke, "Expanding the View of First-Person Narration" *Children's Literature in Education* Vol. 30, No. 3, 1999 (pp.185-202)

Young, Cynthia, "Revision to Reproduction: Myth and its Author in *The Red Shoes*" in *Re-viewing British cinema, 1900-1992: essays and interviews* edited by Wheeler, Dixon, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1994 (pp107-120)

Younger, Ann, Elizabeth, *How to Make a Girl: Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature*, Dissertation. Louisiana State University, Department of English, Louisiana, 2003

Zusak, Markus, *The Book Thief*, Picador, Sydney, 2005

Appendix A – Review of ‘Girl Next Door’

<http://reviews.media-culture.org.au/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=3251>

Accessed 21st April, 2009.

Reviewed by Luise Toma

Jenna-Belle had it made: her mum got promoted; her dad was starting his own business empire; she was in with the cool girls in her snooty private school. But, as they say, all good things come to an end; in Jenna-Belle’s case in a rather rapid way. Dad absconds “to the country,” and her newly-pregnant mother is suddenly very busy selling everything that is not nailed to the floors of their large and beautiful house. Faster than she can say “organic facial” or “hot rock massage,” Jenna-Belle and her family are facing the worst thing ever possibly imaginable: poverty.

Alyssa Brugman is indeed tackling an interesting subject in *Girl Next Door*, addressing the circumstances that force people into homelessness and bankruptcy. And yes, this is an excellent opportunity to make the point of family being vastly more important than money, or how one can handle anything as long as there is a supportive and loving relative in the same boat. Strangely, this is not the main focus of this novel until very late into the tale, which leads to an interesting blend of annoyance and bafflement on behalf of the reader.

Jenna-Belle is a bizarre choice of protagonist. Her view of the situation swings between a set-in-stone sense of entitlement and vague moments of recognising that she might have had it a little easier than others until now. Her observations of less-than-prestigious locations—see trailer park, Centrelink offices, race tracks or dodgy pubs—are, presumably, designed to show her arrogant tendencies. But they also make everyone living around the vicinity of the poverty line look really, really bad. Mothers without money feed their toddlers Coca Cola, girls without money have no dress-sense and bad posture, disadvantaged young men are nothing short of murdering psychopaths driven by nothing but their envy for those better off than them.

While some of these clichés may very well be truthful in some cases, there is a remarkable lack of balance in the way in which the author populates Jenna-Belle’s post-wealth world. Even the family’s sole potential benefactor, a guy renting a spare room in their mansion, fails to redeem the socially weaker standing population. The parade of evil paupers is nothing short of incredibly annoying.

Another paradox lies in Jenna-Belle’s levels of being spoiled. Apparently she has never in her life taken a bus, made herself a sandwich or contemplated the possibility of life without unlimited resources. Yet she is the one member of the family who turns rather money-savvy within literally the space of three days, and ends up exasperated by her mother’s reckless use of remaining resources.

Throughout all this, Jenna-Belle's mother is developed as a character nothing short of schizophrenic. The woman weeps at the sight of her car being towed away, ignores bills and phone calls cool as a cucumber, and finally recovers from a truly horrific tragedy within an afternoon. Overcoming this incident, which I won't give away here, renders her a quiet stoic on the one hand, yet completely dependent on the survival skills of their lodger on the other. This lady clutches at straw one minute, and knows exactly how screwed she is the next.

Reading over all this, perhaps it is a realistic portrayal of a decline from riches-to-rags. Perhaps the victims of wealth change their minds about the situation in the same way that they once changed cars, jewels, servants and diamond-studded underpants. Confusion is definitely a major part of Brugman's novel, and it leaves the reader perhaps even deliberately frustrated at the characters' actions.

The Girl Next Door is an interesting read, and could serve well as reading material in the classrooms of snooty private schools like Jenna-Belle's. However, any kid who has ever purchased a piece of clothing from the supermarket, a secondhand store, or even worse, received it for free from charity, won't be feeling good reading this novel. Unfortunately.